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Bog znaet:
The Ethics of Omniscience in Russian Narrative, 1845-1870

By

Thomas Henry James Dyne

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Slavic Languages and Literatures

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Irina Paperno, chair

Professor Eric Naiman

Professor C. Namwali Serpell

Spring 2019

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Abstract

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Thomas Henry James Dyne

Doctor of Philosophy in Slavic Languages and Literatures

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Irina Paperno, Chair

This dissertation examines how the narratives of Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Lev Tolstoy grapple with the consequences of their omniscience. Their narrators do not simply read minds and tell stories; they also become wrapped-up in the ethical implications of telling stories that require the reading of minds. In effect, they ask: what happens when narrators become godlike? Does the privilege of omniscience define—or disrupt—the novel’s ethical value? I argue that the phrase “God only knows” [*Bog znaet*] becomes the constant refrain of realist narrative, a performance of authority in the moment of divesting from it.

In a series of close readings—from Turgenev’s early *Sketches of a Hunter* to his novel *Fathers and Sons*, from Dostoevsky’s first work *Poor Folk* to his late story “The Meek One,” and from Tolstoy’s earliest semi-autobiographical narrative experiments to the trilogy of novels *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, and *Youth*—I argue that the newly omniscient Russian narrator draws attention to the consequences of his gaze, highlighting the existence of a boundary in the moment he makes a display of crossing it, making sacrosanct the interior of the other in the process of laying it bare. These narratives of Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy become deeply concerned with the troubling effects of their increasingly privileged intrusion into the minds of others and, in making us ever aware of the ethical consequences of reading the face to access the mind, cast a spotlight back onto our reading of them.

Recent works of literary criticism—from rhetorical humanists championing the value of literature to deconstructive examinations of the ethics of reading—investigate the intersection of narrative and ethics in the novel. This dissertation brings Russian narratives of the mid nineteenth-century into this conversation, which has not yet been done by Slavic scholars. Building on recent theories of narrative ethics and omniscience, this dissertation argues that an awareness of the transgressive nature of privileged knowledge becomes clearly manifest in realist prose, even when hidden feelings and unspoken thoughts are rendered legible. These works reckon with—and invite us to attend to—the troubling effects of their increasingly privileged intrusion into the minds of others. Turgenev’s, Dostoevsky’s, and Tolstoy’s narratives rely on strategies of representation that mark themselves as instances of self-aware *transgression*, defining their own devices of omniscience as an ethically fraught process, caught up in the problem of making knowable what “God only knows.”

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Бог знает, где бродили его мысли, но не в одном только прошедшем бродили они: выражение его лица было сосредоточенно и угрюмо, чего не бывает, когда человек занят одними воспоминаниями.

“God only knows where his thoughts wandered, but they did not wander only into the past: the expression of his face was concentrated and sullen, which does not happen when a man is absorbed solely in his memories.”
Fathers and Sons, Chapter IV (8:211)¹

INTRODUCTION

I. Бог знает

What happens when narrators become godlike? Does narrative omniscience, with its penetrating gaze and access to the privileged knowledge of character interiors, define—or disrupt—the novel’s ethical value?

The narratives of Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Lev Tolstoy are intensely concerned with these problems. Their narrators do not simply read minds and tell stories; they also become wrapped-up in the ethical implications of telling stories that require the reading of minds at all. But how is an awareness of the ethical problem of knowing someone *too* well—of “getting” their story and fixing them in words—possibly made manifest in the tradition of Russian realist novelistic narrative, where even consciousness, unspoken feelings, and private thoughts are rendered knowable? It would seem that nineteenth-century novelistic narrative’s greatest trick—accessing interiority and, in Dorrit Cohn’s terms, making the minds of other people transparent, such that we know the characters of novels better than we could ever know each other—also engenders its most significant ethical consequences.²

In the epigraph above, the narrator of Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* [Отцы и дети, 1862] defaults before God’s knowledge of his characters, begging not only ignorance, but also the very impossibility of such privileged knowledge at all. Although the narrator has just checked in on all the novel’s other main characters, peering into their bedrooms and detailing their mental states with ease, here he instead notes the *visible illegibility* of Pavel Petrovich’s thoughts: while “God only knows” their content, their direction is clearly to be seen in the expression of his face. This narrative voice, despite paying lip-service to the impenetrable sanctity of the character’s mind, in the same breath still breaks this boundary, narrating Pavel Petrovich’s thoughts by reading his face, unquestionably certain in the knowledge of which expressions correspond to which interior states. Turgenev’s narrator here attests to the unknowability of the character’s mind in the same sentence that makes it self-evident.

¹ Translation adapted from Richard Hare’s (1948).

² Cohn asserts that this contradiction lies at the heart of fictionality: the “most real” literary characters are “those we know most intimately, precisely in ways we could never know people in real life,” while the verisimilitude at the center of literary fiction relies on the communication and representation of the incommunicable and unrepresentable. Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978), 5-7.

This moment, I argue, lays out the antinomies central to the development of narrative omniscience in the mid-nineteenth-century Russian novel. Just as the character's thoughts are at once legible and illegible, his mind made inviolable in the moment it is also violated, so too is narrative authority defined by an anxious flitting between two opposites. The narrator divests his gaze of any penetrative insight ("God only knows where his thoughts wandered") in the same sentence that he relies on it ("but they did not wander only into the past"). The narrative is aware of these contradictions, and draws attention to them.

I argue that "God only knows"³ indexes the way Russian narratives of the mid nineteenth-century grapple with the consequences of their nascent omniscience. With the constant refrain of "God only knows"—the bellwether of a larger process of disavowing privilege in the moment of relying on it—Turgenev's, Dostoevsky's, and Tolstoy's narrative voices make visible the work of their omniscience, as well as make known their anxiety over its effects. By attending to the consequences of the act of narratively penetrating the mind of the other, making difficult to cross a boundary that they cross all the same, these early omniscient narratives take the shape of an ethically-invested reckoning. Turgenev's hunter-narrator, Dostoevsky's Makar Devushkin, Tolstoy's Nikolai Irten'ev, and others, are all limited, first-person character-narrators, by definition bereft of any access to the thoughts of others, but who strive for a more penetrating, incisive, inside-view of the other characters populating their narratives all the same.

These proto-omniscient narrators set up the boundary between the mind and the body of the other in order to show themselves crossing it, ever aware of this crossing as a moment of over-stepping. As a result, the narratives in which these character-narrators appear are defined by a tension between limitation and omniscience, between "reading" the body and face on the one hand, and directly accessing the mind on the other. These narratives rely on strategies of representation that present themselves as instances of self-aware *transgression*, defining their own devices of omniscience as a negative deontic modal: they are caught up in the process of making knowable that which they professedly *ought not know*.

This side-stepping process—of penetrating the mind of characters and showing what "God only knows," while still anxiously disavowing complicity in the violation producing that knowledge—signposts the "double exigency" of the emerging Russian narrative omniscience. I argue that the newly omniscient Russian narrator draws attention to the consequences of his gaze, making difficult a boundary in the moment he makes a display of crossing it, making sacrosanct the interior of the other only in the process of laying it bare.⁴ The narratives of Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy become deeply concerned with the troubling effects of their increasingly privileged intrusion into the minds of others, as well as with how, as theorist Adam

³ Here *Bog znaet* / Бог знает, but also frequently given as Бог один знает, Бог весть, and Бог ведает.

⁴ In repeating this process of simultaneously disavowing the same authority with which it invests the narrator's gaze, these Russian omniscient narratives rehearse the sublated field of power and surveillance that D.A. Miller identifies as central to the Victorian novel which, he writes, "[...] satisfies a double exigency: how to keep the everyday world entirely outside a network of police power and at the same time to preserve the effects of such power within it. Indeed, the novel *increases* this power in this very act of arranging for it to 'disappear,' absorbed into (as) the sheer positivity of being in the world. It cannot be decried as an intervention because it is already everywhere." D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), 50.

Z. Newton puts it, ethics and narrative haunt one another.⁵ In representing what ought to be inviolate in the instant they also exhibit its violation, these early omniscient narratives, to borrow Cathy Popkin's phrase, are "born of restraint doubly abandoned": they both name an indiscretion—"the exposure of intimacy to publicity"—while also acting on the desire to tell all about it.⁶ This dissertation will also investigate how these works, in casting a spotlight back onto our reading of them, make ethical claims on their readers.⁷

II. The limits of omniscience

It is necessary first to draw some preliminary distinctions and set some definitions for what is at stake in my reading of early Russian omniscience as a self-aware ethical reckoning. The process I see signposted by the refrain "God only knows" unfolds as a tension between, on the one hand, narrators' limitation and self-effacement, and on the other, their continual striving towards penetrating vision and privileged knowledge all the same.

I argue that omniscience in Russian narratives of the mid-nineteenth-century becomes less a question of a singular identity and its empowerment (who possesses what surplus of vision over whom, and how?) than a spectrum, a field of shifting identities swinging between limitation and privilege, among both narrators and characters. The conventions of characterological limitation are constructed in the moment of their being breached, insofar as representing violated privacy reinforces the line separating public and private, knowable and hidden. But this line, which demarcates what is and is not knowable both within and about the diegetic world, is not stable.⁸ Characters and narrators alike, as in the epigraph above, read faces to read minds, defaulting before God's privileged field of vision ("God only knows where his thoughts

⁵ In *Narrative Ethics* Newton brings Emmanuel Levinas's theory of responsibility toward the other and Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of unfinalizability to his readings of several novels, the narratives of which he takes to be an ethical-discursive field penetrated by a paradox central to storytelling: that is, narrating is an inherently reductive act, as "getting" someone's story by fixing them in words renders them finalized and known, increasing our responsibility towards them in a way that simultaneously causes an infinite regress, actually only obscuring our ultimate knowledge by virtue of the increasing proximity of its object. See Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995).

⁶ Cathy Popkin, "Kiss and Tell: Narrative Desire and Discretion," in *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, ed. Jane T. Costlow, et al. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993), 139-40.

⁷ Alexander Spektor has recently furthered a similar argument about the "interpretative anxiety" generated by Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* [Идиот, 1869], which prompts the reader to make an "ethical assessment of *The Idiot's* similarly incoherent protagonist, even as the novel makes it progressively more difficult to do so." In this way, Spektor convincingly argues, Dostoevsky's narrative not only represents moral problems, but also "[forces] on the reader the awareness of the moral ambivalence of the acts of representation and interpretation," prompting an ethical response via (and in response to) our reading it. Spektor, "Violence to Silence: Vicissitudes of Reading (in) *The Idiot*," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Fall 2013), 552-554.

⁸ This is distinct from and in addition to the already-present "instability of the subject position" that Catherine Gallagher identifies as symptomatic of "novels with third-person omniscient narrators," in which "the accessibility of the fictional character's mental life" increases the felt separation between the character's mind and the narrator. Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006), 360. In the narratives of Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy, as I will argue below, our attention is redrawn to the separation of character's minds from the narrating agent by both omniscient narrators who purport to be unable to access character's mental lives *and* character-narrators who strive for a higher level of narrative authority over other characters, making of this separation a problem addressed by the narratives that also create it.

wandered...”) while narrating from a position of Godlike authority anyway (“...but they did not wander only into the past”). In this way, Turgenev’s, Dostoevsky’s, and Tolstoy’s narrative voices at times disavow their own complicity in the very techniques of surveillance and omniscience in which they represent (and *by which* they are empowered to represent) characters participating.⁹ What might otherwise be termed “privileged information” (the inner workings of characters’ minds, for example) is also inescapably marked by its heavy reliance on the interpretation of the visible, exoteric (and distinctly *unprivileged*) signs that play out on the body and the face.

Omniscience in these Russian narratives, then, would hardly seem like omniscience at all. Despite many such protestations, the acquisition of privileged knowledge is never simply a case of “God only knows,” and yet Turgenev’s narrators, for example, struggle with limitations as much as they do with access, which seems distant from the term’s “definition based on the presumed analogy between the novelist as creator and the Creator of the cosmos, an omniscient God.”¹⁰ In this same vein, recent scholarship finds “omniscience” to be both lacking in rigor and unhelpfully tricky as a category of analysis. Using Dostoevsky’s narrator from *Brothers Karamazov* [Братья Карамазовы, 1880] as an example, Gerald Prince questions the dividing line drawn between seemingly impossible omniscient knowledge and normal narrative focalization, noting that “in fact, many fictional human beings *are* endowed with the capacity to perceive other entities’ reflections and feelings.”¹¹

Jonathan Culler further questions the “dubious notion” of the term and its implications, which tends to imbue third person narrative voices with godlike, all-seeing and all-knowing qualities, which in turn puts critics into the embarrassing situation of feeling “obliged to explain why the omniscient narrator declines to tell us all the relevant things he must know.”¹² The term itself, Culler argues, may lead readers astray in their analysis of narrative, by leaning so heavily on a theological metaphor that puts too much focus on assumed moments of withholding, when something left unsaid must presumably still be known by a narrator.¹³

Culler cites Richard Walsh on this matter, who puts the problems of omniscience on the shoulders of the reader who, in the act of figuring the narration as issuing from an embodied, bounded figure, has already negotiated a mode of complicity in the act of representation. Such a position ends up engendering a logical fallacy, Walsh argues, treating “a represented instance of narration as ontologically prior to the language doing the representing.”¹⁴ As Kent Puckett summarizes, the very idea of omniscience, then—that a godlike, privileged field of vision defines

⁹ Here and below, my invocation of the role of surveillance in the performance of narrative omniscience owes a debt to the influential formulations of D. A. Miller.

¹⁰ Scholes, Robert & Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York: Oxford UP, 1966), 272.

¹¹ Prince generally argues that omniscience as a category of analysis is not appreciably different enough from Genette’s focalization, as “theoretically, nothing prevents focalization from yielding the same kind and amount of information provided in cases of nonfocalized *omniscient* (or quasi-omniscient) narration.” Gerald Prince, “A Point of View on Point of View,” in Van Peer, Willie & Seymour Chatman, ed., *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective* (Albany: State U of New York P, 2001), 48. James Phelan counters Prince’s (and Seymour Chatman’s) position on omniscience, which he asserts achieves “clarity and economy at the expense of an inadequate account of what narrators can do.” Phelan, “Why Narrators Can Be Focalizers – And Why it Matters,” in Van Peer, op. cit., 51.

¹² Culler, “Omniscience,” *Narrative*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2004), 25-26.

¹³ See also Culler’s response to Barbara K Olson’s response to the above article, “Knowing or creating? A Response to Barbara Olson,” *Narrative*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Oct. 2006).

¹⁴ Walsh, “Who is the Narrator?,” *Poetics Today*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Winter 1997), 499-507.

the narrating agent of the text *against* the objects of its narration—“reproduces in the field of the literary a damaging theological error and as a result sustains an illusion against which no ordinary life could measure up. Omniscience is, in other words, an insult.”¹⁵ To these objections, however, Paul Dawson notes that Culler simply succeeds in demonstrating what has already long been known: that omniscience is an imperfect analogy for the representation and “rhetorical performance of narrative authority.”¹⁶

Keeping in mind these limitations, *Bog znaet* will rely on the term “omniscience” to refer to the complex of devices that play into and underwrite the way narrative authority makes itself visible. After all, Turgenev’s narrator in the epigraph above himself invokes the Godliness and strangeness of his knowledge, inviting at least one of the metaphors that Culler rejects. *Bog znaet* will pay special attention to such self-aware moments in newly omniscient Russian narratives that explicitly identify knowledge as problematic, gazes to be violent, or information to be had thanks only to a violation.

In defining narrative omniscience in this way—as a problem not of knowledge and its absence among different figures in the text, but as an oscillating swing between both—I follow Audrey Jaffe, who interprets omniscient narration to be a form of “emphatic display,” anxious about the differences between the observer and the observed, “[a]t once refusing the boundaries of character but defining itself by manufacturing those boundaries,” establishing them only to violate them.¹⁷ Understood in this way, omniscience sets up a relationship predicated on *distance* from characters (and their epistemological limitations) that at the same time allows for (and even requires) a *presence* among the characters (penetrating and representing their minds). In this way, Jaffe argues, a certain “tension between self-effacement and self-assertion” inheres in omniscience, as at times “the omniscient gaze bears traces of the same personal and cultural identities it seeks to efface.”¹⁸

In the search for authoritative narrative omniscience, Turgenev’s, Dostoevsky’s, and Tolstoy’s early narratives—to borrow Jaffe’s convincing formulation—first “create limited subjects,” in order to “have something to be omniscient about.”¹⁹ Their narratives are invested in the stakes of the knowledge they represent, and often excuse or justify individual instances of impossible knowledge, as well as problematize the means by which the private and intimate are penetrated, revealed, and made knowable in narrative. The questions raised by these nascent omniscient narratives fall along the fault line of what Adam Z. Newton terms “hermeneutic

¹⁵ Puckett, *Bad Form: Social Mistakes and the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 7.

¹⁶ Dawson, *The Return of the Omniscient Narrator* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 2013), 54. Dawson convincingly argues that the difference between narrators possessed of varying degrees of reliability is a problem of “rhetorical strategies rather than degrees of knowledge,” noting that the case of the problematically omniscient first-person narrator comes down not to impossibilities, but to hypothesis: “first-person omniscience becomes a performance of knowledge based on the hypothesis of a virtual focalizer: this is what *would* have been perceived by an omniscient narrator if such a perspective were possible.” *Ibid.*, 206. Amanda Anderson, meanwhile, investigates the “habits of suspicion” that both prompt and result from Victorian omniscient narration, which she takes to be a symptom of a purposeful, historical cultivation of distance and detachment, itself a response to the challenges of modernity. See Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), 3-6.

¹⁷ See Jaffe, *Vanishing Points: Dickens, Narrative, and the Subject of Omniscience* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1991), 6, 12, 71.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

ethics,” the inquiry, though narrative, “into the extent and limits of intersubjective knowledge in persons’ reading of each other, and the ethical price exacted from readers by texts.”²⁰ The assertion “God only knows” becomes the marker of an ethically invested narrative, purporting respectful distance in the moment of an intimacy-violating, -exposing presence. Such narratives represent characters who “read” each other, thanks to (and yet also in spite of) the position of narrators who themselves question the possibility of such readings at all. These paradoxical tensions index mid-nineteenth-century Russian narrative’s concern with, as Newton puts it, the difference between an “unveiling which destroys the secret” and “the revelation which does it justice.”²¹

III. Narrative ethics

By pairing the field of vision of the narrator with an act of violation, a moment of violence, early Russian omniscient narrative attends to the voyeurism inherent to the relationships it stages. The usual narrative distinctions—when considered through the ethically-invested optic of “God only knows”—then become less “show and tell,” and more “hit and run”: in bearing witness to violence, we are made to question who bears responsibility, in the same moment that claims of responsibility are abdicated.

Bog znaet will build on the work of several recent theorists of narrative ethics, as well as the foundational investigations into narrative and the Russian novel of M. M. Bakhtin, which lay the groundwork for an epistemological and ethical philosophy of novelistic form. By my use of the term “narrative ethics,” I refer to the constellation of concerns that cohere around a set of relationships that texts both produce and represent – character and narrator, narrator and reader, author and hero. Narrative becomes the site of ethics at the intersection of these relationships, when we are made to see the consequences of how privileged knowledge changes hands.

With these definitions, *Bog znaet* already takes a stance on several issues along which dividing lines are drawn in contemporary narrative scholarship. On the one hand, many liberal humanist scholars follow the rhetorical tack of identifying the reading and constructing of narrative to be inherently positive acts, affording readers an ethical testing ground for their own morality. Martha Nussbaum, for example, locates the value of fiction in its construction of ethical test cases, against which we as readers can judge ourselves and our own moral reactions to the situations modelled by characters on the page.²² Each novel becomes an “active heuristic working through of ethical problems,” ever sharpening the readers’ arsenal of tools for ethical

²⁰ Newton, *Narrative Ethics*, 26.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

²² See Nussbaum, “Love’s Knowledge,” in *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1990), 261-285. Frank Palmer similarly links the appreciation of literary works to the development of moral understanding, arguing that literary characters must be thought of as persons, not as “figurative unpersons.” Palmer, *Literature and Moral Understanding: A Philosophical Essay on Ethics, Aesthetics, Education, and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 11. As Dorothy Hale convincingly argues in her investigation of recent theorists of narrative ethics, however, Nussbaum’s project sees the ethical value of the novel tied up in its reification and confirmation of *certain* types of private emotion, in the process not only missing essential problems of novelistic form (and our reading of it), but also taking for granted the novel’s achievement of alterity full-stop. See Hale, “Aesthetics and the New Ethics: Theorizing the Novel in the Twenty-First Century,” *PMLA*, Vol. 124, No. 3 (May 2009), 898-99.

inquiry.²³ Wayne C. Booth similarly makes an ethical case for reading narratives, which invites critical discussions of the situations they represent.²⁴ In his systematic ethics of narration, meanwhile, James Phelan links omniscience with a necessarily positive ethical valence, arguing that the temptation to feel superior to characters whose minds we read is balanced by the increased feeling of sympathy that this position generates.²⁵

On the other hand, countering the liberal humanist notion that novel-reading by default reinforces our ability to empathize, Galen Strawson, for example, argues that “narrative self-articulation” actually promotes “an ideal of control and self-awareness in human life that is mistaken and potentially pernicious.”²⁶ Candace Vogler similarly argues not only that the limits of possible human knowledge preclude a responsible adaptation of our means of knowing literary characters to real-world ethical situations, but also that our self-understanding hinges on this very distinction: we are ungraspable and unknowable only in contradistinction to characters, about whom it *is* possible to know everything, thanks to omniscience.²⁷ J. Hillis Miller asserts that “ethics and narration cannot be kept separate” *not* because stories allow us to rehearse ethical choices by empathizing with characters, but because narrative is inherently and inescapably ethical thanks to the epistemological shadow cast by every different narrative situation.²⁸

²³ Robert Eaglestone, “Flaws: James, Nussbaum, Miller, Levinas,” in *Critical Ethics: Text, Theory, and Responsibility*, ed. Dominic Rainsford & Tim Woods (London: Macmillan, 1999), 78. Eaglestone argues elsewhere, however, that Nussbaum’s process is inherently flawed, offering literature as moral philosophy without attending to the limits of omniscient narrative, understanding “a text as a surface behind which there are real situations and real events.” See Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism: Reading After Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997), 41-57.

²⁴ Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), 13.

²⁵ Phelan asserts that, while the superior field of vision granted by narrative omniscience forms an ethical problem wrapped-up with superiority and hierarchy, this issue is solved by the attendant *closeness* we feel to those we might otherwise feel superior to: “Our knowledge has two main effects, one connected with ethical responsibility, the other with desire. With the privilege of this knowledge come a certain temptation and a certain responsibility. The temptation is to feel omniscient, or at least so superior that we begin look down at [characters.] [...] But these temptations are balanced against the demands our superior knowledge places on our sense of justice.” Phelan, *Living to Tell About It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005), 62.

²⁶ Strawson, “Against Narrativity,” *Ratio* XVII, 12/2004, 447.

²⁷ Vogler, “The Moral of the Story,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Autumn 2007), 5-35. Vogler notes how Robert Pippin furthers a similar claim in “On Maisie’s Knowing Her Own Mind,” noting that it is by the act of resisting the incursions of her parents into her mind that Henry James’s Maisie comes to have an inner self at all. Vogler, “The Moral of the Story,” 26. See also Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006).

²⁸ See J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James and Benjamin* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987), 2-5. Geoffrey Galt Harpham summarizes Miller’s deconstructive championing of the imperative of inscrutability as a demand the text places on the reader, not only renouncing the idea that any character can be used as a model for life, but also that “the ethics of reading dictate that no ethical instruction be derived from reading.” Harpham, *Getting it Right: Language, Literature, and Ethics* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992), 161-64. As Robert Eaglestone points out, however, Miller, in subsuming ethics “into reading—quite the opposite approach to Nussbaum, who subsumes reading into thinking about ethics,” leaves open the question of what remains of ethics “apart from narrative unreadability.” Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism*, 75. Booth elsewhere attempts to counter the deconstructive assignation of value to textual openness by arguing that readers are concerned with

This dissertation will investigate how early Russian narrative omniscience self-awaredly grapples with its own ethics, mapped onto the trajectory of Russian realism, reaching from subjective first-person character-narrators to omniscient third-person narrative voices, *without* conflating narrative ethics with the discrete moral choices made by characters, or our reactions to them. *Bog znaet* will ask instead: how do different narrative situations make visible—and attend to—the ethical consequences of their own narrative gazes? How does the Russian novel deal with the effects of the violent, penetrative act of omniscience that it also represents? To what degree does narrative situation dovetail with the ethical? And how do these narratives deal with this essential contradiction, representing—in narrative—the potentially pernicious effects of narrative?

In concrete terms, *Bog znaet* closely reads the narratives of several major Russian realist writers, whose work engages with omniscience as ethical issue, as an historically constituted problem that the novels both produce and respond to. Taking as its point of departure recent scholarship on the development of the authorial position of the realist narrator, *Bog znaet* tracks the rise of omniscience in the tradition of the Russian realist novel through the lens of narrative ethics, which has not yet been done by scholars. In the Slavic field, Victoria Somoff²⁹ has suggested that omniscience is a symptom of the new nineteenth-century remit of being reliable and objective, a problem of representing on the page a whole world of people who possess hidden interiors, minds, and souls; how else to be reliable in narration but to access those interiors directly? *Bog znaet* develops this idea further, both theoretically and chronologically, asking: what are the ethical implications of this direct access, and how does it change over time? How does omniscience construct the boundaries that it also breaks?³⁰ In the process of producing limitation, its own narrative foil, does omniscience in the tradition of the Russian realist novel also train the reader to be a reader of people? Or does it stage the ethical dangers of such an activity?

IV. Overview

Chapter one analyzes how the works of I. S. Turgenev grapple with the basic problem of narrative omniscience: how to penetrate the body of a character, get in her head, and represent what is “going on” inside? Narrative omniscience in Turgenev’s narratives takes the shape of a tension wrapped-up in anxieties about vision, violence, and the body. The largely effaced narrator of Turgenev’s *Sketches of a Hunter* [Записки охотника, 1847-74] moves around the Russian countryside, famously eavesdropping, spying, and pretending to be asleep in order to fully sketch the characters he meets. In the process, the sketches draw attention to the way Turgenev’s narrator obtains privileged knowledge, as well as to the consequences of his

reacting to the human elements marshalled by a particular narrator at a particular time, not with the *kind* of narrator a text employs, and that consequently openness or unreadability are not as ethically-invested as is the process of reader-response. Booth, *The Knowing Most Worth Doing: Essays on Pluralism, Ethics, and Religion* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2010), 84-85.

²⁹ See Somoff, *The Imperative of Reliability: Russian Prose on the Eve of the Novel, 1820s-1850s* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2005).

³⁰ On the subject of omniscience as a liminal space defined by tension, rather than by a surplus of knowledge, I continue to follow the terms of Audrey Jaffe, who notes: “What we call omniscience can be located, that is, not in presence or absence, but in the tension between the two – between a voice that implies presence and the lack of any character to attach it to, between a narratorial configuration that refuses character and the characters it requires to define itself.” Jaffe, *Vanishing Points*, 4.

narrative. The hunter-narrator's knowledge of other characters—including, at times, of their minds—requires work that is marked in some way as a *knowing* violation, the product of secret surveillance. Turgenev's later additions to the *Sketches*, added thirty years after the originals were published, become even more concerned with these questions of violated intimacy and of bodies penetrated by the narrator's gaze. They play with the problems only suggested by the earlier works: although the gaze of the limited first-person narrator has become over time ever more incisive and knowledgeable, the faces and bodies of those he would read become increasingly less legible.³¹

Fathers and Sons—situated chronologically between Turgenev's earlier and later sketches—stages a clash of their different devices of omniscience, of furnishing privileged knowledge, of learning “what is going inside” other people. This central clash overlaps with its titular battle of the generations, as various characters work hard to penetrate, undress, and reveal the mysterious interior of the (largely female) mind and body of the other. I will conclude by examining how this tension—caught up in the felt consequences of an increasingly omniscient, increasingly ethically compromised, increasingly violent gaze—(literally) comes to a head in the case of Turgenev's late sketch, “The Execution of Тропманн” [Казнь Тропмана, 1870], where the task of obtaining interiority—getting inside the soon-to-be-guillotined head of a young French spree-killer—is shot-through with the narrator's overt concern over the effects of his own overstepping field of vision. Turgenev's narratives are over time increasingly interested in interrogating the stakes of their own ability to make minds transparent, as well as to represent others doing the same.

Chapter two addresses the problem of character-narrators who exceed the boundaries of their position by examining F. M. Dostoevsky's first novel *Poor Folk* [Бедные люди, 1845] and contrasting it with his late short story “The Meek One” [Кроткая, 1876]. Both works, I argue, detail a male narrator subjugating the female object of his desire to his narrativizing gaze, assigning self-confirming meaning to her actions and, in the process, inviting the reader to attend to the ethics of her erased position of alterity. This chapter maps out how Dostoevsky closely links strategies of reading and narrating to our ethical responsibility toward the other. To read the unrequited love story of the poor, unprepossessing clerk Makar Devushkin as a prototype of the entirely self-possessed, unnamed, nearly unfeeling narrator of “The Meek One” is to read drastically against the grain, taking the lovelorn novelistic hero to be – in some ways, at least – the lothario that others in the novel claim him to be.³² Mikhail Bakhtin has famously declared the letters of *Poor Folk* to be shot-through with an anxiety of reception, dialogically oriented both towards the impression that the messages will create in the recipient as well as towards the potential response they will engender.³³ My reading will engage with this idea, as well as with

³¹ This point follows (and will build upon) Victoria Somoff's suggestion that the narrative voice behind Turgenev's late additions to the *Sketches* cycle is markedly novelistic, benefitting from twenty years of the development and popularization of omniscient third-person narration in realist novels.

³² Without going as far as suggesting that Makar Devushkin is the cause of Varvara's social fall from grace, I will take my cue here from Carol Apollonio, who suggests we read Makar's letters for the degree to which his words and actions don't align, inviting the reader's complicity in his objectifying gaze as the “sideways glance” of his discourse strays into the territory of voyeurism. See Apollonio, *Dostoevsky's Secrets: Reading Against the Grain* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2009).

³³ See Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984), 49, 58.

Bakhtin's definition of aesthetically proper reading, to trace an ethics of reading and narrating in Dostoevsky.

Poor Folk is the story of Makar Devushkin's development as both a reader and a narrator. Just as we track his changing ability to "read" Varvara Alekseevna and understand her letters and actions, so too do we follow his emerging taste as a discerning reader of fiction, culminating in his narratively naïve (but ethically sensitive) rejection of the heterodiegetic narrative of Gogol's and Puhskin's short stories. In this moment, Makar Devushkin—our voyeuristic homodiegetic narrative voice—ironically rejects the methods of his own narrative, the over-stepping omniscience of heterodiegesis. He is appalled by the activities of Gogol's narrator, for example, whom he assumes has been spying on and following around poor Akaky Akakievich. Makar Devushkin's rejection of omniscience draws our attention back to the ethics of his own gaze, which throughout the novel reduces Varvara Alekseevna to playing a role in his own narrative self-understanding, assigning self-confirming meaning to everything she does. I argue that the novel's concern with the ethics of reading and narrating the other is programmatic, evident from its first lines, an epigraph drawn from V. F. Odoevsky's "The Living Dead Man" [Живой мертвец, 1838], a short story whose first-person narrator has an out-of-body experience and, as a ghost, gains intimate knowledge about the minds and opinions of his family members – an early wrangling with the difficulty of furnishing privileged information to unprivileged narrators. I will then turn to Dostoevsky's late short story "The Meek One," in which a miserly pawn-broker drives his wife to suicide by attempting to control every aspect of her life, reducing her story to a footnote in the narrative of his own ability to read it. The narrator of "The Meek One" narrates his wife's consciousness and lays bare her interiority without any trace of subtlety or sensitivity, rendering her totally finalized, while an authorial preface reveals that the pawnbroker's story rehearses exactly this problem on a larger scale, as we too overhear his impossible-to-overhear interior monologue.³⁴

The third chapter focuses on the development of penetrative omniscience *within* Tolstoy's earliest first-person narrative experiments, from his unfinished sketch "A History of Yesterday" [История вчерашнего дня, 1851] to the three novels of his unfinished tetralogy *The Four Epochs of Development: Childhood* [Детство, 1852], *Boyhood* [Отрочество, 1854] and *Youth* [Юность, 1857]. Although the recognizably *Tolstoyan* (omniscient, authoritative) narrator only appears in later sketches, these early works, I argue, are not so much pre-omniscient, as proto-omniscient. They are invested both in the possibility of making minds transparent, as well as in attending to the inevitable consequences of doing so. His early narrators comment on their ability to access the minds of characters, and remark on the illegibility of secret thoughts and hidden feelings, which play out all the same, fleetingly yet legibly, across characters' faces and in the movements of their hands and bodies. The result, I argue, is a process of *overreading*, where narrative voices draw attention to the excesses of their own gaze. Despite the self-professed impossibility of tracking all the impressions and thoughts that enter one's head

³⁴ Bakhtin also notes that this is the story not of the pawnbroker, but of the representation of the journey of his self-consciousness as he comes to understand his own narrative. I aim to follow and build on the recent work of Alexander Spektor, who in his 2008 dissertation *Narrative ethics in the first-person prose of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Witold Gombrowicz* suggests that "The Meek One" abandons the authorial surplus of vision by utilizing the first person, in the process forcing the characters of the story to contend with the power, responsibility, and violence of their narrative control, turning the narrative situation of the story into the site of an ethical problem.

throughout the day, the narrator of “A History of Yesterday” attempts it all the same, and not in the case of his head alone. The ostensibly limited and embodied narrative voices that follow this first one—including the chronologically split first-person character-narrator Nikolen’ka Irten’ev—play with the tension between limitation and privilege, frequently breaking through epistemic boundaries, penetrating the interiors and detailing the histories of other characters with impossible accuracy and perspicacity.

In creating textual bodies in order that the secret grammar of their faces, gestures, eyes, and movements may be parsed and interpreted, *Childhood* privileges a mechanism of silent, non-verbal reading as a higher order of narrating. *Boyhood* and *Youth*, meanwhile, equate these scenes of reading with the intimacy of filial closeness, suggesting that the model for the aesthetically proper reading of people follows that of a closely-knit family, a coterie of like-minded interpreters, well-versed in the silent reading of each other’s exteriors, while also warning against the potentially pernicious consequences of reductively reading other people as one reads literary characters. These novels model a way of knowing born out of reading, but also warn against it. Ultimately, Tolstoy’s early working-out of narrative voice becomes a working-through of narrative ethics. Before the easy omniscience of his later work, Tolstoy’s early narrators perform acts of “reading” that come wrapped up in a negative, deontic modal. In paying lip service to the imperceptibility of characters’ still-perceived smiles, Tolstoy’s early narrators grapple with their acts of reading, seeing, and knowing what they *ought not* to read, see, and know.

Bog znaet asserts that Russian realist narrative tends towards omniscience, while still retaining vestigial concerns for the privileged nature of the information it represents. *Bog znaet* investigates the way these ethical concerns take the shape of several tensions written into the Russian novel, including moments where omniscient narrators rely on reading facial expressions to gain access to the minds of others, where the limitations of first-person narrative survive into texts written in the third-person, and where an overt concern with the *source* of narrative information is voiced. *Bog znaet* highlights these tensions by mapping their progression, from Dostoevsky’s first novel to a late story, from Turgenev’s early experimentation with realism in the 1850s to the anxieties of his late work, and as it unfolds in the proto-omniscience of Tolstoy’s early semi-autobiographical narratives.

CHAPTER 1

**“What has happened inside this man?”:
The ethics of penetrating the body of the other in Turgenev’s narratives**

I. Introduction

The question of “what has happened inside” a particular character forms a central ethical problem for the narratives of Ivan Turgenev.

Turgenev’s late sketch “The Execution of Tropmann” [Казнь Тропмана, 1870], from which this quote is drawn, limns what is ethically at stake in many of Turgenev’s narratives at large. Originally published as an indictment of the death penalty, it also, I argue, indicts Turgenev’s tricky relationship with narrative omniscience, with penetrating the body of the other, and with accessing its interior.

In the sketch, Turgenev employs a first-person narrative voice to recount the public execution of a young French mass-murderer, which he personally witnessed in January 1870. Invited as a special guest into a closed-off section of the prison, Turgenev’s narrator is aghast at the violence of what he is bearing witness to, as well as to the violence of bearing witness itself. He makes frequent reference to the *privilege of his vantage point*, as he has been granted access to otherwise *inaccessible spaces*. Reporting from the inner sanctum of the prison, he witnesses up-close the prisoner’s final toilette, as well as the preparations made by the executioner, constantly and anxiously aware that he is seeing something he should not. Although he frequently turns to the large crowd who are also gathered to watch the execution, Turgenev’s narrator cannot make sense of their voices, and has difficulty reading the individuals he does pick out, of one in particular wondering: “What has happened inside this man?” [Что происходило в этом человеке?] (14:156).¹ After having closely detailed the minutiae of the event, the narrator’s gaze fails him; he famously looks away from the beheading at the last moment, focusing instead again on the crowd of witnesses, wondering what effect this sight will have on them, and later, what value his narrative has had, if any.

Dostoevsky hated this ending, which he saw as a dereliction of Turgenev’s duty to witness what he had set out to witness.² I propose, however, that this turning-away is not a moment of indefensible squeamishness, but rather forms an ethically invested means of attending to the confluence of vision, violence, and the body, which gives shape to all of Turgenev’s

¹ All citations of Turgenev refer to *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v dvadtsati vos'mi tomakh* (Moscow: Nauka, 1964). Translations of the *Sketches of a Hunter* refer to Richard Freeborn’s, of *Fathers and Sons* to Michael Katz’s, and of “The Execution of Tropmann” to David Magarshack’s.

² In a June 1870 letter to N. N. Strakhov, Dostoevsky rails against the sketch: “[...] меня эта напыщенная и шепетильная статья возмутила. Почему он всё конфузится и твердит, что не имел права тут быть? Да, конечно, если только на спектакль пришел; но человек, на поверхности земной, не имеет права отвертываться и игнорировать то, что происходит на земле...” (29:127-28). As Emma Lieber notes, Dostoevsky would later parody Turgenev for this sketch in the character of Karmazinov in *Demons* [Бесы, 1872], “a pompous has-been whose account of a steamer wreck, concerned largely with his own refusal to watch” is itself all merely a means of “self-display.” Lieber, “‘Pardon, Monsieur’: Civilization and Civility in Turgenev’s ‘The Execution of Tropmann,’” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (Winter 2007), 669. See also Robert Louis Jackson, “The Ethics of Vision: Turgenev’s ‘Execution of Tropmann’ and Dostoevsky’s View of the Matter” in *The Poetics of Ivan Turgenev: Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, Occasional Paper #234* (Washington, DC: 1989), 35.

omniscient narratives. Ultimately concealing that which it has purportedly set out to reveal, the sketch aligns omniscience and privileged knowledge with violation, narrative with responsibility, and vision with violence. This chapter will map out how this constellation of concerns plays out in Turgenev's narratives and comes to define the development of his devices of omniscience. Indeed, the narrator of "Tropmann"—who ends up in a secret place, sees what he also thinks he ought not have seen, and bears witness by turning away—rehearses the same anxious negative deontic modal at work behind omniscience itself: an ethically fraught, epistemologically invested act which must construct the boundaries that it represents itself transgressing, narrative omniscience renders knowable that which *ought not* be, in so doing also reifying a boundary—between private and public, between hidden and legible, between inside and outside, between mind and body—in the moment of crossing it.³

This chapter will examine the tension that defines what is at stake for omniscience in Turgenev. The largely effaced narrator of Turgenev's *Sketches of a Hunter* [Записки охотника, 1847-74] famously eavesdrops on conversations and spies on faces in order to complete his sketches of characters. In the process this hunter-narrator lays bare the consequences of privileged knowledge in Turgenev: knowledge of characters' interiors requires work that is marked in some way as a *knowing* violation, the product of various devices of coincidence, infelicity, lying, and secret surveillance. His later sketches become even more concerned with these questions of the private sphere made public, of bodies penetrated by the narrator's gaze, and play with the problems only suggested by the earlier works: although the gaze of the limited first-person narrator has become over time ever more incisive and knowledgeable, the faces and bodies of those he would read become increasingly less legible.

With this trajectory in mind, I will turn to a close reading of several key scenes in *Fathers and Sons*—situated chronologically between Turgenev's earlier and later sketches—to demonstrate how this text serves as a middle-ground for Turgenev's devices of omniscience. The novel stages a clash of old and new devices for furnishing privileged knowledge that overlaps with its titular battle of the generations, as various characters take up the task of answering this chapter's central question, working hard to penetrate, undress, and reveal the mysterious interior of the (largely female) mind and body of the other. I will conclude by examining how this tension—wrapped up in the felt consequences of an increasingly omniscient, increasingly ethically compromised, increasingly violent gaze—(literally) comes to a head in the case of "Tropmann," where the task of obtaining interiority—getting inside the soon-to-be-guillotined head of a killer—is shot-through with the narrator's overt concern over the effects of his own overstepping field of vision.

II. Negotiating privileged knowledge in the early *Sketches of a Hunter*

Historian Carlo Ginzburg suggests that the activity of a hunter—which involves following traces and deciphering tracks, resulting in knowledge “characterized by the ability to construct from apparently insignificant experimental data a complex reality that could not be experienced directly”—shares overt sympathies with the very idea of narrative itself,⁴ particularly that which constructs inner worlds from outer signifiers. Perhaps, he suggests, the two are causally linked, and the practice of narrative originated first in the lore of hunting.

³ I borrow this convincing formulation from Audrey Jaffe, *Vanishing Points*, 6-12.

⁴ Carlo Ginzburg, “Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm,” in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John & Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989), 103.

In the study of Turgenev's *Sketches of a Hunter*, that causal relationship is frequently invoked, but its direction is questioned: does the drive to hunt result in narrative, or does the drive to narrate lead to hunting? Does the hunter—whose hobby justifies his visiting many groups of peasants and landowners across the countryside—emerge as “an individual hunting for a manner of *narrating*,” searching for a way of devising “a model of consciousness” as much as for game⁵, or is his hunting ancillary to the way his mobility and capacities for listening and recording consummates the apotheosis of the entire tradition of the nineteenth-century frame narrative?⁶ These questions metaphorize hunting's connection to narrating, but also outline the silhouette of the ethical component of Turgenev's early cycle of short sketches, which his later ones will fill in. The strategies that define the narration of this epistemologically invested hunter move from the outside-in, as he travels around the countryside, a mostly empty vessel figured as an outside observer, whose main occupation is not hunting, but briefly looking-in on lives, resulting in a balancing act simultaneously composed “of involvement, participation, and retirement into a more distant position from which to survey the scene.”⁷ The knowledge produced by (and narrative resulting from) his looking-in, his surveillance on those often unaware of their observation, comes wrapped-up in an admission of its status as an ethical violation. Narrative authority in Turgenev's early sketches plays out as a contradictory project, anxious about its own method for penetrating bodies and narrating minds, resulting in a process of divesting from the devices that underwrite it.

The question of “what is going on inside people” deeply interests and motivates the hunter-narrator of Turgenev's *Sketches*, a cycle of short vignettes first published individually in the “miscellany” section of the 1847 edition of the thick journal *The Contemporary* [Современник]. However, his attempts to answer this question, as many readers and scholars alike have long noted, invariably fall along several lines of unbelievable coincidence. The narrator is often possessed of impossibly thorough information about his subjects, information which stands outside the possible realm of his knowledge; in parenthetical asides, the narrator often comments on his knowledge's provenance, sometimes justifying its sudden presence. In the cycle's first sketch, “Khor and Kalynich” [Хор и Калынич, 1847], for example, the hunter-narrator spends some time with unknown peasants, but is possessed of a remarkable amount of foreknowledge of them, justified by the addition of a relative clause: “as I found out later” [как узнал я позже] (4:11).

For a hunter observing and spending his time mostly with strangers, conversations flow rather well, and his interlocutors often trust him preternaturally with their stories and secrets. The same unexpected “trust of my new friend” [доверенность моего нового приятеля], as he earns without trying in “District Doctor” [Уездный лекарь, 1848], does not escape the narrator's attention in “Khor and Kalynich”: “and I spent the next three days at Khor's place. I became preoccupied with my new acquaintances. I don't know how I had won their confidence, but they talked to me without any constraint. It was with pleasure that I listened to them and watched them” [и следующие три дня провел у Хоря. Меня занимали новые мои знакомцы. Не знаю, чем я заслужил их доверие, но они непринужденно разговаривали со мной] (4:14).

⁵ Elizabeth Cheresch Allen, *Beyond Realism: Turgenev's Poetics of Secular Salvation* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992), 143-44.

⁶ Somoff, *The Imperative of Reliability*, 29.

⁷ Sander Brouwer, *Character in the Short Prose of Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 79

Just as the narrator seems compelled to legitimize narrative information by justifying his privileged knowledge, so too does he often rely on *common* knowledge, which abdicates some level of narrative authority by pulling back, framing “the nature of people” as already evident to “whoever has happened to travel from Bolkhov province to Zhizdra” (4:7) in the first sketch’s first line.⁸

While the narrator also often demonstrates privileged knowledge of character interiority, he remains self-aware of the limits of his gaze. Such moments are justified by, among other things, the legibility of thoughts, moods, feelings, and desires on the face and body. The narrator’s judgement of Khor, for example, as a man who is “aware of his standing in the world,” is founded on an analysis of how “his speech and his movements were of a measured slowness and he gave occasional chuckles through his long whiskers,” a judgement further softened by its opening qualifier of what everything “seemed” to mean [Он, казалось, чувствовал свое достоинство, говорил и двигался медленно] (4:12). The narrator *does* venture into judging characters’ internal states; of Khor he later notes, “You’re one who knows his own mind and keeps a strong rein on his tongue, I said to myself.” [Крепок ты на язык и человек себе на уме,—подумал я] (4:13). Much of this judgement, however, is based on his ongoing surveillance of many characters; the narrator often spies, eavesdrops, or pretends to be asleep, trying to catch characters unaware, as he does with the boys in “Bezhin Meadow” [Бежин луг].

These moves mark narrative authority as a position in need of justification, and privileged information as the product of vision in need of legitimization, softened in its scope by its framing as either common or self-evident knowledge. This narrator is already on his way towards the disembodied third-person heterodiegesis of Turgenev’s later novels; by legitimizing his knowledge of characters by his secret, unobserved surveillance, the *Sketches* assert that the most accurate and telling information about characters comes only when it is *as if the narrator is not there*. Such secret surveillance also comes already wrapped-up in an admission of its own status as an *ethical violation*, as a crossing of boundaries. The narrative of the *Sketches* is anxious to divest itself from a status of privilege, but comes already invested in its own *ethical* status. This tension becomes a pendulum swing between professed absence and actual presence, rehearsing the role of the narrator in the text at large: narrative omniscience in these sketches professes limitation in the process of exceeding it.

In “My Neighbor Radilov” [Мой сосед Радиллов, 1847], the process of ethically invested observation and secret surveillance becomes central to the story.⁹ At dinner, the narrator seems to be listening to Radilov attentively, but is actually spying on Ol’ga “on the sly” [и украдкой наблюдал за Ольгой], intently cataloging all of her observable traits, while simultaneously divesting himself of any special authority in the matter: “She wasn’t very pretty, but the resolute and calm expression of her face, her broad, white forehead, thick hair and, in particular, her hazel eyes, small but intelligent, clear and vivacious, would have struck anyone, no matter who, in my place” [Она не очень была хороша собой; но решительное и спокойное выражение ее лица,

⁸ Allen points this out as the paradox of this narrative voice, which, despite increasingly developing autonomy, and “although displaying his personal sensitivity to the peculiarity of language that identify individual speakers, the narrator shows little confidence in his own, autonomous voice.” Allen, *Beyond Realism*, 145.

⁹ My reading will depart from Allen’s analysis of this element of the sketch, which she puts down to the narrator’s development of autonomy, to his assertion of “his authority as a mediating consciousness in the transmission of the events portrayed.” Allen, *Beyond Realism*, 146.

ее широкий белый лоб, густые волосы и, в особенности, карие глаза, небольшие, но умные, ясные и живые, поразили бы и всякого другого на моем месте.] (4:56). The narrator’s judgement of Ol’ga’s looks, expression, hair, and eyes, and the way they speak to her positive character traits (despite her not being overtly attractive) is immediately undercut by his insistence that these traits would also have struck “anyone else in his place,” evacuating his own position of any special authority, while simultaneously *performing* that very authority.

Of course, “his place”—and its status as a position from which character traits can be rendered legible—is also a construction of the narrative. He later frames his judgement of Radilov as another moment of self-evident observation, rather than a matter of *his* gaze in particular:

In people who are constantly and strongly preoccupied by one thought or by a single passion there is always some common feature noticeable, some common likeness in behavior, no matter how different their qualities, their abilities, their position in society and their education. The longer I observed Radilov, the more it seemed to me that he belonged to such a category of person.

В людях, которых сильно и постоянно занимает одна мысль или одна страсть, заметно что-то общее, какое-то внешнее сходство в обращенье, как бы ни было, впрочем, различны их качества, способности, положение в свете и воспитание. Чем более я наблюдал за Радиловым, тем более мне казалось, что он принадлежал к числу таких людей. (4:57)

This observation moves from outlining a broad, shared methodology (that common features or behavioral similarities are noticeable in certain people, and that they correspond to internal mental states) to a specific identification (asserting that Radilov belongs “to such a category of person”). In the process the narrator makes knowable the character’s interior (asserting that his mind is clearly preoccupied by a single, obsessive thought) while also rendering that interior a mystery in need of deciphering. The mystery of the mind of the other is left *visibly secret* – an anxious, liminal position that is neither visible nor secret.

Yet the narrator’s privilege is roundabout, a few lines later constructing Radilov again as an unknown cypher: “secreted in his eyes, in his smile and in his whole being there was something extraordinarily attractive – and yet it was secreted. So it seemed you wanted to know him better and really be friends with him” [в его взоре, в улыбке, во всем его существе таилось. Так, кажется, и хотелось бы узнать его получше, полюбить его] (4:58). The unknowability (despite the earlier legibility) of the secret interior “inside his entire being” only drives the narrator to try to get to know this character more—to more doggedly hunt his hidden game—whose traces he has followed by tracking Radilov’s features.

The rest of the sketch can be read as the history of this tracking, as the narrator recounts a particular expression he noticed that night, and how he has assigned different meanings to it over time. As Ol’ga pours tea, the narrator watches “her with greater attention than at dinner” (4:58), and when Radilov stops talking, he notes that he “looked at him and then at Ol’ga and I’ll never forget the expression on her face.” [Я посмотрел на него, потом на Ольгу... Век мне не забыть выражения ее лица] (4:59). Having left their company, the narrator concludes the sketch with the information he picks up only later—that Radilov has upped and left with his sister-in-law, shocking the entire province—which finally gives meaning to that expression

which he had observed two weeks earlier: “and it was only then that I finally fathomed the look that had been on Ol’ga’s face during Radilov’s story. It hadn’t just been a look of compassion; it had been a look burning with envy.” [и я только тогда окончательно понял выражение Ольгина лица во время рассказа Радилова. Не одним состраданием дышало оно тогда; оно пылало также ревностью] (4:60). The devices of narrative omniscience at work in “My Neighbor Radilov” furnish privileged knowledge that is at once gathered “on the sly,” yet is also purportedly self-evident, from characters whose faces are legible, yet whose corresponding interiors are also meant to be mysterious, by a narrator who disavows any special authority, in the very process of exercising it.

This preoccupation with looks, eavesdropping, and spying is, of course, nothing new for first-person narrators: in Genette’s terminology, assumptions based on the observation of the readily visible often index the limitations of homodiegetic narrative voices, whose narration is peppered with commentary justifying their sometimes-illicit knowledge.¹⁰ As Victoria Somoff has convincingly demonstrated,¹¹ these strategies are particularly on display in Turgenev’s *Sketches*, which redraw the reader’s attention to way narrative negotiates seemingly paradoxical tensions of limitation and authority, of presence and absence, of legibility and illegibility.¹² They also cast a spotlight on how these narratives are invested in their own ethics, in how they cross

¹⁰ Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. J. E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983), 77.

¹¹ Although it is mostly a chronological outlier for the boundaries (1820-50) of her work, Somoff locates Turgenev’s *Sketches* within her study of the development of the “reliability imperative” in the nineteenth century Russian novelistic form. She demonstrates that early Russian novelists “experienced their authority in presenting character’s inner life as problematic and in need of justification,” often employing “documentary” material or attempting to catch character’s unaware. Somoff, *The Imperative of Reliability*, 9. Characters’ minds only become uncomplicatedly transparent, she argues, “due to the architectonics of the authorial position established in realist discourse,” leaving the earlier lack of inside views a problem of the “external vantage point, whose domain is the hearing of character soliloquies and the observing of their ‘telling gestures.’” Somoff, *The Imperative of Reliability*, 109-113. The narrator of the sketches, as noted above, is empowered to narrate privileged information only thanks to his ability to fall asleep and wake up at the right times, after which he overhears and faithfully records confessions. Ibid., 115-116.

¹² The particular suitability of Turgenev’s effaced-yet-present, distant-yet-intimate hunter-narrator to this task has long been the subject of scholarly concern. Steven Brett Shaklan suggests an ethical investment at work behind Turgenev’s “early preference for first-person narration,” which distances himself “from his literary inheritance by placing that language in the mouth of an ‘other.’” Shaklan, “‘So Many Foreign and Useless Words!’: Ivan Turgenev’s Poetics of Negation,” in *Turgenev: Art, Ideology and Legacy*, ed. Robert Reid & Joe Andrew (New York: Rodopi, 2010), 41. Elizabeth Cheresh Allen asserts that the “narratorial authority” Turgenev tries out in the *Sketches* is a mode of power indexed by his increased effectiveness in “signaling extensive complexities beneath simple surface appearances.” Allen, *Beyond Realism*, 147. Justin Weir points out the “modulating narrative distance” in the *Sketches*, a constant forming and breaking of frames that signposts Turgenev’s “commitment to examining and representing aesthetic communication as such.” Weir, “Turgenev as Institution: *Sketches from a Hunter’s Album* in Tolstoy’s Early Aesthetics” in *Turgenev: Art, Ideology, and Legacy*, op. cit., 226. In a series of convincing close readings of the sketches, Sander Brouwer asserts that the hunter-narrator serves as a perfect device for crossing boundaries and observing, giving shape to the “narratorial position from which nature could be described simultaneously *from within*, as it is in itself, as well as from a distance.” Brouwer, *Character*, 85-93.

boundaries, ever reminding us of the centrality of spying, eavesdropping, and secret, unobserved observation.

In his history of the development of the form, M. M. Bakhtin suggests that such concerns are symptomatic of novelistic narrative at large, since the private life is “by its very nature and as opposed to public life, *closed*. In essence one could only *spy* and *eavesdrop* on it. The literature of private life is essentially a literature of snooping about, of overhearing ‘how others live.’”¹³ This leaves narrative as the center of contradiction, insofar as it is the site of the public opening of this closed, private space, as well as the means by which the private is constructed as such. Novelists, argues Peter Brooks, are acutely aware of this tension between public and private, as they thematize “the struggle of privacy and its invasions, in turn making the novel of private life increasingly also the novel of the individual’s body.”¹⁴ As they redraw attention to this central tension—by way of the conflicting but simultaneous poles of observer and participant, public and private, mind and body—Turgenev’s early *Sketches* also trace out an essentially ethical poetics of violation and transgression.¹⁵

III. “А почему знать?” – Crises of reading in later additions to the *Sketches*

Although the narrator of the *Sketches* participates in a self-aware project of surveillance, looking-in “on the sly,” marking privileged knowledge as a knowing violation, his face-reading also denies a higher level of authority by begging off any special ability: his observations, he maintains, would be self-evident to anyone in his position. The formal concerns mapped out by these early sketches—which take the shape of a tension between observer and observed, between self-effacement and self-assertion, between absence and presence—inform the *content* of Turgenev’s later additions to the cycle, in which faces become harder to read, minds more difficult to penetrate.

In “The Clatter of Wheels” [Стучит!, 1874], the narrator who once spied with ease now finds himself unable to read other characters by their faces, potentially the victim of men whose identity—and secret intentions—he cannot verify. As his driver remarks, in what might be taken as the summation of the entire ethical epistemology of Turgenev’s later sketches: “How’s that to be known? Do you think it’s possible to get inside another’s soul? Another’s soul is a mystery. It’s always best to be on God’s side.” [А почему знать? В чужую душу разве влезешь? Чужая душа – известно – потемки. А с богом-то всегда лучше] (4:380). The *visibly hidden* (yet still legible) secrets of Radilov’s mind, which so motivated the earlier narrator to know him

¹³ Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. M. Holquist, trans. C. Emerson & M. Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981), 123.

¹⁴ Peter Brooks, *Body Works: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993), 32-33.

¹⁵ Irene Masing-Delic investigates these concerns as they manifest in Turgenev’s short fiction as “the motif of crossing the borders from conventional reality to the realm of the forbidden and hidden,” noting how his narrative overlaps with a “penetrating” movement into hidden space that redraw our attention to the essential difference between those experiencing and those observing life. Masing-Delic, “Hidden Spaces in Turgenev’s Short Prose: What They Conceal and What They Show,” in *Turgenev: Art, Ideology, and Legacy*, op. cit., 25. Masing-Delic further links the “spatial-thematic opposition” between these spaces with the aesthetic project of Turgenev’s short narratives, in one case turning his story into “the tale about the ‘indecent’ of the artist who is willing to violate all boundaries, penetrate into the most secret recesses of private life, wrench the hidden out of its hiding place – because he is compelled to complete his story.” *Ibid.*, 29.

better, now carry potentially fatal risks for the narrator of the later sketches. The stakes get ever higher, as narrative-ethical problems become invested with ever greater consequences.

The late additions to *Sketches of a Hunter*—added thirty years after the publication of the first sketches—are deeply concerned with the transgression of bodily boundaries, and the possibilities and conventions of knowledge thereby obtained.¹⁶ When invited to contribute to a collection to help peasants suffering from starvation in the Samarskaia guberniia in 1873, Turgenev turned to “The Living Relic” [Живые мощи, 1874], an incomplete sketch he had found (alongside “The Clatter of Wheels”) in a notebook from the 1850s, which was published with the subtitle “An excerpt from the Notes of a Hunter” [отрывок из записок охотника].

The narrator, rained-out while hunting with his faithful servant Ermolai, happens upon a nearby family estate and comes across the titular “living relic,” Luker’ia, a once-beautiful maidservant from his childhood home, now left crippled and immobile after an accident. Her subsequent years of deterioration (although she is not yet thirty) have not only nearly erased her facial features, but have also left her body nearly unrecognizably human, as the narrator wonders upon first seeing her: “Before me lay a living human creature, but what was it?” [Передо мною лежало живое человеческое существо, но что это было такое?] (4:354). His narrative entirely dehumanizes her: her face and hands are “bronzed,” like an icon, her fingers are “little sticks,” her nose is “as thin as a knife blade.” Upon closer inspection, however, he sees deeper beauty in her face, and notices “that a smile was striving to appear on it, to cross its metallic cheeks – was striving and yet could not spread” [И тем страшнее кажется мне это лицо, что по нем, по металлическим его щекам, я вижу — силится... силится и не может расплыться улыбка.] (4:354). Here the order of signification from the earlier sketches is reversed, as the privileged narrator—who can discern that a smile is attempting (but remains as yet *unable*) to spread itself across the withered, illegible face with its nonexistent lips—reads into a character’s interior state *before* (or even in spite of) the signs by which it is indexed: he is aware of her smile before it exists. The narrator’s prior inability to properly contextualize Ol’ga’s expression, or to truly know Radilov’s interior, is here replaced with a preternatural ability to narrate interior states *regardless* of the traces they leave.

Luker’ia tells the narrator her story, and a back-and-forth dialogue follows, during which the narrator asks brief questions, to which Luker’ia provides long answers. The narrator finds most remarkable that she tells her entire sad tale of lost love, beauty, youth, and health without a complaining and without “fishing for sympathy” (4:355), reading into her intentions. He learns that she does not eat, sleep, move, think, or even remember, but rather lies alone, looking out the window, sometimes entertained by birds (until they were shot by local hunters). She is, in effect, the pathetic, doubled opposite of the narrator, whom she even chastises for his hunting. Unable to move, to record, or to remember, she can only observe—but she sees nothing, and meets no

¹⁶ As she demonstrates with a convincing reading of “The End of Chertopkhanov” [Конец Чертопханова], another late addition to the cycle, Victoria Somoff takes the newfound concerns of Turgenev’s later sketches to be a byproduct of his success with the novelistic form, as in the gap between the early *Sketches* and the later additions he has already worked-through mastering the representation of figural consciousness. Somoff, *Imperative of Reliability*, 131. Somoff postulates that this discrepancy accounts for moments in the late sketches that “let slip” the heretofore unseen “capacity for novelistic presentation of character interiority.” *Ibid.*, 116. I would add to this compelling reading that the late sketches represent a *heightening*, and not a sudden appearance, of concerns already evident in the narrative of the earlier *Sketches*, that are also worked-through in *Fathers and Sons*.

one new.¹⁷ Her only real narratable experiences are her three dreams, which she recounts to the narrator (a fourth was excised from the final version of the story), in which she meets Christ, her parents, and goes on a pilgrimage. The narrator's stories, by contrast, have of course been those of *other people*, and never those of his own psychological state or interior.

Although Luker'ia has seen several doctors, they have been unable to diagnose her sickness, and have only hurt her more with their attempts at treatment; nonetheless, the narrator is deeply affected by what he has seen, and suggests he take Luker'ia once again to see a doctor, to which she scoffs "who can really help another? Who can enter into their soul?" [Да, барин, милый, кто другому помочь может? Кто ему в душу войдет?] (4:359). Taken as a rehearsal of the concerns central to Turgenev's performance of ethically invested narrative omniscience, this question might not be rhetorical; ventriloquizing through Luker'ia, the question appears even to ask "who can enter another's soul?" of the very narrator who has been empowered to represent figural consciousness by doing just that.

The sketch's conclusion continues this thread, as the narrator exceeds the boundaries of his possible knowledge in a brief coda, in which he reports Luker'ia's death a few weeks later. He notes that "they said" that on her deathbed she heard a bell ringing, which she thought came "from above," and not from a nearby church, probably meaning—but crucially *not saying*—that she meant "from heaven" (4:365). The sketch ultimately addresses Luker'ia's question; although the narrator has not helped her, he has certainly attempted to enter (and represent) her soul.

"The Clatter of Wheels," the last of the 1874 additions to the *Sketches* cycle, picks up on Luker'ia's question—indeed, the character of Filofei even repeats it nearly verbatim¹⁸—but addresses it as a problem not of empathy, but of physical danger, turning the tables on the face-reading narrator.

Having run out of lead shot for his gun, the narrator sets off to a larger town to get some more in a *tarantass* driven by Filofei, a possibly unreliable local hire. The narrator falls asleep, but is woken by a nervous Filofei, whose anxious exclamation titles the sketch: "Стучит!" he bemoans (4:374), explaining that "it's a cart on its way, traveling light, with iron-shod wheels," a sign that "there's bad people travelling in it, master. Hereabouts, around Tula, there's many people up to no good" [Телега катит... налегкие, колеса кованые, -- промолвил он и подобрал вожжи, -- Это, барин, недобыре люди едут; здесь ведь, под Тулой, шалят...много.] (4:374). The narrator at first dismisses Filofei's story as nonsense, but is unable to fall back asleep, and, as the night grows darker and mistier, starts to wonder if Filofei might be right (4:375). Soon convinced that "Filofei can't be mistaken!" (4:376), and that the character of these men might be determined by such an otherwise innocuous signifier, the narrator soon hears the ominous sound again, this time obviously gaining ground behind them. After a short chase, the cart—clearly full of drunks—catches up to them, and then blocks their passage, "exactly like robbers," whispers Filofei (4:377), whose competing narrative is gaining traction with the sketch's narrator, who is otherwise unable to read the intentions of these illegible antagonists.

¹⁷ Allen points to this moment of doubling as a paradox of psychological individuation brought on in spite of physical immobility, as her "illness, while physically debilitating, has brought Luker'ia exemplary self-awareness and self-reliance," in contradistinction to the narrator's constant, defining mobility but absent interiority. Allen, *Beyond Realism*, 193.

¹⁸ Noting this repetition, Dale Peterson argues that this phrase leaves the sketch an ambiguous tale about misreading signs and false alarms. See Peterson, "The Completion of *A Sportsman's Sketches*: Turgenev's Parting Word," in *The Poetics of Ivan Turgenev*, op. cit., 59-62.

When the cart ahead stops by a bridge and flags them down, a “giant” approaches their carriage and asks for some money to get a drink, which flummoxes the narrator, who had earlier plotted out just how this figure might attack him, imagining being hit with an axe, or choked with a “dirty piece of rope” before being tossed into a ditch (4:377). However, once the moon breaks through the mist and illuminates the giant’s face, the narrator is at last able to read it: “At that moment the moon broke through the mist and lit up his face. It wore a grin, the face did, a grin of the eyes and lips. But there was nothing threatening to be discerned in it, except that it seemed to be literally on its guard, and the man’s teeth were so large and white...” [В самый этот миг месяц выбрался из тумана и осветил ему лицо. Оно ухмылялось, это лицо – и глазами и губами. А угрозы на нем не видать... только словно всё оно насторожилось... и зубы такие белые да большие...] (4:378-379). In the end, the narrator and Filofei continue on their journey, shaken but unharmed; however, when recounting their story to Ermolai, the narrator later learns that on the same road that night, a merchant had been robbed and killed, possibly by the same drunks he and Filofei encountered (4:381).

The sketch bears out Filofei’s reasoning. When the narrator asks him why he wasn’t afraid during their encounter, Filofei responds that it was impossible to have known if they were really robbers anyway: “How’s that to be known? Do you think it’s possible to get inside another’s soul? Another’s soul is a mystery. It’s always best to be on God’s side.” [А почему знать? В чужую душу разве влезешь? Чужая душа – известно – потемки. А с богом-то всегда лучше] (4:380). Indeed, they may or may not have been the same men, and even the sudden legibility of the giant drunk’s face does not conclusively reveal his character to the narrator, who is normally adept at entering souls this way. In both of these late sketches, the narrator is made impotent; both even feature his inability to *hunt* (having been rained out in one sketch, and having run out of ammunition in the other) alongside his inability to accurately read the other. In so doing, the sketches map out the “surprisingly complex coexistence of contradictory signs,”¹⁹ playing with the ambiguity suggested by its narrator’s sudden crisis of reading, leaving the reader equally uncertain as to the authority of the narrator’s ability to render minds legible. Filofei’s question maps out the stakes of the narrator’s authority: who *is* empowered to enter into the soul of another, when faces—and the interiors they point to—are rendered illegible?

With these crises of reading, from the living relic’s dehumanized body to the giant drunk’s moonlit face, Turgenev’s late sketches problematize the anxious authority of his earlier narrator, casting doubt on the devices of narrative omniscience that inform his reading of faces to read the minds of the other. These late sketches delay and question the narrator’s ability to know what is going on inside someone, investing his position of authority with ever greater consequences. Such crises of reading—tied together by the question common to both “Living Relic” and “The Clatter of Wheels”—draw attention to the authority of Turgenev’s narrator’s gaze, casting doubt on his ability to cross boundaries, to penetrate character interiority, and to make public the private.

IV. “Да посмотрю, что у нее там внутри делается” – Privilege in *Fathers & Sons*

Fathers and Sons [Отцы и дети, 1862] occupies a middle-ground between Turgenev’s earlier narratives (that profess limitation in the process of exceeding it) and his later sketches (that model crises of reading). The novel’s particular mode of narrative omniscience draws attention to its own stakes and consequences, casting the privilege of a privileged field of vision

¹⁹ Ibid., 58.

as a problem of narrative authority. In many ways, the fraught question of “what is going on inside this person?” becomes the central question of the novel, as it not only patterns the behavior of the characters (who are driven to know and possess each other), but also gives shape to the narrative voice, which oscillates between privilege and limitation, here revealing characters’ inner states, there leaving them obscured. This oscillation repeats the contradictory side-stepping of Turgenev’s earlier sketches, which transgress amidst an allocution about their transgression, begging off authority in the moment of acting on it.

In *Fathers and Sons*, however, *characters* also participate in the same structures of surveillance and secret observation that so defined Turgenev’s earlier narrators. Aware of the conventions of face-reading, and of the possibility of gaining secret, inside-views of each other, the novel’s characters are deeply invested in uncovering the same information that the narrator possesses. While some eavesdrop from afar and read faces on the sly, others long for a more authoritative and incisive instrument for revealing interiority. In the end, the novel stages a confrontation between different devices of narrative omniscience that overlaps with its titular battle of the generations. This confrontation plays out on the stage of the novel’s love plot, as success in romance becomes inextricably tied up with attending to the body (as well as rendering knowable the unknown inner workings of the mind) of the other. As a result, the novel draws attention to the ethical stakes of the erotic, epistemologically invested gaze of its own narrative voice.

The novel’s narrative voice is from the start defined by a swing between limitation and privilege, here revealing the inner secrets of characters’ minds, there defaulting to reporting only the visible.²⁰ The opening scene—in which Nikolai Petrovich Kirsanov awaits, along with his servant Petr, the return of his son Arkady from university—reveals this swing at work: characters are introduced first and foremost visually, making the representation of their minds and desires again the usual Turgenevian work of face-reading. The narrative gaze that performs this work, however, oscillates wildly in its reach, at times suddenly withdrawing from characters whose feelings and thoughts had recently been easily made known. Petr is introduced via a list of telling signs that reveal his innermost characteristics, as everything about him, “the turquoise ring in his ear, the styled, multicolored hair, ingratiating movements, in a word, everything—proclaimed him to be a man of the new, advanced generation” [и бирюзовая сережка в ухе, и напомаженные разноцветные волосы, и учтивые телодвижения, словом, всё изобличало человека новейшего, усовершенствованного поколения] (8:195). The narrative then breaks off to dive deeply into Nikolai Petrovich’s background, upbringing, and life in minute detail,

²⁰ V. M. Markovich provides a detailed analysis of the «неопределенность» of Turgenev’s novelistic narrators, who change their makeup frequently, here only guessing as to the inner workings of characters’ minds, there narrating them directly and easily. Markovich, *Chelovek v romanakh I. S. Turgeneva* (L: Izd’stvo Leningradskogo Universiteta, 1975), 11-15. The “depth of psychological analysis,” however, is not determined by the “openness” of the character, as we may read in short order of the “deep” yet unexplored thoughts of Nikolai Petrovich, the impenetrable memories of Petr Petrovich, and the easily mapped-out reverie of Arkady. *Ibid.*, 16-18. Here I also depart from Wasiolek, who, adopting the classic Jamesian distinction, argues that Turgenev shows rather than tells “the inside of a character,” preferring instead to let characters “reveal their essential selves by what they say and do.” See Wasiolek, *Fathers and Sons: Russia at the Cross-roads* (New York: Twayne, 1993), 52. For a list of other scholarship that is concerned with how Turgenev negotiates between superficial expression and internal motivations, see David Lowe, *Turgenev’s Fathers and Sons* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1983), 29-31.

before, upon returning to the present, withdrawing once more, now relaying without confirmation either way that Petr “out of a sense of propriety, or perhaps because he didn’t want to remain under his master’s eye, had gone to the gate and lit his pipe” [из чувства приличия, а может быть, и не желая остаться под барским глазом, зашел под ворота и закрыл трубку.] (8:198).

The pulled-back uncertainty of this statement is immediately followed by the novel’s first instance of close-up interiority, as we learn that “Nikolai Petrovich fell into a reverie” [Замечтался наш Николай Петрович], and then read—in quoted, reported speech—the content and flow of this thoughts (8:198-99). Upon Arkady’s arrival, the narrative pulls back once more, as we learn not of the feelings and thoughts of the reunited father and son, but of what their expressions *seem* to suggest: “Nikolai Petrovich seemed far more excited than his son; he seemed a little bewildered, a little timid” [Николай Петрович казался гораздо встревоженнее своего сына; он словно потерялся немного, словно робел.] (8:199). Visual clues are threaded throughout the narrative, yet the narrator’s gaze also exceeds them without relying on them; while the reader is often trained to “read” what is going on inside characters, this information is superseded by privileged inside-views anyway. During the conversation between Arkady and his father about the potentially awkward nature of his relationship with Fenichka, we learn that Nikolai Petrovich rubs his forehead and eyebrows, which is “always an indication with him of inward embarrassment” [потирая лоб и брови рукою, что у него всегда служило признаком внутреннего смущения] (8:203), yet this sign next appears in a scene composed entirely of privileged inside-views, during which we learn what secret feelings flood both Arkady’s and Nikolai Petrovich’s hearts, without the intervening step of first reading faces or gestures (8:204).

The oscillating focalization of the novel’s narrative mixes the self-professedly limited narrator of Turgenev’s *Sketches* with the reach and privilege of narrative omniscience. Others have explained away this oscillation in scope as simply the result of shifting focalization, always presumably grounded in one character’s perspective or another; however, these moments of subtle yet sudden swinging between interior and exterior are, as we have seen, marked by their distinct *privilege*, as they confidently relay everything from Arkady’s secret feelings to what certain gestures “always” mean for his father.²¹ The novel draws attention to the way it negotiates shifts between, on the one hand, representing intimate information via a direct and penetrating gaze, and on the other, a withdrawal to a more distant perspective, commenting on appearances and making guesses.

This negotiation tactfully withdraws from privilege in the moment of acting on it; it takes the shape of an omniscience that denies its own authority, as we see in the scenes immediately following Bazarov’s arrival at the Kirsanov household. After supper, we check in with each character, learning of the “great happiness” that has come over Arkady thanks to his homecoming (8:210) as well as of the “deep thoughts” that occupy Nikolai Petrovich’s mind (8:211). We are, however, left in the dark about Pavel Petrovich, who we see sitting by a

²¹ Citing V. M. Markovich’s study, Sander Brouwer argues that, while “these oscillations between a position that resembles that of a real life observer on the one hand and that of an all-knowing and all-seeing viewpoint on the other seem to contradict and mutually exclude each other,” they are actually flip-sides of the same position, as nowhere “does the narrator exceed the limits life sets to a ‘real life’ observer, whose evaluation is necessarily subjective.” See Brouwer, *Character*, 42, and Markovich, *Chelovek*, 8-23. I would qualify Brouwer’s conclusion by noting the novel’s intense focus on looking, seeing, and knowing as a *problem*; the overlap between knowledge within and knowledge about the diegetic world is ultimately, as I will argue below, one of the novel’s primary concerns.

fireplace, thinking: “God only knows where his thoughts wandered, but they did not wander only into the past; the expression of his face was concentrated and surly, which does not happen when a man is absorbed solely in recollection” [Бог знает, где бродили его мысли, но не в одном только прошедшем бродили они: выражение его лица было сосредоточенно и угрюмо, чего не бывает, когда человек занят одними воспоминаниями.] (8:211). Like Radilov’s mind, Pavel Petrovich’s thoughts are at once hidden and legible; their form is visible, but their content a mystery. Although the narrative voice here appears to step back from a position of privileged surveillance, peeking in the bedrooms of everyone in the house yet *not* unveiling Pavel’s hidden interior, it still reveals what it purports to obfuscate, confidently reporting on where Pavel’s thoughts surely must be going.

Such moments are threaded throughout the novel: characters’ minds are here visible, there obscured (yet still inherently *legible*). With them, the narrative draws our attention to the inherent contradiction at work behind the limitations it professes amidst the privilege it acts on. After seeing his brother with Fenichka and their baby, for example, Pavel Petrovich retires to his room and seems to grow despondent. We are not granted interiority at this moment, but rather read: “Whether he wanted to hide from the very walls that which was reflected in his face, or for some other reason, he got up, drew the heavy window curtains, and again threw himself on the sofa” [Захотел ли он скрыть от самых стен, что у него происходило на лице, по другой ли какой причине, только он встал, отстегнул тяжелые занавески окон и опять бросился на диван.] (8:233). With his face concealed and the heavy curtain closed, so too does the final word on Pavel Petrovich’s feelings appear to be left open.

When his face *is* made visible, however, Pavel Petrovich’s interior is rendered legible by an undeniably privileged gaze that far exceeds the limits of face-reading, anyway. After he soon thereafter passes his brother outside, Pavel Petrovich grows thoughtful and raises up his eyes, “but nothing was reflected in his beautiful dark eyes except the light of the stars. He was not born a romantic, and his fastidiously dry and sensuous soul, with its French tinge of misanthropy, was not capable of dreaming” [Но в его прекрасных темных глазах не отразилось ничего, кроме света звезд. Он не был рожден романтиком, и не умела мечтать его щегольски-сухая и страстная, на французский лад мизантропическая душа.] (8:252). Face-reading, here unfettered by a closed curtain or a turn to the wall, is superseded by a direct penetration into Pavel Petrovich’s soul. The narrative voice (who elsewhere parses gestures, eyes, looks, and glances in order to represent minds) is invested with the scope of what “God only knows” moments after decrying its unknowability.

In making visible the antinomies of the work of omniscience—here professing limitation and defaulting before God’s knowledge, there providing an incisive, Godlike inside-view with ease—the novel draws attention to the scope and limits of the *characters’* knowledge, as well. Indeed, they are as invested as the narrator in finding out what is going on inside each other. To that end, we frequently see characters *seeing* each other, ever in search of a more revelatory, a more authoritative gaze. They participate in the same devices of surveillance, the same “ways of knowing” their world, that the narrator employs to represent it.

Arkady has brought home with him his dear new friend from university, Evgenii Bazarov, an aspiring doctor. After the revelation at dinner that Bazarov is a nihilist, Arkady reverts to the epistemological mode of the narrator of “My Neighbor Radilov,” trying to catch others out, watching them on the sly, and noting their reactions: “The two brothers looked at him in silence, while Arkady stealthily watched first his father and then his uncle” [Оба брата молча

глядели на него, а Аркадий украдкой посматривал то на отца, то на дядю] (8:218).²² We are similarly later introduced to Anna Sergeevna Odintsova not visually, but *by way* of the visual; before any information about her figure or character are detailed, we first trace the effects her entry at the ball has had on the expressions of those observing her: “Suddenly his face changed, and turning to Arkady, he said, with some show of embarrassment it seemed, ‘Odintsova is here!’” [Вдруг лицо его изменилось и, обернувшись к Аркадию, он, как бы с смущением, проговорил: «Одинцова приехала».] (8:265).

The novel’s focus on the observation of observation draws attention to the means by which privileged information is made knowable, both within as well as about the diegetic world. Characters are as interested as the narrative voice in the stakes of omniscience, in the *effects* of parsing looks and glances; they are aware of face-reading as a point of privileged access, and act accordingly. The act of catching other characters unaware by eavesdropping—the standby of the hunter-narrator of the *Sketches*—becomes a frequent method for transferring privileged knowledge amongst *characters* in *Fathers and Sons*. Walking out in his garden, Nikolai Petrovich overhears Arkady and Bazarov talking about him, and fears (accurately) that what he has heard serves as evidence that he is losing touch with his son (8:238). This overheard conversation, as well as hearing Bazarov and Arkady speak of nihilism soon thereafter, prompts Nikolai Petrovich finally to realize “the distance between him and his son; he foresaw that every day it would grow wider and wider” [Впервые он ясно сознал свое разъединение с сыном; он предчувствовал, что с каждым днем оно будет становиться всё больше и больше] (8:249).²³ Likewise, the duel that leaves Pavel Petrovich wounded is prompted by his eavesdropping on Bazarov and Fenichka in the same garden (8:345-46); later, Katya’s acceptance of Arkady’s marriage proposal comes immediately after the pair eavesdrop on Bazarov and Odintsova walking through her own garden (8:376-77).

Such moments of eavesdropping and spying are employed not just as an easy device for contrived coincidence, however; they also serve as a successful method of getting at the truth. Arkady and Katya’s behavior changes demonstrably when they are aware they are being observed, particularly by Odintsova (8:285-86); meanwhile, the peasants working at Marino, the Kirasnov estate, only act like they are busy working when they *are* certain they are being observed, as of the estate’s overseer we read: “When he caught sight of Nikolai Petrovich in the distance, he would fling a stick at a passing pig or threaten a half-naked urchin to show his zeal, but the rest of the time he was generally asleep” [Завидя издали Николая Петровича, он, чтобы заявить свое рвение, бросал щепкой в пробежавшего мимо поросенка или грозился полунагому мальчишке, а впрочем, больше всё спал.] (8:336-37).

Characters attempt not only to gain a privileged surplus of vision over each other, to learn what is going on inside the other by reading faces, but also to limit their own exposure, and to control their own susceptibility to such means of surveillance. Arkady, for example, responds “lazily” to Bazarov’s suggestion that the two return to his father’s house, but does so only as an

²² As Victor Ripp notes, the stakes of the conversation at this dinner-table confrontation, despite seeming ideological, are also entirely psychological, as it is Bazarov’s incisive gaze and “ability fully to comprehend Pavel’s attitude that gives him the upper hand.” Ripp, *Turgenev’s Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980), 193.

²³ As Patrick Waddington notes, this scene of eavesdropping appears even in the earliest drafts of the novel from 1860, in which the broadest strokes of dates, names, and personalities are sketched out. Waddington, “Turgenev’s Sketches for ‘Ottsy i dety (Fathers and Sons),” *New Zealand Slavic Journal* (1984), 71.

evasive tactic, for “in his heart he was highly delighted with his friend’s suggestion, but he thought it a duty to conceal his feeling” [Он в душе очень обрадовался предложению своего приятеля, но почел обязанностью скрыть свое чувство.] (8:252). Back at the Bazarovs’, Bazarov’s father, despite pulling his emotional wife off of their son, is also “obviously trying to control himself and appear almost indifferent” to their return [но он, видимо, желал победить себя и казаться чуть не равнодушным.] (8:309). Several tiers of surveillance are tranced together in these moments; while Bazarov’s father and Arkady successfully mask their faces to hide their true emotions from the gazes of other observant characters, their secrets are still obviously rendered legible by the narrator’s own undeniably privileged gaze.

The characters knowingly participate in a system of surveillance, which defines the limits of privilege and underwrites the transfer and unveiling of knowledge both within and about the diegetic world. These devices of spying, of reading each other “on the sly,” culminate in what the novel terms *fabrication* [сочинение], the fictionalization of false narratives, used by characters to catch out the supposedly true (but as-yet unspoken) feelings of their listeners by testing their reactions to the fabrications of the story-teller. We read that Bazarov announces his sudden departure to Anna Sergeevna “with no idea of putting her to the test, of seeing what would come of it; he never fabricated” [Базаров объявил ей о своем отъезде не с мыслию испытать ее, посмотреть, что из этого выйдет: он никогда не «сочинял».] (8:288). Arkady, however, *does* fabricate, and counters Bazarov’s announcement with one of his own, testing Bazarov’s reaction in the process: “‘Why doesn’t he ask me why I am going, and just as suddenly as he?’ thought Arkady. ‘In reality, why am I going, and why is he going?’” [«Зачем же он меня не спрашивает, почему я еду? И так же внезапно, как и он? – подумал Аркадий. – В самом деле, зачем я еду, и зачем он едет?»] (8:303). In this way, the narrative unites eavesdropping with authorship, spying with narrativizing.

Characters participate in a system of surveillance that suffuses the diegetic world; two-thirds of the novel’s major characters eavesdrop on someone at some point, and most are at least always reading each other’s faces, if not also actively attempting to subvert the attempts of other characters to “face-read” them back. Characters are invested in asserting ever higher levels of narrative control over each other, authoring narratives to gain insight to the true but hidden feelings of others. The devices that enable them to learn what is going on inside each other overlap with their desire to control what is in turn knowable about themselves. The gaze in *Fathers and Sons*, be it the narrator’s or the character’s, is highly fraught.²⁴

This aggressive focus on the limits and conditions for rendering others knowable, for making minds legible, makes it all the more significant that Bazarov at first appears to be the only exception to the rule. As many readers and scholars alike have noticed, the novel very rarely gives away the inner workings of Bazarov’s mind.²⁵ Although the opening scenes render his

²⁴ Allen posits that in this way, Turgenev provides a “safe psychic ground” on which readers can “learn both by observing and by assessing characters’ creative reactions to specific situations and then by observing and assessing their own reactions to those situations, all the while remaining utterly unthreatened.” Allen, *Beyond Realism*, 48. I would counter that this humanist evaluation of the novel’s narrative ethics as a “safe space” ignores the attention the same narrative voice draws to the status of its observations as voyeuristic acts of transgressive violation, adumbrating the concerns of the narrator of “Tropmann.”

²⁵ As Bialyi notes, the opening chapter totally ignores Bazarov, instead devoting an entire chapter to his physical introduction, during which attention is immediately drawn to his «незаурядняя внешность».

character traits phrenologically legible, with a smile and eyes that show “self-confidence and intelligence,” and long blond hair that does not “conceal the prominent bulges in his capacious skull” [Его темно белокурые волосы, длинные и густые, не скрывали крупных выпуклостей просторного черепа], chapter five marks the first time we gain direct access to Bazarov’s interior, when his thoughts are reported in quoted speech (8:211). This disparity—amidst the opening chapters of a novel that otherwise grants interior access to its three other main characters up until that point—redraws attention to the stakes, limits, and conditions of gaining such privileged, omniscient access.

Bazarov not only has a mind that appears less permeable than others, but is also possessed of an incisive, scientific, and violent method of gaining access to others that is all his own. He lays out his method when talking to a young boy about a frog he has captured on the Kirsanov estate: “I shall cut the frog open, and see what’s going on inside her, and then, as you and I are much the same as frogs, only that we walk on legs, I shall know what’s going on inside us, too” [я лягушку распластаю да посмотрю, что у нее там внутри делается; а так как мы с тобой те же лягушки, только что на ногах ходим, я и буду знать, что и у нас внутри делается] (8:212). Turgenev’s obvious historical targets with this characterization of Bazarov aside, this statement pairs the acquisition of hidden, internal knowledge with violent and destructive consequences, for Bazarov’s incisive gaze will literally penetrate to reveal what is going on inside, dissecting and killing the object of its gaze in the process, foreshadowing Bazarov’s own fatal problems with dissection.²⁶

Bazarov’s violent “way of knowing” re-implicates the novel’s already anxiously omniscient narrator. Bazarov is in effect a character that attempts the same swing away from face-reading, away from the conventions limiting homodiegetic (character-)narrators, and

See G. Bialyi, *Roman Turgeneva Ottsy i dety* (Leningrad: Izd’stvo khud. lit., 1968), 13. Erica Siegel notes that the Bazarov sections throw a spotlight on how “description of these external details even supplants description of such personal narrative and inner workings,” as his “thunderingly silent” introduction in the novel renders him the “least transparent of all the characters in *Fathers and Sons*.” Siegel, “Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick: The Language of Things in *Fathers and Sons*” in *Turgenev: Art, Ideology and Legacy*, op. cit., 109-110.

²⁶ Somoff notes that “[t]he comparison of the fiction writer to the doctor/scientist performing an autopsy on the human heart” was a common trope, frequently employed “in the intellectual discourse of the 1830s,” but which “backfires” in the “society tale” amidst the culmination of the trope of face-reading, since “the ultimate autopsy report would render *all* human hearts fully exposed (externalized) but at the same time indistinguishable from one another.” Somoff, *The Imperative of Reliability*, 75. Although this borders on the very problem the narrator of “Tropmann” anxiously points to when his face-reading abilities cannot help him distinguish a murderer from an innocent student, my reading of *Fathers and Sons* departs from Somoff’s terms, by locating face-reading as the antipode of Bazarov’s medical discourse, at the opposite end of the spectrum of omniscient devices. Irene Masing-Delic further connects Bazarov’s epistemological gaze with his medical discourse with his focus on the body of Odintsova, which also prefigures his death: “Оружием поединка он выбирает – скальпель, скальпель своего разящего ума. С помощью этого ‘скальпеля’ Базаров надеется вскрыть те механизмы, которые ‘приводят в движение’ Одинцову, представительницу той природы, мастером которой он хочет быть.” Masing-Delic, “Bazarov pered sfinksom: nauchnoe anatomirovanie i estesticheskaia forma v romane Turgeneva Ottsy i deti,” *Revue des etudes slaves*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (1985), 371. See also Olga Matich’s chapter on fragmenting and dissecting the body as a trope of Russian fin-de-siecle literature in *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia’s Fin-de-Siecle* (Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 27-56.

towards the privilege of omniscient, inside-views, that defines the narrator's field of vision. Bazarov forms a doubled echo for the narrator: he rejects reading faces as much as he rejects reading fiction; he disdains the devices of gaining privileged knowledge that other characters rely on; indeed, he is one of the novel's only main characters who does not eavesdrop, and the thought of having been overheard causes him such distress that he is unable to return to his specialized scientific optic (his microscope) after realizing he has been spied upon (8:349-50). He rejects "fabrication" and the creation of false narratives to check reactions. To Pavel Petrovich's suggestion that they each keep a confessional letter in their pockets, so that the other would not be held accountable should one of them die after their duel, Bazarov remarks disapprovingly that "there's a slight flavor of the French novel about it, something not very plausible" [Немного на французский роман сбивается, неправдоподобно что-то] (8:348). Bazarov is not only a class representative of his generation, a new type of person, but is a new type of *narrator*, too. The epistemological stakes of his gaze not only rub up against those of the other characters, but even reject the conventions of the novel's own narrative voice in the process.

The reading and analysis of eyes and what is reflected in them is one of the narrator's most oft-relied upon devices, common to Fenichka's portrait (8:229), face (8:234), and even the backstory explaining her first meeting with Nikolai Petrovich (8:232). Bazarov, however, will have nothing to do with the "romanticism, nonsense, rot, artiness" of studying the "enigmatical glance," preferring instead to study the organ's physical anatomy (8:226) – a process that, once again, presupposes the death of his subject. Likewise, although the narrative voice lays out in minute detail everything to be seen in Bazarov's mother's eyes, "Bazarov, however, was in no mood to analyze the exact expression of his mother's eyes; he seldom turned to her, and then only with some short question" [Впрочем, Базарову было не до того, чтобы разбирать, что именно выражали глаза его матери; он редко обращался к ней, и то с коротеньким вопросом.] (8:330). Bazarov appears to be a cypher that resists penetration, only to attempt a narrative-omniscient deciphering of his own. His is the head that retains its secrets, while armed with an incisive, cutting gaze that aims to cut out the secrets of others. Self-awaredly distinct from the "not very plausible" "French novels" of the past, Bazarov pitches himself as the representative of a new kind of narrative gaze, confidently asserting his lack of concern with the consequences of violent, violating penetration that the novel's narrative voice so frequently attends to.

V. "Что гнезилось в этой душе – бог весть!" – Odintsova's Gaze and Body

That is, until he meets Anna Sergeevna Odintsova. When he comes under her scrutiny, Bazarov rejects the taste of his own medicine, now that he is figured as the *object* of an incisive gaze, rather than its subject. To Odintsova's attempt at finding out "what is going on inside [him]," he scoffs: "'Going on!' repeated Bazarov, 'as though I were some sort of government or society!'" [Происходит! – повторил Базаров, -- точно я государство какое или общество!] (8:298). He rejects the penetrative dissection that he also performs, exactly as does the narrator of Turgenev's *Sketches*. The novel's love plots stage a clash between these different epistemologically invested gazes, which for Bazarov plays out on Odintsova's objectified body, which the novel's narrator and characters seek to unveil as much as they do to undress. *Her own* incisive gaze, meanwhile, is as invested as Bazarov in finding out what is "going on" inside the other, much to his chagrin. The gradual revelation of Odintsova's body and mind coincides with the closing of Bazarov's, drawing attention to the ethical stakes of observation. The narrative

ultimately punishes the characters who collaborate in a system of surveillance, denying happiness—and life—to those whose gazes, like Bazarov's, transgress in the name of seeing “what is going on inside” the other.

Odintsova's interactions with those who observe her reveal the stakes of their observation, which are pitted against each other in their mutual goal of obtaining a privileged, inside view of her.²⁷ As we have seen, Odintsova's introduction in the novel is already figured as a problem of compounded observation, as her arrival at the ball is signaled by the reactions that play out on Sitnikov's face upon seeing her. Arkady, immediately struck by and smitten with the young widow, focuses on the “dignity of her carriage” and the shapeliness of her waist, arms, and shoulders, as well as on the kind of smile emanating from her lips (8:265). He attentively reads her reaction when she is introduced to him—“her face assumed an expression of pleasure when she heard Arkady's surname” [Однако лицо ее приняло радушное выражение, когда она услышала фамилию Аркадия.] (8:266)—and cannot take his eyes off or stop thinking about her, extrapolating from her few words that “this young woman had already felt and thought much” (8:267). After they dance together, he cannot stop wondering at “how gracefully her figure [стан] seemed to him, draped in the greyish luster of black silk!” (8:268). The attention Arkady pays Odintsova (and her body) is loaded, wrapped up in his own feelings: his eyes focus on the fabric that *visibly conceals*,²⁸ hiding in plain sight the figure with which he seeks intimacy, rehearsing again the contradiction central to Turgenev's narrators.

Arkady is immediately pitted against Bazarov, however, who is also focused on Odintsova's body, albeit more directly, and more violently. Echoing his earlier interest in dissection—and in finding out “what is going on inside her”—Bazarov exclaims that Odintsova would make an ideal specimen for the operating table, precisely because of her well-endowed (literally *godly*) body [Этакое богатое тело! – продолжал Базаров, -- хоть сейчас в анатомический театр] (8:272). Arkady focuses on parsing the veil, on reading faces to get at the secrets that lie behind enigmatic expressions and mysterious glances; Bazarov, meanwhile, aims for a more direct, incisive, and suggestively violent look at the inner workings of the body of the other.

At this point, Odintsova is still a mystery to *us*, too, having been presented to the reader as a set of physical descriptions, externally focalized only through Arkady and Bazarov. This initial introduction recalls the inset story of Princess R., Pavel Petrovich's unrequited love, whose tale Arkady narrates to Bazarov in chapter seven. She, too, is presented as a set of extraordinary external features, possessed of “an enigmatic glance” that is “swift and deep,

²⁷ This staged clash overlaps—but does not necessarily coincide—with the *discursive* clash that Shaklan also traces in the novel, by which Turgenev uses the insufficiencies of certain narrators to demonstrate the failure of certain outmoded (Sentimental, Romantic) discursive traditions: “Turgenev distributes these outmoded discourses to his first-person narrators, sticks them into contemporary situations, and demonstrates how they fail, thereby highlighting their massive insufficiencies.” Shaklan, “So Many Foreign and Useless Words,” 47. Shaklan takes the inset story of Princess R, for example—“full of so many markedly Romantic tropes”—to be a satiric rather than lyric portrait of Pavel Petrovich; my reading of this chapter extends its staged discursive failure to its self-ironizing representation of narrative devices, too.

²⁸ Jane Costlow traces the repetition of the root «охотно» throughout this scene, which invokes and combines sensuality, predation, and flirtation in the way that “Arkady's glance disrobes Odintseva—he sees her body beneath grey silk—but he will not admit to it.” Costlow, *Worlds Within Worlds: The Novels of Ivan Turgenev* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), 128-29.

unconcerned to the point of audacity, and pensive to the point of despondence” [но взгляд их, быстрый и глубокий, беспечный до удали и задумчивый до уныния, -- загадочный взгляд.] (8:222). Her desirability coincides with her unobtainability; her “bewitching image,” which becomes “deeply rooted” in Pavel Petrovich’s heart (8:223), suggests something unknown yet still potentially reachable, something hidden in plain sight, as in her “there always seemed something still to remain mysterious and unattainable, which one could penetrate. What was hidden in that soul—God knows!” [в которой даже тогда, когда она отдавалась безвозвратно, всё еще как будто оставалось что-то заветное и недоступное, куда никто не мог проникнуть. Что гнезилось в этой душе – Бог весть!] (8:222). Pavel Petrovich renders the object of his affection a sphynx, an insoluble feminine riddle whose mystery—without a more penetrating field of vision—he ultimately cannot solve (8:224). While this would seem to suggest an analogue in Odintsova, who will soon test Bazarov in the same way Princess R. has already tested his narrative double Pavel Petrovich, the novel will ultimately subvert and complicate this reading by turning the tables on Bazarov, making of his gaze a double failure. He not only fails to understand Odintsova using his violent, penetrating, dissecting optic, but is ultimately cowed by the superiority of Odintsova’s own gaze over his.²⁹

The first such cracks in the lens of Bazarov’s optic begin to show when he and Arkady visit Odintsova at her estate. In a scene that closely observes characters as they observe each other, each of the three is shown to be made aware of the sudden change in their relations. Arkady notices “with secret amazement” that Bazarov seems embarrassed in Odintsova’s presence. Bazarov, too, is aware of his irritating feelings, which drive him to hide their presence by speaking “with an exaggerated appearance of ease” (8:269-70) in an attempt to interest and impress Odintsova, which also surprises Arkady, who “could not make up his mind whether Bazarov was attaining his object.” The narrative focalization then shifts, as the narrative voice, providing information unavailable to Arkady (who was still finding it “difficult to conjecture from Anna Sergeevna’s face what impression was being made on her” [По лицу Анны Сергеевны трудно было догадаться, какие она испытывала впечатления]), notes that Odintsova was in fact flattered by Bazarov’s bad manners, which she accurately reads as a symptom of his nervousness (8:271). At the end of their meeting, “Bazarov only bowed, and a last surprise was in store for Arkady; he noticed that his friend was blushing” [Базаров только поклонился – и Аркадию в последний раз пришлось удивиться: он заметил, что приятель его покраснел] (8:272). The novel has turned the tables on its own intratextual reference, restaging the unrequited love-plot of Pavel Petrovich and Princess R., but from a position of *privileged interiority*, not only making known the mysterious inner workings of Odintsova’s mind, but also showing her to have a penetrating gaze of her own, and one superior to Bazarov’s at that, for while she reads him correctly, the workings of her mind are to the two young men left “difficult to conjecture.”

The process by which *Fathers and Sons* renders Odintsova’s mind legible, however, re-implicates its narrative voice, suggesting again the transgressive nature of such privileged, inside views. Odintsova’s first major scene of interiority coincides with the undressing of her body, rehearsing the desires of Arkady and Bazarov in a field of vision that is ultimately denied to

²⁹ Lowe notes that Princess R and Odintsova share overt sympathies in what they mean and do to the mean who interpret, read, and desire them. Lowe, *Turgenev’s Fathers and Sons*, 44. I would add that Odintsova—armed with a gaze of her own, but still made legible to us by the narrative voice, unlike her intratextual predecessor—inverts the story of Princess R.

them both.³⁰ The novel redraws attention to the ethics of its narrative gaze, forcing the reader into the position of spying voyeur, observing Odintsova on the sly. After noting that everyone has retired that night occupied by their own thoughts, the narrator makes quick work of the great mystery of Odintsova's enigmatic desires, noting that she, "like all women who have not succeeded in loving," did not realize that, while "it seemed to her that she wanted everything," she actually wanted nothing (8:283).³¹

In the bathing scene that accompanies this authoritative revelation, the narrator strips the veils of Odintsova's mind and body in the same breath, recalling the scene of her introduction. In the process, the narrator is rendered a voyeur, in Odintsova's bathroom as in her mind, spying on her body as on her thoughts:

Dreams sometimes danced in rainbow colors before her eyes even, but she breathed more freely when they died away, and did not regret them. Her imagination indeed overstepped the limits of what is reckoned permissible by conventional morality; but even then the blood flowed as quietly as ever in her fascinatingly graceful, tranquil body.

Радужные краски загорались иногда и у ней перед глазами, но она отдыхала, когда они угасали, и не жалела о них. Воображение ее уносилось даже за пределы того, что по законам обыкновенной морали считается дозволенным; но и тогда кровь ее по-прежнему тихо катилась в ее обаятельно стройном и спокойном теле. (8:283).

Here the privileged gaze of narrative omniscience collides with the ethics of transgressive observation, as the narrator explicitly (and suggestively) draws attention to how Odintsova's own imaginative gaze oversteps moral limits, while simultaneously attending to the flow of blood inside her "fascinatingly graceful, tranquil body." The narrator is caught up in observing the same body that so fascinates Arkady and Bazarov, parting the silk dress to reveal its inner workings, noting how sometimes Odintsova would come "out of her fragrant bath all warm and languorous" *before* revealing what thoughts occupied her mind on those occasions.

By pairing the epistemologically invested gaze with a voyeuristic and explicitly erotic focus on the body, this scene gives shape to the novel's narrative ethics: as Odintsova is gradually revealed, so too are revealed both the stakes of the narrator's gaze, as well as the

³⁰ Jane Costlow points out the contradiction inherent in this scene as a continuation of the novel's concern with sexual relations and the deceptions of culture, which become metaphorized as transgressions into and within the domestic spaces that serve as a construct of order and a microcosm of society, the "open doors" that allow the narrator's gaze to find free "narrative passage." Costlow, *Worlds Within Worlds*, 107, 118. This particular scene similarly mediates its voyeuristic transgression by also ostensibly observing propriety, playing "with the boundaries of decorum, in a manner that both points to the seductive beyond, and holds to the compromises of convention," repeating in the narrative situation the "ambiguous position" between decorum and eros that has already "played out in an earlier dialogue between Arkady and Bazarov, when they first meet" Odintsova. *Ibid.*, 125-126.

³¹ Here I depart from V. M. Markovich, who posits that the difficulty felt by characters in expressing or understanding themselves is replicated by narrator: "Неясное для самого персонажа признается неясным и для повествователя: если персонажу трудно определить природу своих ощущений, то повествователь чувствует себя обязанным остановиться в таком же затруднении." Markovich, *Chelovek*, 27. In this scene and throughout, however, the narrator quickly and successfully gives voice to thoughts and feelings thought by the characters experiencing them to be inexpressible in words, and in the process exceeds the limits of their internal focalization.

deficiencies of the other gazes the novel models. The mysteries sought by characters who eavesdrop and face-read (Arkady) as well as by those who employ a more incisive, penetrating optic (Bazarov) are ultimately only made knowable by the novel's own omniscient narrative, which exceeds both of theirs, *and* which draws attention to its own transgressive voyeurism.³² *Fathers and Sons* internalizes the narrating device of Turgenev's earlier sketches—by featuring characters who read each other, as his older narrator once read characters—while also exploding it, for while Arkady attends to the black silk veil and Bazarov to the body beneath it, the mysteries of both are shown to be solved *only* by the novel's omniscient heterodiegesis. The narrative voice continues to undress Odintsova:

Her soul would be filled with sudden daring, and would flow with generous ardor, but a draft would blow from a half-closed window, and Anna Sergeevna would shrink into herself, and feel plaintive and almost angry, and there was only one thing she cared for at that instant—to get away from that horrid wind.

Душа ее наполнится внезапною смелостию, закипит благородным стремлением; но сквозной ветер подует из полузакрытого окна, и Анна Сергеевна вся сожмется, и жалуется, и почти сердится, и только одно ей нужно в это мгновение: чтобы не дул на нее этот гадкий ветер. (8:283)

It is only thanks to the narrator's annotation of the flow of Odintsova's thoughts upon getting out of the bath that the reader is able to decipher the scene that so confounds Bazarov in the chapter that follows. The narrator's gaze succeeds where his fails.

This chapter, in which Bazarov suddenly announces to Odintsova that he is leaving her estate, both models the failure of Bazarov's optic and stages the superiority of the novel's alternative, while also once more drawing attention to the ethical stakes of such privileged knowledge. Bazarov and Odintsova attempt to read each other to divine the true intentions lying behind their words and expressions, but Bazarov is unable to decipher Odintsova's reaction, wondering to himself "why she is saying such words," before admitting aloud, contrary to his professed world-view, that he knows her very little, perhaps a symptom of the mysterious and impenetrable nature of all people: "Maybe you are right; maybe, though, every person is a mystery." [Может быть, вы правы; может быть, точно, всякий человек – загадка] (8:291). After Bazarov opens the window at Odintsova's request, another moment of spying readdresses the voyeurism inherent in our presence at this intimate moment: "the soft, dark night looked into the room [глянула в комнату] with its almost black sky, its faintly rustling trees, and the fresh fragrance of the pure open air" (8:291). The voyeurism of furtive surveillance so suffuses the novel's diegetic world that it is literally rendered *natural*. Soon, though, the freshness of the voyeuristic night air becomes a "disturbing," "mysterious whispering," which overcomes

³² In a close-reading of Turgenev's "Three Encounters," Irene Masing-Delic attends to the inherent and inescapable voyeurism in the storyteller/narrator who is "determined to gather his raw material (*fabula*) even at the price of good manners, preservation of dignity, respect for privacy and basic decency." This "insatiable curiosity," she posits, leads to the "characteristic pose" of the hunter-narrator: "that of standing at a window and trying to peer through it, or more precisely, that of standing outside a window / gate / door and imagining the space inside." Masing-Delic, "Hidden Spaces," 29. To this compelling reading I would add that, in *Fathers and Sons*, the narrative *invites attention* to this very moment of transgressive observation as part of its own narrative project.

Odintsova, who does “not move a single limb; hidden emotion gradually possessed her. It communicated itself to Bazarov” (8:292). The emotion Odintsova experiences in this scene is *visibly communicated* to (yet still *hidden* from) Bazarov, but is of course known to the reader, who has one chapter earlier been primed by the narrative gaze that has voyeuristically detailed the way sudden drafts affect the flow of Odintsova’s feelings. Bazarov returns alone to bed, his heart broken (8:293-4).³³

The next day, Odintsova’s success at reading what is going on inside Bazarov casts a spotlight on his own failure to do just that to her: he balks at her desire to find out “what is going on within” him, bowing his head when admitting that he cannot speak freely of everything he has on his mind (8:298). Nonetheless, the narrative voice has already confirmed Anna Sergeevna’s suspicions as to the observable “newness” in Bazarov’s behavior:

The real cause of all this ‘newness’ was the feeling inspired in Bazarov by Odintsova, a feeling which tortured and maddened him, and which he would at once have denied, with scornful laughter and cynical abuse, if any one had ever so remotely hinted at the possibility of what was taking place in him.

Настоящею причиною всей этой «новизны» было чувство, внушенное Базарову Одинцовой, -- чувство, которое его мучило и бесило и от которого он тотчас отказался бы с презрительным хохотом и циническою бранью, если бы кто-нибудь хотя отдаленно намекнул ему на возможность того, что в нем происходило. (8:286)

After Bazarov finally confesses his feelings for her, Odintsova reads his body incisively, noting that his visible trembling “was not the tremor of youthful timidity, not the sweet alarm of the first declaration that possessed him; it was passion struggling in him, strong and painful,” which makes her feel “both afraid and sorry for him” [Он задыхался; всё тело его видимо трепетало. Но это было не трепетание юношеской робости, не сладкий ужас первого признания овладел им: это страсть в нем билась, сильная и тяжелая – страсть, похожая на злобу и, быть может, сродни ей... Одинцовой стало и страшно и жалко его.] (8:299). She examines his face “twice, directly, and not stealthily” [прямо, не украдкой], and ably reads the “contemptuous determination stamped on every feature” [с отпечатком презрительной решимости в каждой черте] (8:300). These scenes continue the contradictory side-stepping of narrative authority. Narrative omniscience is invested with an undeniable sovereignty and supplied with a surplus of vision over the other gazes that it models, but also draws attention to the stakes of its own vision, which inevitably entails a self-awaredly erotic voyeurism. The other’s mind can be fully revealed only when the body, unaware of its observation, is fully undressed.

³³ As Costlow notes, “the central gesture of these scenes is one of violent opening,” as the veiled window Bazarov opens also stands in for Odintsova, for “natural longing problematically hidden; the epithets of the room—fragrant (*blagovonnaia*), solitary (*uedinennaia*)—are also Odintseva’s, echoing the earlier description of her emerging from the bath and the etymology of her own name.” This scene, as the bathing scene and Arkady’s gaze at the ball before it, “disrobes the woman by alluding to what her clothes cover,” which in turn recast the novel as a mass of transgressions and sexual violence that must be overcome “to reestablish the violated order.” Costlow, *Worlds Within Worlds*, 130-135. I would add to this convincing reading that the narrative is not merely a constant stream of violations, but rather a *performance* of authority that necessarily draws attention to these moments of violation.

The dismantling of Bazarov's gaze becomes a matter of course. In reinforcing the superiority of its narrative omniscient gaze *only* by also attending to the consequences of its own transgressive devices of observation, *Fathers and Sons* levies heavy penalties for character-narrators who fail to pay the same deference to the mind of the other as an impenetrable, sacrosanct space. When Bazarov and Odintsova are walking for the last time in her garden, they talk of their feelings, but the narrative voice pulls back, explicitly commenting on his inability to decisively judge the veracity of their conversation: "So Anna Sergeyevna spoke, and so spoke Bazarov; they both supposed they were speaking the truth. Was the truth, the whole truth, to be found in their words? They could not themselves have said, and much less could the author" [Так выражалась Анна Сергеевна, и так выражался Базаров; они оба думали, что говорили правду. Была ли правда, полная правда, в их словах? Они сами этого не знали, а автор и подавно.] (8:372).

Two sentences later, however, the narrative voice checks Bazarov's claims against the truth, noting that Bazarov "was on the point of telling her about his duel with Pavel Petrovich, but he checked himself with the thought that she might imagine he was trying to make himself interesting, and answered that he had been at work all the time." [Он чуть было не рассказал ей о своей дуэли с Павлом Петровичем, но удержался при мысли, как бы она не подумала, что он интересничает, а отвечал ей, что он всё это время работал.] Katya and Arkady, meanwhile, who are eavesdropping on this conversation, are afterwards haunted by what they have overheard (8:382). This scene encapsulates and rehearses the stakes at work in the novel's narrative ethics at large: the omniscient narrative disowns its collaboration in the surveillance that it also relies on, rendering privileged knowledge legible amidst an allocution about such knowledge's impossibility. The novel is anxious about its own devices, constantly redrawing attention to the transgression inherent in such observation.

As Odintsova is opened up (only by the impossible but self-aware voyeurism of the omniscient narrator), so too is Bazarov shut down. The rest of the novel sees Bazarov shut out of the system of surveillance he has participated in up to this point, as he not only stops accurately reading others, but is himself increasingly rendered opaque and illegible.³⁴ His duel with Pavel Petrovich leaves him ill-at-ease in a "distressing and awkward silence," conscious that his position of alterity has been erased as he has been totally revealed, as "each was conscious that the other understood him" [Каждый из них сознавал что другой его понимает] (8:354). When Pavel Petrovich wonders aloud what the nearby peasant must think of them now, after the duel, Bazarov scoffs: "Who knows! [...] It is quite likely that he thinks nothing. The Russian peasant is that mysterious stranger about whom Mrs. Radcliffe used to talk so much" [Кто ж его знает! – ответил Базаров, -- всего вероятнее, что ничего не думает. Русский мужик – это тот самый таинственный незнакомец, о котором некогда так много толковала госпожа Ратклифф] (8:355). In an ironic twist, however, it is soon thereafter revealed that "self-confident Bazarov, who knew how to talk to peasants (as he had boasted in his dispute with Pavel Petrovich), did not even suspect that in their eyes he was all the while something of the nature of a buffoon" [Увы! презрительно пожимавший плечом, умевший говорить с мужиками

³⁴ Shakhlan counters Allen by arguing that silence, in the end, turns out to be the flipside of the narrative coin to the breakdown of both Bazarov and Pavel Petrovich's flawed mentalities: a positive marker of aesthetic construction as well as ethical relations, silence defines the successful relationship of Arkady and Katya, who reject artificial or literary constructions in the process. Shakhlan, "So Many Foreign and Useless Words," 52-58.

Базаров (как хвалился он в споре с Павлом Петровичем), этот самоуверенный Базаров и не подозревал, что он в их глазах был все-таки чем-то вроде шута горохового...] (8:384). Interiority for Bazarov gradually evaporates, too, as his feelings are increasingly expressed only as the interpretations of external focalization. After he has returned to his parents' estate, we learn that "a strange weariness began to show itself in all his movements; even his walk, firm and impetuously bold, was changed" [Странная усталость замечалась во всех его движениях, даже походка его, твердая и стремительно смелая, изменилась] (8:383), but do not enter his mind again.

Fathers and Sons stages a clash not only between the generations, but also between different narrative devices, and the optics they rely on. The novel models an uneasy omniscience: its narrative gaze undresses Odintsova's body as it reveals the workings of her mind, staging for its readers the revelation that Arkady and Bazarov so want, but cannot achieve. In the process, Turgenev's narrative draws attention to the violation inherent to its own act of representation, extending the ethically invested side-stepping gaze of the narrative voice of Turgenev's *Sketches*, which rely on the authority they also ostensibly divest themselves from. Bazarov's scalpel turns out to be a blunt instrument, however, incapable of accurately revealing what is going on inside the other. Flummoxed by a gaze superior to his own, Bazarov is left impotent, and the victim of the violence of his own optic: he is killed by the contraction of an *invisible, internal* pathogen from a body he has *incorrectly dissected*.

VI. Narrative-Ethical Transgression in "The Execution of Tropmann"

While *Fathers and Sons* punished one character for the violence of his field of vision, perhaps nowhere else in Turgenev's work does the question of "what has happened inside this man" become a more ethically fraught issue than in "The Execution of Tropmann." The sketch is deeply concerned with the ethical consequences of entering private, sacrosanct spaces and bearing witness to what is inside, be they minds or prison chambers. These concerns represent a heightening of the problems only suggested by the earlier sketches, as well as by the side-stepping narrative voice of *Fathers and Sons*. An intense anxiety coheres around narrative and its effects for the narrator of "Tropmann," as the "looking-in" of the earlier sketches now irrupts into "looking away."³⁵

The sketch—not part of a larger cycle, but published individually in the thick journal *The Herald of Europe* [Вестник Европы] in 1870—details the execution in Paris on 7 January 1870 of Jean Baptiste Tropmann, a French teenager who had murdered a family of six.³⁶ Although "The Execution of Tropmann" is certainly an autobiographical essay—as Turgenev witnessed the event first-hand, having been invited by Maxime du Camp, a French journalist and staunch opponent to public executions—it is also undeniably a fictionalization. It combines personal reflection and an incisive narrative gaze—which attempts to lay bare the motivations and feelings lying behind the faces of the guillotining's many attendees—with a recapitulation of

³⁵ My reading follows Emma Lieber's call to avoid a reductive focus solely on this final moment in the sketch, and to instead closely read the entire story; however, I depart from her conclusion that this sketch represents a new or unexpected departure for Turgenev's work—in that it "documents and is born out of the unusually invasive behavior of the narrator himself, a crossing of boundaries that is in its own way equivalent to the *prestuplenie* that lies at the story's heart"—seeing it instead as a heightening of the concerns that are already present in his earlier sketches. See Lieber, "Speak Softly," 671-73.

³⁶ Jackson, "The Ethics of Vision," 28-29.

observations du Camp had already published about the execution.³⁷ Therefore, my reading of the sketch will concern the diegetic conventions and limitations of the ethically invested, unnamed first-person narrating agent, and not Turgenev's own reactions to or further commentary on the execution published outside of the sketch itself.³⁸ Moreover, I take "The Execution of Tropmann" to be an excursus not just on capital punishment, but on the ethics of the penetrating gaze of narrative omniscience itself.

Two bookends, which frame the sketch's twelve short chapters, comment on the goals and concerns of the narrator, who is from the beginning overtly preoccupied by his becoming complicit in violence by bearing witness to it in narrative. The ethical effects of narrative are at the forefront of the narrator's mind, as he lays out the stakes of the story (for both reader as well as himself) in its opening chapter:

As a punishment of myself—and as a lesson to others—I should now like to tell everything I saw. I intend to revive in my memory all the painful impressions of that night. It will not be only the reader's curiosity that will be satisfied: he may derive some benefit from my story.

В наказание самому себе—и в назидание другим — я намерен теперь рассказать всё, что я видел, намерен повторить и в воспоминании все тяжелые впечатления той ночи. Быть может, не одно любопытство читателя некоторую пользу из моего рассказа. (14:148)

Narrative is from the beginning of the sketch aligned with performance, a staged rehearsal of a morality play that will (potentially purifyingly) punish the narrator and edify the reader. The sketch has an almost dramatic quality, as theatrical metaphors are invoked throughout; characters are introduced as if from a list of *dramatis personae*, and the execution is referred to as a "performance," presented in self-aware quotation marks [видно было, что «представление» не началось] (14:149).

The conclusion of the sketch, however, explodes the hopes laid out by its opening, as the narrator concedes that the spectacle has had no edifying effect whatsoever: "We had seen the impression such a spectacle made on the common people: and, indeed, there was no trace of the so-called instructive spectacle at all." [Мы видели, какое впечатление производит подобное

³⁷ See W. C. Brumfield, "Invitation to a Beheading: Turgenev and Tropmann," *Canadian American Slavic Studies*, No. 17 (1983), 79-88.

³⁸ As Jackson notes, while the narrator is of course Turgenev, the sketch must also be taken as a self-aware literaricization of its subject, a literary artifact in the much the same sense as the *Sketches*, in which Turgenev "has subordinated all the elements of his experience to an artistic-ideological design." Jackson, "The Ethics of Vision," 34. Lieber goes further, arguing that the artfully constructed text itself is likely not only informed by Victor Hugo's 1830 *Le dernier jour d'un condamné* ("The Last Day of a Condemned Man"), but also a response to Dostoevsky's treatment of witnessing an execution in *The Idiot*. This leaves Turgenev's structuring of historical events a deliberate "filtering" that is "beholden to fictional models," to be taken in the context of its "literary influences and rivalries," in the process calling into question the boundaries between fact and fiction. Lieber, "Speak Softly," 672. See Brumfield for a comprehensive summary of the various correspondences and other novels of Turgenev's that reference Tropmann and his personal experience witnessing the execution.

зрелище на народ; да и самого этого, якобы поучительного, зрелища не вовсе] (14:170). Undercutting the earlier hopes at both admonition and self-punishment, the narrator thinks back to a young laborer whose face he “had studied for several minutes. Would he start work today as a man who hated vice and idleness more than before? And what about me? What did *I* get from it?” [Я вспомнил о молодом, бессмысленно кричавшем блузнике, лицо которого я наблюдал в течение нескольких минут. Неужели он примется сегодня за работу человеком, больше прежнего ненавидящим порок и праздность? И я, наконец, что я вынес?] (14:171). In the end, the narrative not only readdresses the question of its own value, but also brings up the distressing possibility that it may be entirely negated, narratively rehearsing the question central to the sketch’s treatment of the public spectacle of the guillotine: has bearing witness to the punishment potentially done just as much violence, if not more, than the original crime itself? Are the readers of the represented event equally implicated in the transgressive nature of the act of witnessing it?³⁹ Is the narrator worse off after (and on account of) his performance of narrative authority?

I take this concern with the transgressive nature of witnessing to be my point of departure from other readings that address the “ethics of observation” of “Tropmann,” as Robert Louis Jackson has put it.⁴⁰ The sketch is as much about the transgression of narrative, and the violence of vision, as it is the execution; it is preoccupied with spatial transgression and the ethical after-effects (for the reader, narrator, and other witnesses present) of seeing what one ought not see. Indeed, this is a narrator concerned not only with showing “everything that I saw” but also one who actively probes and questions everything he did *not* see, as well. The process of face-reading as a means of gaining special, privileged access to the mind, soul, or character of others is thrown into special relief in this sketch, as the narrator’s ability to perform this function becomes one of his primary concerns. At times, the narrator’s process of face-reading abandons visible signs, exceeds the limits of his possible knowledge, and penetrates directly into the minds of characters.

For example, the narrator compiles a list of the prison governor’s features—his moustache, “aquiline nose, immobile, rapacious eyes and a tiny skull”—that speak to his inner qualities, before concluding that “even without his being aware of it, every gesture of his, every word of his, at once showed us that he was a ‘reliable fellow’ (*un gaillard solide*), an utterly loyal servant, who would not hesitate to carry out any order of his master” [но даже помимо его воли, по каждой его ухватке, по каждому его слову нельзя было не заметить тотчас, что это «малый солидный» (*un gaillard solide*), слепо преданный слуга, который не поколеблется исполнить какое бы то ни было приказание своего господина.] (14:150). This judgement, which starts out grounded in the observable before spilling over into the mind of the

³⁹ Brumfield gestures towards this conclusion, noting that the “fine irony” of the sketch culminates in the “suggestion of obscenity which Turgenev attaches to the apparatus of execution,” which not only fails to curb man’s basest and most “aggressive instincts” but even serves to spur them on in the process. See also Jackson, “The Ethics of Vision,” for a compelling reading of the ethical problems of vision, violence, and narrative transgression that inhere in this sketch; Jackson takes the narrator’s gesture of averting his eyes to be of “signal importance in the sketch; it not only gives final embodiment to the narrator’s persistent thought that he had no right to be where he was, but points toward one of the principal thoughts of Turgenev’s sketch: namely, that the witnessing of violence, crime, the physical or moral degradation of another human being implicates the observer in the act of violence.” Brumfield, “Invitation to a Beheading,” 29.

⁴⁰ Jackson, “The Ethics of Vision,” 29.

character, enters the domain of privileged narrative omniscience, informing the readers not just of the governor's features, but of what he is and is not *internally aware* of how those features betray his inner qualities. Similarly, while the narrator observes the soldiers, policemen, workers, and others present inside the prison primarily externally, noting that their "faces expressed nothing but cold and patiently submissive boredom" (14:153), he adds conflict to the sketch by speculating on their internal states, revealing characters' unspoken disagreements with each other by reading their faces. When narrating a discussion amongst the attendees about whether Tropmann's evident mania should prevent his execution, the narrator notes that several skeptics "followed his reasoning," but, judging by their expressions, he scarcely convinced them" (14:154).

Such moments do not strike the reader as unique; indeed, as we have seen, they have been in Turgenev's repertoire since the 1840s, and already mark the expected limits of his first-person narrative voice. More interesting, however, are the moments during which the narrator's gaze *fails* to provide this inside view, which in this sketch ultimately outnumber those that successfully lay bare character interiors, prompting the narrator's anxious commentary on the inadequacies of his own gaze. The crowd causes the narrator significant concern. The estimated 25,000 people gathered to witness the event are speaking and shouting together, but produce an inhuman, "distant," "hollow," "unbroken," "senseless" noise that the narrator is unable to decipher, and on account of which he is unable to sleep: "And what, I could not help asking myself, did this noise signify? Impatience, joy, malice? No! It did not serve as an echo of any separate, any human feeling...it was simply the rumble and the roar of some elemental force" [И что такое выражает этот шум? думалось мне... Нетерпение, радость, злобу?.. Нет! никакому отдельному, никакому человеческому чувству не служит он отголоском... Это, просто, шум и гам стихии.] (14:155). Kept awake by all this commotion, the narrator walks around the ramparts of the prison and turns to the faces of those gathered outside it, picking out one young man in particular and closely annotating his features and gestures. However, he is unable to read him, and is left wondering "What has happened inside this man?" [Что происходило в этом человеке?] (14:156). The narrator's inability to read minds, despite his catalogue of facial features, proves troubling.

When he finally enters Tropmann's cell as the hour of execution approaches, the narrator notes the facial expressions of everyone in his group, but concludes that he does not know "what the others felt, but I felt terribly sick at heart." [Не знаю, что почувствовали другие, но у меня сильно защемило на сердце] (14:159). He later wonders whether his feelings are shared, but admits that he does not know "whether these 'apprehensions' occurred to anyone else." [Не знаю, приходили ли другим в голову эти «опасения»...] (14:164). These moments are in effect the reverse of the earlier sketches' performance of narrative omniscience: they do not profess the absence of privilege in the moment of performing it, but rather start off from a position of *assumed* privilege while commenting on its now-evident (but unexpected) absence. The *lack* of a penetrating, insightful, authoritative gaze is now the object of concern for this first-person narrator, rather than a signpost of the work of his omniscience.

The narrator is particularly concerned by Tropmann's head and face, and his confrontation with the killer, which prompts the sketch's central scene of "getting into" a character's head, playfully readdresses its twisty thematics that tie together vision, omniscience, violation, and violence. The brain the narrator wants so desperately to penetrate and reveal will, of course, soon be separated from its body, and will eventually reveal its secrets to the coroner anyway, an irony that does not escape the narrator's notice (14:151). In the eighth chapter of the

sketch, the narrator finally encounters and describes the physiology of Tropmann from a distance, at first noting his facial features [черноволосое, черноглазое лицо] (14:159) before finally getting a good look at him. Here the strategies of face-reading really become problematized, first as something *gotten away with*, as the narrator comments that “nothing prevented me from scrutinizing his face carefully” [Ничто не мешало мне хорошенько разглядеть его лицо], a phrase markedly self-aware of its own complicity in transgression.

Such face-reading is also marked as a now distressingly unhelpful means of analysis: Although the narrator fully examines Tropmann’s features in excruciating detail (noting particularly his unpleasant lips, animal-like mouth, and bad teeth), he unhappily reports that these features actually reveal nothing, that

If you happened to meet such a man outside prison and not in such surroundings, he would, no doubt, have made a good impression on you. Hundreds of such faces were to be seen among young factory workers, pupils of public institutions, etc.

Встретесь вы с такой фигурой не в тюрьме, не при этой обстановке – впечатление на вас она, наверное, произвела бы выгодное. Сотнями попадаются подобные лица между молодыми фабричными, воспитанниками общественных заведений и т. п. (14:161)

The narrator’s face-reading, which could decipher the quality of Khor’s character or reveal the inner workings of Radilov’s mind, here—when the stakes for face-reading have never been higher—cannot decisively distinguish the face of a vicious murderer from that of a factory worker or student.

A crisis of reading erupts once more, driving the narrator to question more deeply what is going on inside Tropmann. He flits back and forth between the possibilities, wondering if it is pure vanity that sustains the unnaturally calm condemned man, or a desire to show off before a crowd of spectators and give one last “performance,” or “something else, some still undivined feeling? ... That was a secret he took to the grave with him” [или другое, еще не разгаданное чувство?.. Это тайна, которую он унес с собой в могилу] (14:163). The professed inscrutability of Tropmann’s mind does not stop the narrator from speculating, however; indeed, just before the guillotine falls, he wonders

what that so obediently bent head was thinking of at that moment. Was it holding on stubbornly and, as the saying is, with clenched teeth, to one and the same thought: ‘I won’t break down!’ Were all sorts of memories of the past, probably quite unimportant ones, flashing through it at that moment? Was the memory of the face of one of the members of the Kink family, twisted in the agony of death, passing through it? Or was it simply trying not to think---that head, and was merely repeating to itself: ‘That’s nothing, that doesn’t matter, we shall see, we shall see...’ and would it go on repeating it till death came crashing down upon it—and there would be nowhere to recoil from it? ...

Невольно ставил я себе вопрос: о чем думает в эту минуту эта столь покорно наклоненная голова? Держится ли она упорно и, как говорится, стиснув зубы, за одну и ту же мысль: «Не поддамся, мол, я»; проходят ли вихрем по ней разнообразнейшие – и, вероятно, всё незначительные воспоминания прошлого;

представляется ли ей с какой-нибудь особенной предсмертной гримасой один из членов семейства Кинков; или она просто старается ни о чем не думать, эта голова, и только старается ни о чем не думать, эта голова, и только твердит самой себе: «Это ничего, это так, вот мы посмотрим...», и будет она так твердить до тех пор, пока смерть не обрушится на нее – и отпрянуть будет некуда... (14:166)

This brief speculation enfolds a spectacular range of privilege—attempting to comment on unobserved thoughts and memories, recorded even with the reliable quotation marks of reported speech—into the same gaze that also remarks on its own frustrated attempts at reaching this character’s interior. This intense moment of attempting to “get into” Tropmann’s head, however, immediately precedes the separation of that head from his body, and as a result, the permanent loss of any access to his secrets, apart from those the coroner can pick at afterwards (14:151). Before it can spill its guts, then, the object of the narrator’s incisive, penetrating gaze has its guts spilled; the “unveiling which destroys the secret” clashes violently with the attempt at a “revelation which does it justice.”⁴¹

This playful connection draws our attention to the ethics of bearing witness to violence, as well as to the violence of bearing witness at all. Just as he remarks on the uncomfortable privilege of his access to Tropmann’s cell, so too does the narrator cast a spotlight on the act of *transgression* inherent to his omniscient attempts at “getting into” someone’s head, by aligning it so closely with the crime and ultimate punishment of Tropmann — with the head that keeps its secret, but at a great cost. The narrator frequently echoes this tension by constantly reasserting his concerns with his transgressions in space, which result in a felt illicit surplus of vision on his part. He comments throughout the sketch on his unexpected sense of *privilege* in what he witnesses—“it was proposed that I should be admitted to the prison itself together with a small number of other privileged persons” [мне предлагали включить меня в число немногих привилегированных лиц, которым разрешается доступ в самую тюрьму] (14:147)—which results in an uneasy feeling of complicity in the execution itself.

This feeling soon becomes literalized, as the inhuman, indecipherable crowd of people initially mistakes *him* for the executioner [Вот он... вот он... это он! – произнесло несколько голосов вокруг нас.-- Знаете что? – сказал мне вдруг Дюкан. – Вас принимают за здешнего палача. «Хорошее начало!» -- подумалось мне] (14:149). The boundary between witnessing in narrative and participating in violence becomes hazier still as, two chapters later, the hands of the real executioner remind the narrator of Pushkin’s “Poltava” (14:152). Foreshadowing the ending of the sketch, the narrator opts not to watch the executioner’s trial-run of the guillotine, because “the feeling of some unknown transgression committed by myself, of some secret shame, was growing stronger and stronger inside me” (14:157). The “only innocent creatures among us all,” he exclaims, are the horses. The narrative act is on par with the executioner’s here: both sever the brain from the body, opening it up – only to become party to violence, and to find out nothing.

After all this set up, the narrator famously—and controversially—looks away at the last moment, unable to bring himself to watch the actual decapitation. However, no detail of the guillotining is lost as a result of this turning-away, since the execution has already been excruciatingly detailed up to that point.⁴² When watching Tropmann earlier, the narrator has

⁴¹ Newton, *Narrative Ethics*, 47.

⁴² See Jackson, “The Ethics of Vision,” 30-31.

already vividly imagined his “slender, youthful neck” being smashed, picturing “a line cut straight across it...there, I thought, a five-hundred-pound axe would in a few moments pass, smashing the vertebrae and cutting through the veins and muscles” [и особенно от этой тонкой, юношеской шеи... Воображение невольно проводило по ней поперечную черту... Вот тут, думалось мне, через несколько мгновений, раздробляя позвонки, рассекая мускулы и жилы, пройдет десятипудовый топор] (14:166). Here, as in “The Clatter of Wheels,” the unwitnessed violent crime is prefigured and replaced by its rehearsal in the narrator’s imagination, who ultimately does not see the beheading just as he ultimately is not robbed and killed by the giant drunk. Both of these unwitnessed events do, however, happen to other people, leaving open the question of the narrator’s complicity: his turning-away from the grisly decapitation leaves him no less a party to it, just as his supposedly privileged field of vision leaves him no safer on the nighttime road to Tula.

Despite not watching the axe succeed physically where he has failed narratively—in penetrating Tropmann’s head—in the moment before he turns away the narrator performs a different penetration of his own. He engages in directly omniscient speculation, detailed above, that darts between all the different things that might be going through Tropmann’s brain. The violent and transgressive complicity of the narrator’s vision then continues even while he is looking away from the guillotine: instead of looking at Tropmann in his final moments, he instead watches a sentry, who in turn is watching him “with dull perplexity and horror.” In these twenty seconds of observation, the narrator has time “to think that that soldier probably hailed from some god-forsaken village and came from a decent, law-abiding family—and the things he had to see now!” [Я успел даже подумать, что вот этот солдат, быть может, родом из какой-нибудь глухой деревеньки, из смиренной и доброй семьи, -- и теперь – что ему приходится видеть!] (14:168-69). This is not so much a looking-away, then, as a recast and heightened *looking-in*. The moment of supposedly occluded vision gives way to another moment of intense visual scrutiny, which not only bears all the markers of narrative omniscience, but that also pairs that act with violence.

Afterwards, the crowd seems exhausted, and the narrator repeats the guillotining metaphor, noting that they look like a weight has been lifted off their shoulders [словно обуза свалилась с плеч] (14:169-170), a playful pun that, as Jackson has noted, reinforces their complicity in the event by laying out the price for such violence: *they* are as-if guillotined by the narrator’s gaze.⁴³ The sketch then concludes by making one final omniscient move, noting how, although no one seemed “like a man who realized that he had been present at the performance of the act of social justice,” everyone had nonetheless “tried to turn away in spirit and, as it were, shake off the responsibility for this murder” [Но никто из нас, решительно никто не смотрел человеком, который сознает, что присутствовал при совершении акта общественного правосудия: всякий старался мысленно отвернуться и как бы сбросить с себя ответственность в этом убийстве...] (14:170).

The conclusion pairs distance with presence, narration with complicity, and violence with vision: on the one hand, although the narrator avoids witnessing the violent execution, he has still represented it narratively, speculatively mapping it out beforehand in precise, graphic, and gory detail. On the other, although he purportedly distances himself from this violence, his act merely substitutes one transgression for another, confidently reporting on the spirits and feelings of everyone present, as well as imagining the interior states of both Tropmann’s head and the sentry who *does* watch it get cut off. The real punishment that concerns this sketch is not

⁴³ Ibid., 34.

necessarily the titular execution, but the consequences of transgressive, privileged observation, which lay death and violence at the feet of the omniscient narrator who watches it.

VII. Conclusions

As they pose (and in variform ways render answerable) the question “What has happened inside this man?”, Turgenev’s narratives perform a seemingly contradictory double-duty, both constructing the inner and outer worlds of characters (whose outside must be probed before the inside can be penetrated and made known), and also rendering the barrier separating them difficult to cross. Turgenev’s narrators are frequently possessed of a privileged field of vision, crossing the boundary between body and mind to reveal that which is veiled, often by parsing the veil itself; however, they also anxiously disavow the very possibility of such a field of vision at all, leaving the objects of their penetrating gaze, at times even within the same sentence, liminal in their opacity, here revealing their interiors, there concealing them.

This leaves the body—and particularly the face—the surface on which Turgenev’s narrators make visible the work of their omniscience. His narrators decode the faces of characters, reading external signs for their internal signifieds. Indeed, scholars have long noted the centrality of the body to the representation of the mind in Turgenev, whose narrators render the otherwise hidden interiors of characters legible by cataloging and parsing phrenological and physiological details, from Evgeny Bazarov’s large, intelligent forehead to Jean-Baptiste Tropmann’s dark eyes.⁴⁴ However, in Turgenev’s later sketches, the body and the face—once the site of insight, the easy entryway into the mind—increasingly become surfaces fraught with ethical problems, as privileged fields of vision become entangled with, on the one hand, questions of violation on the part of the observer, and on the other, responsibility towards those observed. While the epistemologically invested narrativizing gaze becomes ever more erotic (for the representation of figural consciousness is inextricably wrapped up in looking at, probing, and penetrating the body), so too does it become ever more ethically charged, caught up in averring the problematic consequences of privileged knowledge *from within* narrative positions that all the same produce (as well as rely on) it.

Turgenev’s narratives seem to be over time increasingly interested in interrogating the stakes of their own ability to make minds transparent, as well as to represent others doing the same. The transactional nature of the exchange of privileged information between the narrator and characters of Turgenev’s early *Sketches* floods the interpersonal relationships between the characters of his later work, who all collaborate in a system of surveillance, while an authoritative narrative voice stages proof of its own superiority. Turgenev’s narrative omniscience makes visible its authority not only by establishing boundaries just to represent itself transgressing them, but also by attending to the stakes of that transgression, drawing attention to a gaze that is epistemologically invested, erotically charged, and undeniably ethically focused.

⁴⁴ Particularly influential was the work of Swiss physiognomist Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801), whose works Turgenev studied and recommended to his friends. Edmund Heir outlines Turgenev’s indebtedness to the science of physiognomy and particularly details his propensity for judging, creating, and representing characters by their appearances, first and foremost. See Heir, *Literary Portraiture in Nineteenth-Century Russian Prose* (Vienna: Bohlau Verlag, 1993), 127-52. For analyses of Lavater’s particular influence on Turgenev’s methods of characterization, see E. Siegel, “Speak Softly,” and W. G. Westeijn, “The Description of the Appearances of Characters in Turgenev’s Novels (in particular *Fathers and Sons*)” in *Turgenev: Art, Ideology, and Legacy*, op. cit.

CHAPTER 2

“That’s the horrible part: I understand everything!”¹The ethics of misreading the other in Dostoevsky’s *Poor Folk* and “The Meek One”

I. Introduction

Amidst unreliable narrators, unrequited love, and unprevented suicides, Dostoevsky’s work draws attention to the ethical choices his characters make, and in the process, questions the ethics of narrative itself. The title of this chapter points to a problem that runs deep in Dostoevsky’s thought, stretching from his literary debut, the 1845 epistolary novel *Poor Folk* [Бедные люди, 1846], to the late short story “The Meek One” [Кроткая, 1876]: the problem of other minds, and of the character-narrators who confidently misread them. In representing character-narrators who *misread* other characters, who *fail* to make minds transparent, Dostoevsky’s narratives invite readers to attend to the limits of this transparency, as well as to the ethical consequences of our reading it.

Standing over his dead wife, the unnamed pawnbroker narrator of Dostoevsky’s “The Meek One” soliloquizes her corpse. Fretting at the prospect of her body’s removal, the narrator unwittingly reveals the real source of his anxiety: “While she’s still here, everything is still alright; I go up and look at her every minute. But they will take her away tomorrow and—how can I stay here alone?” [Вот пока она здесь—еще всё хорошо: подхожу и смотрю поминутно; а унесут завтра и—как же я останусь один?] (24:6). For the pawnbroker, the loss of his partner pales in comparison with the loss of his audience, for his wife has ever served as his mute sounding-board, constantly playing the role of character to his narrator, her thoughts made legible with suspicious ease, her life relegated to a footnote in the story of her husband’s ability to narrate it reliably. This narrator makes constant reference to his sharp memory, total understanding of the events of his marriage, and absolute ability to read his wife’s mind in her face, actions, and tone of voice, but in the process leaves the reader both acutely aware of the dominating one-sidedness of his narrative, and immediately wary of the amount of discursive control to which he lays claim.

Seemingly at the opposite end of the spectrum of Dostoevsky’s character-narrators stands his first, the lowly but eager clerk Makar Devushkin, whose love letters to his beloved neighbor Varvara Dobroselova are collected in the epistolary novel *Poor Folk*. “I already know you’re thinking about me” [Уж знаю, что и вы обо мне там думаете] (1:14), Makar writes to Varvara as he gazes through his window at hers. Reading into the position of her curtains, he finds proof of her returned affections, turning her into the object not only of his affection and gaze, but of his narrative as well.

This objectification in turn engenders a slew of questions about this character-narrator’s knowledge: *does* Makar Devushkin in fact know that she is thinking of him? Can he? If he is wrong (he is), what position is the reader then to take to the novel whose characters are made known only by the potentially faulty narrativizing of other characters? Whose *misreadings* we learn about only by reading them ourselves? As it turns out, Varvara is not only *not* thinking of him, but has only signaled him by mistake. Once given the remit to question the character-narrator’s reliability in this way, the reader is shuffled into a space above and against the first-

¹ В том-то и весь ужас мой, что я всё понимаю! (24:6). Translations of *Poor Folk* and “The Meek One” are drawn (and amended) from Hugh Aplin’s and David Magarshack’s. Citations of Dostoevsky refer to *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1982).

person narrative of the novel's letters, invited to see through Makar Devushkin's narrative in order to question the stakes that prop it up.

In such scenes of represented misreading, *Poor Folk* and "The Meek One" draw attention to the ethical consequences of a narrativizing, totalizing gaze that attempts—and fails—to "understand everything" about the other. The reader is from the start invited to question the ways of reading and knowing that the narratives model and, as a result, to consider the ethical consequences of such reading. In *Poor Folk*, the way characters read narratives bleeds into the way they read each other, making it ever more significant that Makar Devushkin's literary tastes and abilities are questionable at best. Makar's famous misreading of Pushkin and Gogol—in which he conflates essential distinctions between narrator and author, between reader and character—mirror those of his own letters, where he remains naïve to the limits of his ability to narrate and read others.

Poor Folk is at its heart an ethically fraught novel, shot-through with a hypocritical anxiety, which coheres around the rendering of the mind of the other by a character-narrator who lacks omniscience, but who still strives for something like it anyway. The privileged knowledge produced by omniscient third-person narrative greatly discomforts Makar Devushkin when he encounters it in fiction, and yet he also attempts to read (and to know) Varvara Alekseevna in a way that mirrors the fictional narratives that cause him such distress. Written into the novel is a deep concern with narrative ethics, mapped out as a problem of narrative voice, strung along the tension between first- and third-person narration, between limitation and omniscience.

Despite their ostensible dissimilarities, I take the narrator of "The Meek One" to be the grotesque and tragic fulfilment of the problematic misreading of the other first mapped out in the letters of Makar Devushkin.² Their echoed misreadings draw attention to the shared task these works demand of their *own* readers: we must be better readers than these character-narrators, able to read between the lines of what Makar Devushkin says just as we are able to see beyond the frame of what the pawnbroker narrates. By modelling situations in which naïve misreading and problematic narrating overlap, both "The Meek One" and *Poor Folk* invite the reader to question the ethical problems inherent to all narrative, belied by the mutually confident (but equally mistaken) pronouncements, "I understand everything," and "I already know you're thinking about me."³

² I am indebted here to several recent and compelling readings of *Poor Folk*, notably Carol Apollonio's "against the grain" reexamination of Makar's less-than-innocent motives, in which she convincingly argues that Makar Devushkin "has a dark side that prefigures the most complex and sinister figures of Dostoevsky's later fiction." Apollonio, *Dostoevsky's Secrets*, 14. See also Robin Feuer Miller's interpretation of the intersection of reading and writing in the novel's letters. Miller, "Dostoevsky's *Poor People*: Reading as if for Life," in *Reading in Russia: Practices of Reading and Literary Communication*. Ed. Damiano Rebbechini & Raffaella Vassena (Milan: Ledizioni, 2014), 151-60.

³ Recent Dostoevsky scholarship has also attended to this ethical dimension of his work. Alexander Spektor in particular has examined how in Dostoevsky, the side-effect of authorship and narration is "the usurpation of power over others." Spektor, *Narrative Ethics in the First-Person Prose of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Witold Gombrowicz*, 192. Deborah A Martinsen examines how, after *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky's narratives work to imbue readers with a sense of shame, turning reading into "a redemptive tool that stimulates ethical changes." Martinsen, *Surprised by Shame: Dostoevsky's Liars and Narrative Exposure* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2003), 12. For a thorough examination of how texts ethically negotiate interpersonal relationships in *The Idiot*, see Sarah J. Young, *Dostoevsky's The Idiot and the Ethical Foundations of Narrative: Reading, Narrating, Scripting* (London: Anthem, 2004).

II. The problem of character-narrators

As character narrators, Makar Devushkin and the pawnbroker are always already defined by their limitations. Possessed of potentially unreliable, often first-person narrative voices, the stories of character-narrators are from the start charged with the reader's expectations of their limits. Character-narrators can explain the world around them, but can only ever guess as to the contents of the mind of the other. Wayne Booth contrasts the limitation of these "dramatized narrators"—who appear as characters in their own narratives—with the more privileged observers and narrator-agents that are marked by the rhetorical power of an "inside view" to other characters' psyches.⁴ Seymour Chatman reinforces this rhetorical tack, noting that narrative authority is limited by the degree to which narrators have "entrée" into characters' minds.⁵

Abandoning these terms that anthropomorphize narrating agents, Gerard Genette instead offers "heterodiegetic" and "homodiegetic" to distinguish narrative voices from those that include themselves as characters in their own telling from those that do not.⁶ Homodiegetic and first-person narrators are generally marked by their lack of omniscience—and, therefore, of full narrative authority—although, as Dorrit Cohn notes, in many ways "a first-person narrator's relationship to his past self parallels a narrator's relationship to his protagonist in a third-person novel," as such narrators have access to a large amount of psychological information about *their* minds and past selves.⁷ Still, she concludes, first-person narrative is bound by its "less free access" to other characters' psyches, which distinguishes it from omniscient third-person (or, in Genette's terms, non-focalized heterodiegetic) narrative, limited instead to making what Kate Hamburger terms inherently unreliable "feigned reality statements."⁸

The distinction between narrative points of view thus becomes one of relative empowerment (who can say what about whom?), cast in terms of knowledge (what do they know, and how?) and our response to its origin (what position is the reader to take to the unreliable nature of character-narration?). But what happens when character-narrators stray into the territory of omniscience, and know more than they should? When a first-person narrator, bereft of an "inside view" into the minds of others, still bemoans the weight of "knowing everything?" Such moments are often cast as a *violation* of the narrative's order. Genette terms such a narrative situation "paralepsis," in which a focalizer gives away too much information.⁹ Others have picked up on these narrative infractions and extrapolated further: Ruediger Heinze maps out a typology of different sorts of paraleptic violations of focalization, as, for example, the superiority of a narrating-I (commenting with foreknowledge and the benefit of experience) over his past self is distinct from a voice narrating from an inaccessible point, like beyond the grave.¹⁰

On the opposite end of the narratology spectrum, James Phelan maps out these distinctions as a typology of different functions (in character-narration, for example, the "character function" is dominant) laid over different figures, adapted from Booth (narrator, implied author, actual reader), whose relationships to each other invoke an emotional and ethical

⁴ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983), 160-61.

⁵ Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978), 212-13.

⁶ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 244-45.

⁷ Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 143-44.

⁸ Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature*, trans. Marilyn J. Rose (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1973), 316.

⁹ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 203.

¹⁰ See Ruidiger Heinze, "Violations of Mimetic Epistemology in First-Person Narrative Fiction," *Narrative*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (October 2008), 279-97.

reaction on the part of the reader to this narrative-as-rhetoric. Phelan terms character-narrators who exceed the expected boundaries of their field of vision to be guilty of varying degrees of representational overstepping, “underreporting” here, “misreading” there.¹¹

The problem with these approaches to character-narration, argues Paul Dawson, is that they conflate the simple rhetorical devices of storytelling with logical infractions, resulting in a sort of “epistemological fallacy” that leads narrative scholars down the rabbit-hole of worriedly attributing vision, voice, and intentionality to a variety of different agents to satisfy an invented “problematics of knowledge.”¹² Dawson writes that this unfortunate preoccupation—with the question “to which agent do we assign responsibility for impossible knowledge?”—traces back to Genette’s separation of voice and focalization, which “prioritizes knowing over saying,” and assumes a source of knowledge that must be accessed before it may be narrated.¹³ Such a view makes a problem out of unjustified omniscience on the part of character-narrators; their failure to comment on the source of their “illicit knowledge” becomes an epistemological dilemma, when of course their “knowledge” and their representation of it are simultaneous constructs of the text, not events that unfold in time. As a way to counter to the (in his view, unnecessary) preoccupation with cataloguing the varying degrees to which impossible knowledge may be justified or illicit, and to move beyond the reductive valuations inherent in terming such moments “violations” or “infractions,” Dawson cites David Herman’s work on “virtual focalization,” and recasts first-person omniscience as simply one of several possible rhetorical tactics taken up by a narrator at any given time, suggesting it to be the product of hypothetical focalization through an imagined agent, the perspective of omniscient narration *if* such narration were possible, regardless if it is not.¹⁴

In *Poor Folk* and “The Meek One,” however, infractions on the part of limited narrators are less a preoccupation thrust on the text by over-analyzing narratologists, than *the* preoccupation of the texts themselves. A problematics of narrative knowledge—defined by an anxiety over the source and reliability of the knowledge possessed by characters, as well as a sharp awareness of the distinction between omniscience and limitation, between third- and first-person narration—becomes the central problem *Poor Folk* and “The Meek One” address. Questions over the source of the narrators’ knowledge are rendered moot from the start of both works, which task readers not with questioning the validity of narrative knowledge, but rather with interrogating its effects, and attending to its consequences: namely, the effacement of the other. Dostoevsky’s works limn what is at stake when character-narrators attempt—and fail—to “understand everything” about the people in their lives, about the other characters in the works in which they also appear. Exceeding the limits of their field of vision—performing what the narratologists above would term epistemological infractions, or *paralepsis*—the narrators of *Poor Folk* and “The Meek One” transform their coevals into *characters*, their potential interlocutors into narrative subordinates, texts to be read, aesthetically consummated, written-out, and, in Bakhtin’s terms, “measured up in full and added up in every detail.”¹⁵ These works make a show

¹¹ See Phelan, *Living to Tell About It*, 5, 12-13, 23, 28, 50.

¹² Dawson, *The Return of the Omniscient Narrator*, 196.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-206.

¹⁵ In his early, unfinished essay “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” [Автор и герой в эстетической деятельности] M. M. Bakhtin posits that the embodied hero’s life echoes the sound of a requiem, for the artistic vision that consummates the hero aesthetically “anticipates from the very outset the hero’s

of pointing out the paucity of their narrators' gazes, and of highlighting the reductive nature of their misreading.

III. *The Poems of Makar Devushkin*

Poor Folk collects the letters of the poor clerk Makar Alekseevich Devushkin and his beloved neighbor Varvara Alekseevna Dobroselova, whose exchanges give shape to an ostensibly tragic story of unrequited love. Despite his attentive affection, Varvara ultimately rejects Makar (and ends their correspondence, as well as the novel) by entering into a loveless marriage of convenience with the odious but wealthy suitor Bykov.

Poor Folk immediately draws the reader's attention not just to the central role played by the acts of reading and narrating, but also to their attendant acts of *impoverishment*. This is partly the inescapable result of genre: in the epistolary novel, the other can only be known through the act of reading about them—or of narrating about oneself to them—in a letter. The novel is the story both of its characters as narrators, as well as of its narrators as characters; Makar and Varvara narrate their own lives to each other in their correspondence, while also featuring as characters within each other's writing. The novel's basic generic conceit (that two separated character-narrators write and receive letters) presupposes the necessity of the absence of physical intimacy, a gap to be filled-in with *textual* intimacy instead: the plot of the epistolary novel hinges on the distance separating its characters in order for its content to exist in the first place (Fraanje 15). Their narration is therefore loaded; it renders moot the question of their relationship from the very start.

This separation leads to an inevitable tension—between absence and presence, between the textual and the physical—which is only further increased by the distance in time between the action of the plot and its subsequent narration. At times this additional, temporal separation can result in a tension in the identity of the letter writers themselves, who confront their past selves in the act of framing themselves in words, giving rise to competing versions of events presented by different character-narrators.¹⁶ Bakhtin famously expounds on how these tensions work in Dostoevsky's novel, noting that the characters' letters are shot-through with an intense sensitivity to their words' potential reception, which fills the narrative with a cringing, sideways-looking bias.¹⁷

hopelessness with respect to meaning,” presenting us with the “*whole* hero, measured in full and added up in every detail,” a “formally dead” aesthetic construct. Bakhtin, “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity,” in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. M. Holquist & V. Liapunov (Austin: U of Texas P, 1990), 130-31.

¹⁶ In *Poor Folk*, Makar Devushkin must, for example, contend with his bouts of drunkenness, as represented in the letters he receives, although we never witness these events except in competing stories *about* them. Joe Bray suggests that the epistolary novel presents a unique narrative situation for the exploration of psychological tensions like these, as “epistolary narrative...oscillates between unity and disintegration of self.” See Bray, *The Epistolary Novel: Representations of Consciousness* (London: Routledge, 2003), 16.

¹⁷ The centrality of reading and writing to the novel—including its attendant tensions—has long been the subject of scholarly concern. M. M. Bakhtin famously points to the apprehensive style that colors Makar's letters with an intense sensitivity to their potential reception, highlighting how narrative mediates the relationships between the characters. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 204-207. Robin Feuer Miller examines how the written word negotiates both Makar and Varvara's relationship to each other, as well as their understanding of themselves, leading to a tension between lived-life and narrative about it, manifesting in the characters' “obsessive need to narrate their stories in order to craft a version of

The foregrounding of narrative questions in *Poor Folk*, however, includes and exceeds these basic tensions, be they native to the epistolary genre or particular to Dostoevsky's polyphony. For Dostoevsky's novel is a late, self-conscious re-activation of the epistolary form, already an outdated genre by the 1840s. As such, it is aware of—and plays with—the generic conventions that give shape to its letters, and impoverishes not only the characters, but even the necessary gaps that separate them; the distance between these *Poor Folk* is not the tragic impossibility of a morganatic marriage, but merely a shoddy courtyard between two apartment buildings. The story of these characters *as* narrators—who gesture across the courtyard at each other—coheres around how Makar Devushkin and Varvara Alekseevna *read each other*, and not only about each other. As *character*-narrators, bereft of an “inside view” of each other, their knowledge is frustratingly incomplete, not to say *poor*, always defined by gaps, and literally limited by the scope of the two curtained window-frames on either side of the courtyard.¹⁸

This courtyard is (literally) central to the novel's structure. Situated as the physical half-way point between the two letter-writers' windows, which frame their limited view of each other, the courtyard parodies the conceits of the epistolary novel. Makar Devushkin is aware his textual intimacy with Varvara—who is many years his junior, as well as his distant cousin—might attract unwanted attention. Constantly afraid of being found out, of being talked about, of what it will “be like when they find everything out about us” [но всё же, сами рассудите вы, маточка, каково это будет, когда они всё узнают про нас? Что-то они подумают и что они скажут тогда?] (1:26), Makar worries what people would say should they see him *traversing the courtyard* toward Varvara's building (1:21). He later fears that people—from the courtyard—point up at her window, and that “in our apartment, everyone knows everything down to the last detail” [в квартире у нас все всё до последнего знают] (1:69-70). The courtyard is the physical space that Makar's writing *must* cross, but which he himself *cannot*, for the continuation of their textual contact (and with it, the novel) renders moot the question of their physical intimacy. The courtyard also literalizes the novel's narrative ethical concerns, for publicizing private correspondence, and knowing “everything, down to the last detail,” is precisely what the epistolary novel seemingly allows the *reader* of *Poor Folk* to do. The novel pushes us into the position of the voyeuristic, gossipy, gawking onlooker from the courtyard, pointing at us as we spy on its protagonists, never allowing us to forget the violation inherent to the act of reading it.

However, the dreaded narration of “everything down to the last detail” is precisely the task Makar Devushkin sets for *himself*. He overwhelmingly understands himself in terms of his own access to narratives, as well as his ability to construct them. He constantly references stories, novels, newspapers, and writers, and the literariness of his neighbors indexes for him their positive value. When describing his squalid apartment building to Varvara Alekseevna in the novel's first letter, Makar Devushkin excitedly writes that one neighbor has a job “something to do with literature,” and that “he's a well-read man [...] a clever man!” [Чиновник один есть (он где-то по литературой части), человек начитанный [...] – умный человек!] (1:16). He is particularly fond of his neighbor Rataziaev, a hack writer whose racy novels he praises as “lovely grub, and not literature! It's such a delight – flowers, simply flowers; you make a

themselves through words that can render their existence bearable.” Miller, “Dostoevsky's *Poor People*,” 155.

¹⁸ Carol de Dobay Rifelj explores the implications of narratives that represent character-narrators frustrated by the “necessary incompleteness of narrative.” de Dobay Rifelj, *Reading the Other: Novels and the Problems of Other Minds* (Ann Arbor: The U of Michigan P, 1992), 21.

bouquet from every page!” [объедение, а не литература! Прелесть такая, цветы, просто цветы со всякой страницы букет вяжи!] (1:51).

Makar’s comically poor understanding of literature is equaled only by his poor taste in it: when praising his neighbor for being well-read, for example, Makar naively equates the epics of Homer with Baron Brambeus, the penname of Osip Ivanovich Senkovskii, editor of the thick journal *Library for Reading* [Библиотека для чтения] and author of minor but popular fantastical stories (1:16). Determined to divine Varvara’s tastes, Makar copies out and sends her passages from Rataziaev’s novels, which she immediately rejects (1:50-51, 55), scolding him for having sent her the “most worthless, horrid little” books and wondering if, “joking aside, surely you don’t like such books, do you, Makar Alekseevich?” [Кроме шуток, неужели вам нравятся такие книжки, Макар Алексеевич?] (1:50). Despite these objections, Makar Devushkin defends Rataziaev’s prose, not noticing that his writing is trite, hyperbolic, and ludicrous (1:50-51).¹⁹ Thanks to his association with Rataziaev’s literary circles, Makar also reads the conservative *Northern Bee* and the popular French novelist Paul de Kock, although he later claims to have read only three things: the dense, 700-page treatise *The Picture of Man* [Картина человека, 1834], by Russian Schellingist A. I. Galich,²⁰ which Makar simply notes was an “wise composition” [умное сочинение] (1:85), the 1813 Zhukovsky translation of Schiller’s ballad “The Cranes of Ibykus,” which is rife with historical references and mythical allusions that likely went over his head, and a section of the translation of the torrid multi-volume novel *The Little Chimer* [*Le Petit Carillonneur*, 1809] by Francois Guillaume Ducray-Duminil²¹, whose novels would later be used by Victor Hugo to index characters with poor taste, in life as in literature.²²

All the same, despite his poor reading habits, Makar insists that Rataziaev’s occasional literary evenings have taught him the value of literature. But when he confusedly extols its virtues to Varvara, the cracks in his understanding begin to show:

And it’s a good thing, Varenka, literature, a very good thing; I learned this from them three days ago. A profound thing! A thing that strengthens people’s hearts, instructs, and – various other things about all this are written in this little book of theirs.

А хорошая вещь литература, Варенька, очень хорошая; это я от них третьего дня узнал. Глубокая вещь! Сердце людей укрепляющая, поучающая, и – разное там еще обо всем об этом в книжке у них написано (1:51).

¹⁹ See Terras, who outlines how the excerpts from Rataziaev’s work parody M. N. Zagoskin, Polevoi, A. A. Bestuzhev-Marinskii, Gogol, and “third-rate Gothic novels of the 1830s.” Victor Terras, *The Young Dostoevsky (1846-49): A Critical Study* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), 244-45. The new critical edition of *Poor Folk* (Ed. K. A. Barsht. Moscow: Ladomir, 2015) notes that the stories Rataziaev’s works parody are boulevard and adventure novels not popular since the 1830s (see 566-67n124).

²⁰ See Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976), 155, and A. I. Galich, *Kartina cheloveka – opyt nastavitel’nago chteniia o predmetakh samopoznaniia dlia vsekh obrazovannykh soslovii*. (SPb: Imperatorskaia akademiia nauk, 1834).

²¹ See Ducray-Duminil, *The Little Chimer: a tale* (London: Henry Coburn, 1810).

²² See Book III, Chapter 2 of V. Hugo, *Les Miserables*, trans. I. F. Hapgood (New York: Thomas Crowell & Co, 1887), in which Madame Thenardier is decried as a “coarse, vicious woman” for dabbling in “stupid romances” thanks to the influence of Ducray-Duminil’s novels.

With this confused definition—which stops short of naming the third thing literature accomplishes, besides instructing and strengthening hearts, collapsing instead into the citation of the work whose value we already know to question—we recognize the comic naivete of Makar’s poor taste, and also come to understand that *he* does not. The novel forces us to question Makar’s adulation of [what he understands to be] literature, resulting in a sort of bathetic fallacy: by casting a spotlight on Makar’s poor reading habits—as the “bouquet” of literary “flowers” that so “strengthens the heart” turns out only to be the turgid prose of a derivative hack, or the text of a dense treatise he likely neither read nor understood—*Poor Folk* undercuts the praise its protagonist casts on its own medium.

The displaying of Makar’s reading habits serves double duty: *Poor Folk* makes a show of Makar’s poor reading, figured as a part of our own. In recognizing Makar’s comically scatter-shot taste and low-quality preferences, the close reader of *Poor Folk* is forced not only to admit the quality—in contradistinction—of her own, but also to question *all* of Makar’s now-tainted literary opinions, including the unvarnished praise he heaps on everything literary. The novel invites us to question whether so many wonderful examples of literature ever *could* be “written in this little book of theirs” and, by extension, into “this little book of” ours, *Poor Folk*. In so doing, the novel pushes its reader into an antagonistic stance, from which we question how much of a “profound” or “very good thing” this literature of his really might be.

Poor Folk’s self-aware, self-undercutting project of questioning the unquestioned value of narrative—including its own—undercuts itself again by casting Makar—a frustratingly agrammatical civil servant—as one of its only two narrator-protagonists. While the novel makes a point of showing how Makar’s endless adulation for everything literary grinds against the quality of his actual reading choices, the stylistic inadequacies of its protagonist come as no surprise. Indeed, Makar’s concern with his own literary inadequacies fundamentally informs his self-understanding. He makes constant, disappointed references to his lack of formal education (1:24), as well as to the deficits of his style and literary talent: “I confess, my dear, I’ve no talent for description, and I know, without anyone pointing it out and mocking, that if I want to write anything a bit more involved, then I’ll come out with a lot of nonsense.” [Сознаюсь, маточка, не мастер описывать, и знаю, без чужого иного указания и пересмеивания, что если захочу что-нибудь написать позатейливее, так вздору нагороджу] (1:21). His job—a further literary allusion—reinforces this identity: like Gogol’s Akaky Akakievich²³, Makar Devushkin works as a copying clerk, redrafting documents without style or embellishment (1:48). At Rataziaev’s literary evenings, Makar Devushkin finds himself ashamed of his own inarticulateness (1:51), and yearns for a better style, which Varvara Alekseevna sometimes faults for being “extremely uneven” [у вас слог чрезвычайно неровный] (1:70). To be sure, his letters ramble; his sentence fragments, drowned in diminutive forms, run-on into each other as often as they drift off into ellipses, as he loses his train of thought on the page.²⁴

²³ The intertextual references *Poor Folk* makes to Gogol have received a clear and thorough formulation by Rebecca Epstein Matveyev in her “Textuality and Intertextuality in Dostoevsky’s *Poor Folk*,” in *SEEJ*, vol. 39, no. 4 (Winter, 1995). See also Gary Rosenshield, “Old Pokrovskij: Technique and Meaning in a Character Foil in Dostoevskii’s *Poor Folk*,” *New Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Russian Prose*. Ed. G. Gutsche and L. Leighton (Columbus: Slavica, 1982) and Victor Terras, *The Young Dostoevsky*.

²⁴ Victor Terras notes that Makar Devushkin’s speech is marked by “subliterary” religious phrases, often awkward and illogical sentence structures, the occasional mangled French word, and the bureaucratic jargon of contemporary Petersburg. Terras, *The Young Dostoevsky*, 160-61.

Just as *Poor Folk* makes a show of how Makar heaps praise only on pulpy trash or on things he has not read, playfully to take aim at Makar's estimation (as well as our own) of literature's inherent, assumed value, so too does it play with the frustrating experience of reading Makar's choppy style: his dream, it turns out, is not just to become a writer, but to be a popular, publicly recognized one. Makar explains to Varvara that he dreams of putting out a book entitled *The Poems of Makar Devushkin*. He does not elaborate on its table of contents. Indeed, after proposing this title, he lays bare his real concerns, immediately asking: "Well what would you say then, my little angel? How would you look on, what would you think of that?" [Ну что бы вы тогда сказали, мой ангельчик? Как бы вам это представилось и подумалось?]. He goes on to imagine that he might even become the cause of a public scene on Nevsky Prospect when he's recognized by his readers as the author of the as-yet-unwritten verse: "What would it be like then, when everyone could say that here comes the composer of literature and poet Devushkin, that that really is Devushkin himself?" [Ведь каково это было бы, когда бы всякий сказал, что вот де идет сочинитель литературы и пиита Девушкин, что вот, дескать, это и есть сам Девушкин!] (1:53). Makar's dream is not actually to *write*, but to *be seen already as a writer*, as a "пиита," even. The irony here is thick: in gauging Varvara's response to his future, hypothetical writing within (and, certainly, in spite of) his *current* writing, Makar—the Rataziaev-reader without a poem to his name—fantasizes about dealing with the consequences of literary celebrity.

Although Makar certainly puts the literary cart before the horse in daydreaming about being mobbed by the fans of his unwritten poems, his question to Varvara lays bare what else *Poor Folk* shows literature doing: he desperately wants to impress her. His letters to her cross another courtyard, so to speak, for with Varvara, Makar constructs his own reading public, pointedly asking her "what she would think of" his being published. His daydreams of writing serve as a means of constructing a narrative about himself, of emplotting this famous, пиита-Makar—the main character of his own daydreams, written-out in the letter—into a story that sees him raised in Varvara's eyes as the hypothetical future author of *The Poems of Makar Devushkin*. The textual supplants the physical once more, as Makar's flirtations with authorship turn back around into flirtations with Varvara. In this exchange of value, though, it is difficult to divine direction: Does Varvara's imagined reaction to his publishing the book index its value for him, or does Varvara's status already as *his reader* signal her own positive qualities? Does he dream of writing to impress her, or does he praise literature *because she reads*? Is she the stand-in, or the goal? In his dream she features, after all, as one of the potentially adoring fans.

Makar's relationship with Varvara is therefore decidedly textual, even beyond the frame of the letters themselves. The giving and receiving of books also feature heavily in their relationship, and Makar sets himself the task of discerning and satisfying Varvara's literary taste, a tricky goal that he finds hard to fulfil, but which sets up another moment of dramatic irony. While the deficiencies of the derivative Rataziaev texts Makar sends Varvara are beyond his ability to understand, for the reader of *Poor Folk*—who is, by extension, already also the reader of Turgenyev, Herzen, Odoevsky, Belinsky, Panaeva, and the others published alongside Dostoevsky's novel in the 1846 *Petersburg Collection* [Петербургский сборник]—they are obvious. But just like his dream of becoming a writer, here Makar's attempt to satisfy Varvara's picky taste rubs up against his attempt to know her.

When promising to send her a book to read, he outlines her possible desires as a function of his earnestly hopeful knowledge of *her*, not of the text itself, which he has not read:

But as far as a book is concerned, I can't get hold of one anywhere for the time being. They say there is one book here that's good and written in a very elevated style; they say it's good, I haven't read it myself, but they really praise it here. I asked for it for myself; they've promised to pass it on. But will you read it? You're a choosy one in that respect; it's hard to satisfy your taste, I know you, sweetheart.

А что до книжек касается, то достать покамест нигде не могу. Есть тут, говорят, хорошая книжка одна и весьма высоким слогом написанная; говорят, что хороша, я сам не читал, а здесь очень хвалят. Я просил ее для себя; обещались препроводить. Только будете ли вы-то читать? Вы у меня на этот счет привередница; трудно угодить на ваш вкус, уж я вас знаю, голубчик вы мой; вам, верно, всё стихотворство надобно, воздыханий, амуров, -- ну, и стихов достану, всего достану; там есть тетрадка одна переписанная. (1:25)

This episode highlights the antinomies central to Makar's letters: the hope of giving Varvara Alekseevna the right book rests on Makar Devushkin's ability to scrutinize what he finds to be her inscrutable tastes; the difficulty he bemoans with "it's hard to guess your taste" [трудно угодить на ваш вкус] is immediately obviated by his assertive follow-up: "I already know you" [уж я вас знаю]. Choosing the right book is predicated on composing the *right narrative* about her first.

In moments like these, *Poor Folk* invites its reader to see the narcissistic and reductive qualities that underwrite Makar Devushkin's letters. It is once more through text that Makar tries to cross the courtyard, as the process of reading is inextricably wrapped up in the shape of his desire. Book-giving here pays lip service to Varvara's mind as an unknowable other, while also framing her mind as the already known quantity, serving as just another vehicle for Makar Devushkin to demonstrate his devotion, and to prove his intimate, privileged knowledge. The narratives he constructs for her, *about her*, dovetail with the narratives he might read or produce himself: while he finds it hard "to guess" her taste, he will always already assert that he "knows her," just as the value of the contents of the *Poems of Makar Devushkin* pale in comparison to the weight of the imaginary narrativized outcome of their being published. But in making us aware that we are better readers than Makar Devushkin, the novel makes a show of demonstrating how his task—given the insurmountable deficiencies of his style, reading habits, and taste—is impossible for him. *Poor Folk* doubles-down on its representation of the pathetic antinomies of Makar's readings, reminding us of the impossibility of his ever satisfying Varvara textually.

IV. Misreading the other as text

When Makar tells Varvara that he "knows her," in the same moment that he reveals he very obviously does not—to her as to the reader of *Poor Folk*—the novel rehearses the antinomies of his reading habits: Makar Devushkin displays his lack of narrative authority in the same moment he asserts it, showing off his reading while also actually showing us its poverty, reaffirming that—if he thinks he knows Varvara's taste, just as he thinks he knows Galich's treatise is "a very wise composition"—he has accurately read neither. In a novel where reading literature dovetails with reading the other, it becomes all the more important that Makar is not just a reader of poor literature, but a *poor reader of the world around him* as well, lacking in narrative authority, despite striving for it. The novel displays not only how the textual sublates

the physical, replacing the haptic and the intimate with courtyard-crossing writing, but also just the opposite: Makar's writing turns Varvara into a *consumable*, into a text. She not only appears as a character in his writing, but is herself rendered (questionably) legible, a text not only to be read, but to be read-out, to be exhausted. *Poor Folk* hinges on the reader making the same realization about Makar's misreading of texts as of the other [text] he reads: Varvara herself.

Poor Folk's first letter reveals this process at work. In the novel's first paragraph, Makar Devushkin excitedly writes to Varvara that she has preternaturally understood what his "heart wanted," that she had correctly divined his "hints" to her that she should fold back the curtain of her window, and that she then showed herself at the now-open window, clearly thinking of him:

So you really did understand what it was I wanted, what my little heart wanted! I see the corner of the curtain at your window is folded back and attached to the pot of balsam in just exactly the way I was hinting to you that time; and straight away it seemed to me that your little face appeared for a moment at the window too, and that you too were looking in my direction from your little room, that you too were thinking of me.

Так вы-таки поняли, чего мне хотелось, чего сердчишку моему хотелось! Вижу, уголочек занавески у окна вашего загнут и прицеплен к горшку с бальзаминном, точнехонько так, как я вам тогда намекал; тут же показалось мне, что и личико ваше мелькнуло у окна, что и вы ко мне из комнатки вашей смотрели, что и вы обо мне думали. И как же мне досадно было, голубчик мой, что милovidного личика-то вашего я не мог разглядеть хорошенько! (1:13)

Thanks to the novel's organizing frame—the work of the hand of the implied author that has collected these letters in this order, titling them *Poor Folk* and appending an epigraph—the reader is immediately made aware that they have no one to trust on this matter but Makar Devushkin, the subjective first-person character-narrator, whose letters are clearly flooded with an anxiety oriented towards their reception. Because our access to the letters starts here, *Poor Folk* immediately casts a spotlight on the reader's inability to confirm Makar's assertions; these "hints" he recalls may be as imaginary as the meaning behind the drawn curtain. Indeed, Makar assigns self-confirming meaning to Varvara's gestures, making of them a system of signs between the two of them, an idiolect that has explicit meaning that all-too-conveniently simply confirms his own desires.

The novel asks the attentive reader already to take notice of the stakes of Makar's potential misreading, as at the end of this first letter he even notes that, despite all of this secret signaling (through the courtyard), he still cannot even see her face (1:13). Nevertheless, Makar writes that it seems like Varvara was gesturing at him, addressing him (1:14) and then maps out an entire secret grammar for these gestures and what they mean:

If you lower the curtain, that means, 'Goodbye, Makar Alekseevich, it's time for bed!' If you raise it, that means, 'Good morning, Makar Alkseevich, how did you sleep?' or, 'How's your health, Makar Alekseevich? So far as I'm concerned, thank God, I'm healthy and well!'

Подымете – значит, с добрым утром, Макар Алексеевич, каково-то вы спали, или: каково-то вы в вашем здоровье, Макар Алексеевич? Что же до меня касается, то я, слава творцу, здорова и благополучна! (1:14).

Thanks to this special argot between the two of them, the novel almost short-circuits before it even begins, as the code Makar reads into the position of Varvara’s curtains means “we don’t even need letters!” [и писем не нужно!] (1:14).

Here Makar narrates a story between and about the two of them, casting himself above Varvara by dint of his ability to discern, read, and render transparent her intentions. However, the novel makes us immediately aware that Makar is punching above his weight, exceeding the boundaries of the first-person character-narrator by making of Varvara’s interior a known quantity, a transparent object, an interpretable system of signs to be read out in the position of a curtain (otherwise, of course, a device for obscuring, rather than revealing). Varvara dismantles the entirety of his code by casually noting: “I didn’t even think about the curtain; it must have got hooked up by itself when I was rearranging the pots; there you are!” [Про занавеску и не думала; она, верно, сама зацепилась, когда я горшки переставляла; вот вам!] (1:18). Thanks to Varvara’s dismissal, Makar is put back into his place across the courtyard, narratively speaking. His story is rejected, and his misreading made known.

Throughout the novel, however, Makar Devushkin assiduously defends the superior narrative position he first attempts to achieve in this first letter. He insulates himself from all who would narrate his story differently, or who would cast him as anything other than as Varvara’s watchful protector. She is the text to be read, to be consumed, and he is her only accurate close reader. He guards his superior narrative position jealously, constantly in search of more privileged knowledge about her. Before beginning the inset story about her past life and experiences with Pokrovsky, for example, Varvara notes how impatient Makar has been to read it, and gain more information about her; she later notes that Makar has, through a similar mechanism of reading, attempted to access her interiority and feel her feelings: “Yesterday you kept looking into my eyes *to read in them what I was feeling*, and you were enraptured by my delight” [Вчера вы так и смотрели мне в глаза, чтоб прочитать в них то, что я чувствую, и восхищались восторгом моим] (1:46, emphasis mine). This extends to other characters, too: Makar even admits to having followed a fellow clerk home to learn more about his life, and to have spied on an argument between two other co-workers, in just the same way he will later fear the narrator of “The Overcoat” might do to him (1:67).

In a playful moment, the novel again points to the paradoxical stakes behind Makar’s readings: Makar posits in the letter of August 1 that the problem of being thoughtlessly rendered in someone else’s story, of being gossiped or written about, of being impoverished by being reduced to a character or a trope, is the primary problem faced by poor folk (1:68), notably the only appearance of the full titular phrase in the novel. Makar’s fear is made manifest as he realizes in horror that his nosy neighbor has told everyone in his office about his relationship with Varvara, but this pales in comparison to Rataziaev’s “vile design” of rendering Varvara and Makar as literary characters, and putting them in a satire [но всё же это ничто перед гнусным намерением Ратазиева нас с вами в литературу свою поместить и в тонкой сатире нас описать] (1:70). In this playful moment, *Poor Folk* hints at its own possible diegetic authorship: might Rataziaev be the novel’s frame narrator?

He certainly serves at least as a *shadow* frame narrator, a competing narrative authority threatening Makar’s, and threatening him precisely with *authorship*; Makar fears that Rataziaev

will, in turning him into the character of some future fiction, cast him negatively in the narrative of his relationship with Varvara, as when, in the letter of August 11, Makar bemoans that he has earned the nickname “Lovelace” at the office, after Samuel Richardson’s aristocratic libertine.²⁵ However, Rataziaev’s may be more than just an empty threat; in what I have called the novel’s ironizing, self-effacing stance, *Poor Folk*—just as it invites the reader to question the unquestioned praise of all things literary, given Makar’s inclinations—here suggests the possibly impure motive of its own unseen organizing hand (which has assembled and ordered these private letters, likely against the wishes of its protagonist-narrators; has appended an epigraph that derides literature; and has even titled the resulting collection *Poor Folk*, a quote directly—and only—citing Makar’s *fears of being narrated*).

Makar Devushkin’s greatest anxieties cohere around his position as a first-person character-narrator, ever in search of more privileged knowledge, ever striving for a superior narrative position. He fears losing control over his little love-story, where his character Varvara’s mind is open to him, and her gestures entirely parsable by him alone; he jealously guards this position, rejects the narrativizing of other characters (and potential narrators), and is mortified at the thought that others, too, might be privy to his privileged knowledge: as he realizes in horror about the people in his apartment, “they know everything!” [они теперь всё знают, обо всем известны, и об вас, родная моя, знают, и обо всем, что ни есть у вас, обо всем знают!] (1:79).

Makar’s fears also belie a willful ignorance of his own position, and limn the stakes of the novel’s narrative: knowing “everything down to the last detail”—his fear of being found out, of being pointed to by the neighbors from the courtyard—is, after all, his *own* goal with Varvara, just as it is the inevitable result of *Poor Folk* itself. While he fears the violation of his and Varvara’s privacy, and while he finds the thought of being rendered as a character in another’s narrative greatly disturbing, he spends his own days peering at her through his window, and already constantly renders her as a character in his own narratives, even making her intentions legible in the movement of the curtains that frame his view. *Poor Folk*, in constantly drawing attention to the consequences of Makar’s misreadings, makes us aware anew of our own.

V. Misreading texts as others

Through the contradictions of Makar’s letters, *Poor Folk* highlights what is at stake when narrators attempt to unveil “everything down to the last detail.” The subjective, first-person narration of character-narrators, like Makar Devushkin, lacks the authoritative privilege of omniscience. However, in striving for it anyway, Makar turns his letters into a site of self-exposure, revealing his desires in his attempt to demonstrate his knowledge of Varvara’s.²⁶ Makar’s letters straddle the divide between private and public, between omniscience and limitation, between what’s behind the window-curtain and what’s out in the courtyard. And yet, despite the prevalent over-reaching and misreading of Makar’s own letters, these very concerns

²⁵ Joseph Frank, contrariwise, sees this comparison as an invitation to the reader to compare Devushkin with his literary antecedent, by which “Dostoevsky exhibits the moral preeminence of the humble clerk over the brilliant but selfish and destructive aristocrat.” Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt*, 150. I instead side with Carol Apollonio in suggesting that we are meant to take this comparison at face value.

²⁶ Martinsen—in examining how the “authorially supplied surplus of vision of Dostoevsky’s texts reveals a gap between the narrative abilities of character-narrators and author”—sees this process of self-exposure at work throughout Dostoevsky’s narratives as a function of narrative voice. Martinsen, *Surprised by Shame*, 12.

still greatly upset him when he encounters them on the page, in the narratives of the writers that Varvara sends him.

Makar embraces Pushkin's short story "The Stationmaster" [Станционный смотритель], which he reads from the collection *Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin* [Повести покойного Ивана Петровича Белкина, 1831] that Varvara sends him. He feels his entire life is laid out on the page (1:59), and strongly identifies with the title character, who drinks himself to death after losing his daughter to a rich suitor. While his sympathetic reading seems to reflect his understanding of his relationship with Varvara Alekseevna, it is of course superficial and aesthetically flawed, and he misses entirely the tale's parodic intent and ironic stance. As Rebecca Epstein Matveyev notes, "central to a reading of 'The Stationmaster' is the realization that Vyryin perishes not because Dunya is seduced, but because the bereft father assumes that she must inevitably be cruelly abandoned. Unfortunately, his viewpoint never converges with his daughter's reality."²⁷ Failing to grasp the central irony that Vyryin's daughter Dunya has bettered herself substantially by her marriage, Makar Devushkin instead superimposes himself onto the pathetic titular character, and his reading of Dunya onto Varvara. He later relays to Varvara Rataziaev's dismissal of Pushkin, who tells him that the tale is all very old fashioned, and that books even have pictures now (1:60).

Poor Folk again draws our attention to the consequences of misreading; this moment, however, is also nearly recursively metatextual. We recognize that Makar's identification with literary characters is an unaesthetic blunder, and yet the novel has also forced us into a similar position: we once again are reading about reading, invited to contrast our own taste with Makar's, in the same moment that we recognize the naivete of *his* comparing himself with a literary character. The contradictions of this letter continue: Makar feels his interior has somehow been accessed, that his heart has been turned out and put on the page: "but you read this – it's like I wrote it myself, it's as if, to give an example, my own heart, such as it is, he took it, turned it inside out for people and described everything in detail – that's what!" [...а это читаешь, -- словно сам написал, точно это, примерно говоря, мое собственное сердце, какое уж оно там ни есть, взял его, людям выворотил изнанкой, да и описал всё подробно – вот как!] (1:59). Makar's opinion of the story limns the novel's self-referentiality, as well as the stakes of his reading, as here Makar nearly realizes that he is a character in the same moment that he claims status as an author; he has, of course, already been turned "inside out," and had everything intimate about himself "described [...] in detail" (by and in *Poor Folk*), but in opining "it's like I wrote it myself," puts himself—the "пиита" of the unwritten *Poems of Makar Devushkin*—on equal footing with Pushkin.

Literature here—in Makar's understanding of it—seems dangerously to skirt the borders of the violation, gossip, and courtyard-gawking narration of "everything down to the last detail" that Makar ordinarily so fears. "The Stationmaster" escapes his condemnation because he obliviously takes it to be a morality tale immediately applicable to his own life, and by extension to Varvara's. In praising it to her without reservation, he clearly hopes she will take away the same lesson he did: that Pushkin's Dunya—who, in his reading, was wrong to leave her poor father—is not a model to be followed. Makar then extends this reading of Pushkin outward to the rest of his life, mapping out an ethics of reading the other based on his reading of the story. He not only identifies himself with the title character (and Varvara with his daughter), but also maps out the *possibility* of such a plot—and of such hidden interiors—onto other people in his life. He

²⁷ See Matveyev, "Textuality and Intertextuality in Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk*," 537-8.

exclaims that the same story could even be true, perhaps, of the clerk who lives in his building, or of some count that lives on Nevsky Prospect (1:59).

From within its own diegetic world, *Poor Folk* explores the dangers of conflating real people with characters in the diegetic worlds of texts, of making too-easy a continuum between fiction and reality. On the one hand, Makar's reading enriches his life by suggesting the heretofore unknown richness of the lives of others, but on the other hand, it makes of those lives something readable, knowable, and exhaustible. If a character can be known in this way—that is, narratively, thanks to the field of vision of an omniscient narrator, and in terms of their emplottedness in a story—can another person also be so known?²⁸ And what happens when someone who reads as badly and as naively as Makar attempts to read others in this way?

Makar soon grapples with this problem again in his reading of Gogol's short story, "The Overcoat" [Шинель, 1842].²⁹ In the story, the intensely pathetic petty clerk and copyist Akaky Akakievich Basmachkin—a clear antecedent for Devushkin—saves up for a desperately needed new overcoat, overpays, has it stolen, and dies soon thereafter, only to haunt the residents of Petersburg as a ghost, seeking vengeance for the crime that killed him. Makar responds to the twisty, ironic, supernatural story very negatively: he first defends his own position in life, insisting that he has never been caught doing anything wrong (1:62), seemingly conflating Gogol's narrator with Varvara. As with the Pushkin character before, here again Makar identifies wholesale with the hero of a story, but now he also objects to the narrative means of supplying access to that character's interior life.

The same conflation that allows Makar to sympathize with Samson Vyrin causes him to vehemently reject the narrative situation of "The Overcoat," and to decry its narrative voice as that of an unwelcome, judgmental spy. He bemoans that he—like Akaky Akakievich, who takes extreme measures to save money—lives in his corner, sometimes tiptoes in the rain so as to not ruin his shoes, and sometimes goes without tea, but still should not fear the imposition of such a narrator's gaze into his life. He wonders if he, too, is meant to go around spying on people like this: "And what, do I look into everyone's mouths, saying, 'What's that he's chewing?'" [Да разве я смотрю в рот каждому, что, дескать, какой он там кусок жуёт?] (1:62). He then takes over the role of the narrator that he so despises, constructing his own butchered and comically nonsensical version of the story, in which Akaky recovers his lost overcoat, is given a raise, earns the respect of his peers, and does not die (1:63). His final word on the story reverses his position somewhat, as he seems to come around to the character's fictionality: "I mean, it's an

²⁸ As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, the ethics of this continuum has been a point of contention for scholars of narrative ethics. In *Love's Knowledge*, Martha Nussbaum locates the value of fiction in its construction of ethical test cases, against which we as readers can judge ourselves and our own moral reactions to the situations modelled by characters on the page. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Candace Vogler argues not only that the limits of possible human knowledge preclude a responsible adaptation of our means of knowing literary characters to real-world ethical situations, but also that our self-understanding hinges on this very distinction: we are ungraspable and unknowable only in contradistinction to characters, about whom we *can* know everything.

²⁹ The centrality of this Gogol story, as well as Makar's reading of it, to *Poor Folk* has been extensively explored, notably by Victor Terras, who notes the double-edged sword of Makar's reading, as he insists that he overlaps with Akaky Akakievich just as Dostoevsky begins to drop hints that distinguish Makar from Gogol's character. Terras, *The Young Dostoevsky*, 245. See also V. Vinogradov, who considers the implications of Makar Devushkin's rewriting of Gogol's story in "Shkola sentimental'nogo naturalizma (roman Dostoevskogo Bednye liudi na fone literaturnoi evoliutsii 40-x godov)", in *Izbrannye trudy* (M: Nauka, 1976), 174.

ill-intentioned little book, Varenka; it's simply unrealistic, because it couldn't be the case that such a clerk existed. And I mean, after something like that you've got to make a complaint, Varenka, a formal complaint" [Да ведь это злонамеренная книжка, Варенька; это просто неправдоподобно, потому что и случиться не может, чтобы был такой чиновник. Да ведь после такого надо жаловаться, Варенька, формально жаловаться.] (1:63). This last objection, of course, both ignores the story's supernatural ending, and also unwittingly rehearses its opening line, which shies away from naming the specific department in which Akaky works for fear of official complaints and reprisals generated by just such a naïve readership: "Nowadays every private individual considers the whole of society insulted in his person." [Теперь уже всякой частный человек считает в лице своем оскорбленным всё общество.]³⁰

A tension of narrative voice inheres in Makar Devushkin's main objections to the Pushkin and Gogol stories. His naïve reading posits the real existence not only of Gogol's characters, but of his *narrator* as well, in the process conflating the specialized, privileged knowledge of omniscience with a grounding in reality that it cannot have: as with Rataziaev before, here Makar fears once again that he, too, may be followed around by a judgmental narrator, only to have his apartment and lifestyle derided. His objection to Varvara that such a clerk as Akaky cannot really exist belies the larger problem underwriting his reading: that actually such a *narrator*—who spies and reports on the inner lives of people without difficulty—cannot exist. Makar Devushkin's rejection of this narrator's knowledge stages a clash of two opposed narrative voices: Makar, the limited first-person narrator of his own letters, which are informed by his voyeuristic misreading of Varvara, is appalled by the conventions of voyeurism employed by the third-person, omniscient narrative he *also* misreads. This negative reaction, however, also taps into a hypocritical vein of Makar's own self-identity, for he actively strives to be just such a narrator, and takes up the mantle of rewriting the story himself. In doing so, Makar Devushkin again draws our attention to the ethics of his own gaze, which has all along been reductively fixing Varvara as the emplotted and knowable character that he so fears becoming himself.

VI. The value of reading

Makar Devushkin's rejection of the Gogol story and embrace of the Pushkin one before it form flip sides of the same narrative coin. Makar's misreadings invite the reader to read between the lines of Makar's happy identification with Samson Vyrin, and to see the implications of his emphatic rejection of the Gogol story,³¹ casting a spotlight both on Makar's desire to cross the courtyard, as well as on its impossibility. His misreading reflects again the novel's ironically self-effacing stance, which has cast doubt on the motives of its potential frame narrator, has paradoxically forced the reader to identify with a character's reading about over-identifying with literary characters, has parodied the conceits of its genre, and has attenuated the assumed value of literature writ large.

Makar's misreading gives shape to the novel's narrative ethics. The epistemological stakes of Makar's attempts to render Varvara a knowable character, possessed of a readable, transparent mind, reveal a possessive and objectifying impulse at work in his role as a narrator, and belie the hypocrisy of his objections to Gogol's spying, voyeuristic narrator. Makar's objections to the fictional stories he misreads once again draw our attention to the ethics not only

³⁰ N. V. Gogol, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 14-kh tomakh*, (M: Izd'stvo AN SSSR, 1938), 3:241.

³¹ Donna Orwin also suggests that the remit to read Makar Devushkin's letters accurately forces us into a position outside them. Orwin, *Consequences of Consciousness* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007), 52.

of his gaze, but also of our own: on the one hand, by Makar Devushkin's reckoning, the reader of *Poor Folk* is, after all, engaged in an intrusive act of eavesdropping, peeking in on the private correspondence of two people, participating in the very activity of spying that so upsets Makar. On the other hand, the novel simultaneously puts its reader in the same position: in being made aware that Makar's readings are naïve, we are also made aware that we are reducing Makar to serving a role in the reaffirmation of our own superiority, where he acts as a mirror for our own readings. In questioning whether Varvara's curtain-movement *may* have been a secret signal—before we know it was not—we are forced to rehearse his effacement of her alterity, and in the end, to echo Makar's question as to the value of reading. Does it “instruct,” does it “strengthen the heart,” or does it—in forcing us to confront the ethics of our gaze as readers—do a third thing, implied but left unspoken in Makar's list of what “they have written in this little book” about that “very good thing?”

Poor Folk is overtly concerned with representing this third effect of reading: its ethical consequences. Indeed, the impoverishing effects of such a narrative voice as Makar's—ever exceeding its field of vision while denying its responsibility, bemoaning the implications of voyeuristic omniscience in the moment of performing it—inheres in the novel from its first lines. The novel's epigraph cites V. F. Odoevsky's tale “The Living Corpse” [Живой мертвец, 1844], which rehearses the unaesthetic interpretation of fiction that would not be out of place for a Makar Devushkin or a Rataziaev, holding storytellers accountable for the perceived uselessness of their narratives.³² The epigraph [slightly mis-]quotes the end of Odoevsky's tale, when its narrator—the dissolute, dishonest civil servant Vasiliï Kuz'mich Aristidov—awakens from a long dream he had taken to be his own death, and curses the storytellers and novelists he holds responsible for feeding his overactive imagination:

Oh, I'm fed up with these storytellers! Rather than write something improving, nice, something that makes you feel good, they insist on digging up all the dirt from under the ground!...They ought to be banned from writing! I mean, whatever is it like: you're reading...and you unwittingly fall into thought – and then all sorts of rubbish comes into your head; truly, I would ban them from writing; I really would ban them altogether.

Ох уж эти мне сказочники! Нет чтобы написать что-нибудь полезное, приятное, усадительное, а то всю подноготную в земле вырывают!.. Вот уж запретил бы им писать! Ну, на что это похоже: читаешь... невольно задумаешься, — а там всякая дребедень и пойдет в голову; право бы, запретил им писать; так-таки просто вовсе бы запретил. (1:13)³³

This quotation could have been lifted from one of Makar Devushkin's letters; the rest of Odoevsky's story, however, serves as a narrative experiment in furnishing privileged knowledge to an otherwise unprivileged narrator.

³² For a full accounting of the connections between Odoevsky and Dostoevsky, who knew each other well, see: E. E. Vishnevskaiia, *V. F. Odoevskii v istorii knizhnoi kul'tury Rossii* (Moscow: Pashkov dom, 2014), and Neil Cornwell's *Odoevsky's four pathways into modern fiction* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2010), *Vladimir Odoevsky and Romantic Poets: Collected Essays* (Providence: Berghahn, 1998), and *The life, times, and milieu of V. F. Odoevsky, 1804-1869* (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1986).

³³ Citations from “The Living Corpse” are taken from V. F. Odoevskii, “Zhivoi mertvets” in *Povesti i rasskazy* (M: Gos. izdat. khud. lit., 1959).

Aristidov, a first-person narrator, has an out-of-body experience and realizes he has turned into a ghost, which leaves him unable to interact with the rest of the world, but still free to observe it. He uses these newfound powers to spy on his office mates and family members from the afterlife, listening in on their conversations to hear what people say about him and how they react when they realize he has died (309). Aristidov is powerless to intervene, however, as he tracks his influence on those he has left behind, and is horrified to see his niece fall into iniquity and be sent to prison, and later his son poison Aristidov's brother, following his father's cold and calculating example. The tale combines many different stylistic registers: Aristidov's first-person recollection of his experience as a ghost shifts to a form of dramatic dialogue, complete with stage directions, once he begins to eavesdrop on the conversations of the living, which then gives way to a third-person, omniscient narrative voice only after Aristidov wakes up.

"The Living Corpse"—with its voyeuristic, unselfaware narrator—prefaces the problematic ethics of Makar Devushkin's misreading of other people. As a narrator, Makar is caught between the poles of the third-person narrative of the end of Odoevsky's tale, and the first-person narrative of its beginning; he is a limited narrator who strives for a more privileged, a more authoritative voice, but who rejects the literary conventions of narrative authority in the process. This tension, central to both the Odoevsky epigraph as well as Makar's letters, is restaged by the naïve aesthetics of Makar's famous misreading of Pushkin and Gogol, which underscores the novel's concern with the ethical consequences of narrative.

Poor Folk is in large part the story of reading the mind of the other, and making it narratively accessible. Just as we track the inconsistencies between Makar Devushkin's desire to read Varvara Alekseevna and his success in doing so, so too do we follow his taste as a reader of fiction, culminating in his naïve rejection of the heterodiegetic narrative of Gogol's and Pushkin's short stories. But Makar's rejection of omniscience (and, in the process, his conflation of the devices typical of third-person narrators with those of first-person narrators) draws our attention to his own narratives, which until this point have effaced Varvara's ability to "mean" outside his ability to "read" her.

However, Varvara Alekseevna is not merely the object of a narrativizing gaze, but is also the agent of her own. Education, the production of narrative, and the giving and reading of books all feature heavily in her letters as well; for Varvara, too, reading narrative dovetails with knowing the other. She defines the distance that separates her from her beloved, poor tutor Pokrovsky as a function of unread books: "He was educated, and I was stupid and hadn't read anything, not one book" [Он был учен, а я была глупа и ничего не знала, ничего не читала, ни одной книги]. She desperately wants to know him better, to change his opinion of her, and plans to do so by throwing herself into reading everything *he* has read:

I suddenly wanted to read his books, and I there and then resolved to do so, to the very last one, and as quickly as possible. I do not know, perhaps I thought that by learning everything that he knew I would be more worthy of his friendship.

Мне захотелось, и я тут же решила прочесть его книги, все до одной, и как можно скорее. Не знаю, может быть, я думала, что, научившись всему, что он знал, буду достойнее его дружбы (1:36).

For Varvara as for Makar, divining literary tastes bleeds into accessing the hidden interiority of the object of their desire, as reading begets knowing.

For old Zakhar Petrovich Pokrovsky, Pokrovsky's drunk, cuckolded step-father that Varvara befriends, the same economy holds true: the acquisition and giving of the right books lays the groundwork for composing the right narrative about himself, as well as about his son. Like Makar, Old Pokrovsky has difficulty expressing himself, and Varvara finds him in a particularly bad state of confusion when trying to divine what book to purchase for his son's birthday: "The old man always expressed himself oddly, and now, on top of everything, he was in the most dreadful confusion" [Старик и всегда смешно изъяснялся, а теперь вдобавок был в ужаснейшем замешательстве] (1:41). She finds him looking at "dreadful rubbish" [ужасные пустяки] but of this he will not be convinced, and—in a moment that echoes Makar once again—is frustrated to tears when he cannot tell apart the good books from the bad, left only to jealously turn over in his hands the books he wants, but cannot afford to have: "he did not even ask the prices of the big books, but just looked at them enviously from time to time, fingered the pages, turned them in his hands and put them back in their places again." [...уж он к большим книгам и не приценивался, а так только завистливо на них посматривал, перебирал пальцами листочки, вертел в руках и опять их ставил на место] (1:41).

Varvara has set out to buy the complete collected works of Pushkin to give to her beloved tutor, and is helped in the purchase by Old Pokrovsky, but in an act of selfless kindness, she lets him take credit not just for one book, but for the entire gift (1:41-42). Old Pokrovsky's pockets overflow with the precious Pushkin volumes, which he presents to his son as (false) proof of his sobriety and ability to save money, writing himself into a narrative that he believes his son wants to hear, an intratextual echo of Makar Devushkin's daydream about being published. After Pokrovsky dies, however, and Anna Fyodorovna attempts to take as payment all of Pokrovsky's books, the book-based joy of the preceding scenes is inverted. Varvara notes that, during the funeral procession for his son, the pathetic and grief-stricken Old Pokrovsky loses the volumes he had so jealously guarded a few pages before: "Books fell out of all his pockets; there was some huge book in his arms to which he held on tight. [...] Books were continually falling out of his pockets into the mud." [Из всех карманов торчали книги; в руках его была какая-то огромная книга, за которую он крепко держался. ... Книги поминутно падали у него из карманов в грязь] (1:45).

This inset story that Varvara narrates defines her role as a narrative agent in the novel: she is not only Makar's interlocutor, but his inverted intertext. Her tastes in reading, ability to narrate, and textual goals all echo—and counter—his. She has identifiably good taste, and a discerning eye for fiction, immediately recognizing how poor Rataziaev's prose is, and rejecting the "worthless, horrid little" volumes Makar sends her; her tastes seem to have been informed instead by the influence of Pokrovsky. When setting herself the task of becoming closer to him, she attempts to bridge the gap between them by *reading his narratives*, leafing through the books on his shelf, before accidentally breaking it; an ensuing confrontation about the books brings the two closer.

In attempting to achieve the same end, however, Makar, as we have seen, casts himself as Varvara's *narrative superior*, attempting to narrate her feelings *to her*. For Varvara, the giving of books works *in the service of the other*; she encourages Old Pokrovsky to take credit for the Pushkin that *she* has bought for Pokrovsky. Makar, contrariwise, sends her texts to burnish his own self-image: the racy Rataziaev passages he copies out in his opinion sing the literary praises of *his* neighbor, while *The Poems of Makar Devushkin* are the idle product of a narcissistic

daydream, which he imagines will induce Varvara to join the crowd of fans mobbing him on Nevsky Prospect. When Varvara sends him texts, Makar rejects them; here *Poor Folk* renders Makar's unaesthetic reading of "The Stationmaster" all the more pathetic. On the one hand, he could not have missed the mark more when attempting "to guess at" Varvara's literary taste; on the other, the novel suggests that the edition of *Tales of Belkin* Varvara has sent Makar may be one of the very volumes dropped from the pockets of Old Pokrovsky. Has Varvara again put Makar back in his place, responding to his courtyard- (and line-) crossing advances, curtain-reading, and racy Rataziaev passages by sending him the cast-off remnant of an earlier affair?

In Varvara's letters as in Makar's, then, the acts of reading, constructing narrative, and giving books all dovetail with knowing the mind of the other. Carol Apollonio suggests that Varvara's choice is ultimately between literature and its absence,³⁴ between Makar Devushkin, the aspiring reader and writer, and Bykov, whose feelings about novel-reading harken back to early Russian objections to the form.³⁵ On the one hand, as we have seen, Makar may not be Varvara's antidote to Bykov; indeed, Varvara may be the antidote to *Makar*.

On the other hand, while Bykov represents everything that stands outside the novel—his former intimate relationship with Varvara, a matter of physical presence, remains ill-defined in the novel—is he wrong? He certainly misreads Varvara's face after his proposal of a marriage of convenience, mistaking her surprised tears for gratitude, but to her insistence that Makar cannot be bought off with money, he scoffs at Varvara "that that was all nonsense, that that was all just novels, that I was still young and read poetry, that novels are the ruination of young girls, that books only do damage to morality and that he couldn't bear any books" [он сказал мне, что всё вздор, что всё это романы, что я еще молода и стихи читаю, что романы губят молодых девушек, что книги только нравственность портят и что он терпеть не может никаких книг...] (1:100). His antiquated rejection of fiction and his fear of potentially ruined moralities aside, his recognition of Varvara's sentiment as inherently *novelistic*—«всё это романы»—is not a misstep; indeed, her entire relationship to Makar Devushkin *has* been predicated on narrative, and filtered through novels both given and received.

Her letters are just as shot-through with a concern for narratives, book-giving, and reading as are Makar's; as such, her choice appears to be less between literature and its absence,

³⁴ Carol Apollonio suggests that, although Makar Devushkin despises the "Lovelace" nickname Rataziaev gives him, he does everything to deserve it, since his entire relationship to Varvara Alekseevna is determined not by any selflessness or sense of devotion, but by his suitor-like desire for her. Apollonio, *Dostoevsky's Secrets*, 18-26. Although Apollonio suggests that this leaves Makar Devushkin as the literary alternative to Bykov for Varvara Alekseevna, I will argue that her plotline is informed by exactly the same kind of reading that underwrites Makar's.

³⁵ Maarten Fraanje outlines how the epistolary novel in particular formed a "transitional zone" in Russian society, a meeting point between the individual and society, and a dangerous space of potential emotional or moral corruption in the minds of contemporary critics. Fraanje notes that in his 1748 *Риторика*, Lomonosov bemoans how the novel is to be blamed for people's persistence in animal passions (закоснение в ... плотских страстях), while in his 1759 "Letter on the Reading of Novels," Aleksandr Sumarokov accuses the novel of representing «скотския изображения» and notes: «Чтение Романов не может назваться препровождением времени; оно погубление времени... Романы писанныя невежами читателей научают притворному и базобразному складу, и отводит от естественнаго». In 1766, Catherine II's government dispersed Ivan Betskoi's *Kratkoe nastavlenie*, which advises that love novels be withheld from the young to prevent their moral corruption. See Fraanje, *The Epistolary Novel in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 2001), 10-11 and Sumarokov, *Polnoe Sobranie vsekh sochinenii v stikhakh i proze* (M: 1781), 4:371-72.

as between different modes of the same literary problem.³⁶ Bykov, Makar's rival for Varvara's hand in marriage, vanquishes his competition comically quickly and imposes his will on Varvara physically; in this, however, he is not so far off from Makar Devushkin, who has already attempted this very task *narratively*. In this way, the novel cuts short any readerly expectations of sentimental plot contrivances to do with rivalry, and instead presents Bykov and Makar as flip-sides of the same coin, inviting the reader to attend to the ethical consequences of Makar's narrativizing gaze that rehearses, strives for, but ultimately loses out to Bykov's physical domination of the same pursued object.

Poor Folk leaves the choice up to Varvara Alekseevna, who soundly rejects Makar Devushkin, both as a lover and as a narrator. In a contemporary review of the novel, Dostoevsky's friend Valerian Maikov even suggested that Varvara probably finds the weight of Makar Devushkin's attentions and affections to be an onerous burden, at last lifted when she can leave with Bykov.³⁷ In so doing, she also escapes from the weight of his attempts to narratively dominate her, to write out what she is thinking, to make her mind transparent, and to guard his supposedly intimate knowledge of her interior. She is then not so much snatched from the arms of a caring friend and whisked-off into a loveless marriage, as she is able to find a way out of a narrative situation in which she is rendered as a character to Makar's narrator.

Varvara wholly rejects this position in her final letter: Makar writes to Varvara about having found the beginnings of an unfinished letter addressed to him in her empty apartment (1:105).³⁸ In her final letter, Varvara leaves him with the remit to imagine that unfinished letter as a dialogic blank check, inviting him to write for himself what he would have her do, or what he would have her say:

“I'm leaving you the book, the tambour, the letter I started; whenever you look at these lines I began, in your thoughts read everything you'd like to hear or read from me, everything I might have written you; and what I might have written now!”

Оставляю вам книжку, пядьцы, начатое письмо; когда будете смотреть на эти начатые строчки, то мыслями читайте дальше всё, что бы хотелось вам услышать или прочесть от меня, всё, что я ни написала бы вам; а чего бы я ни написала теперь! (1:105)

Makar has finally crossed the courtyard and found himself in Varvara's bedroom, but is left with a blank letter and a hollow victory; he wins total narrative control over his character Varvara, but

³⁶ Recent scholarly revision of Varenka's function in the novel includes Carol Apollonio's aforementioned monograph, as well as John Lyle's article “Makar Devushkin as Eligible Bachelor? A reexamination of Varenka's Relationship with Devushkin in Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk*,” in *SEEJ*, Vol. 56, no. 3 (Fall 2012), pp. 347-76, which recasts Varenka into a potentially more active role by considering Makar as a viable alternative to Bykov.

³⁷ See V. Maikov, *Kriticheskie opyty 1845-1847* (SPb, 1891). Frank suggests that this review bears the marks of Dostoevsky's own hand, perhaps thanks to close conversations about the novel between the two friends. Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt*, 141.

³⁸ J. G. Altman notes that in this way, Dostoevsky is playing off the finished against the unfinished, using the unfinished letter to finish his novel. See Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus, Ohio State UP, 1982), 158-59.

at the expense of the real Varvara's actual presence. She submits to him narratively, by escaping from his narrativizing gaze physically.

In his last, undated, perhaps unsent and unreceived letter, Makar Devushkin once again maps more self-confirming meaning onto the tear spots that stain the page:

“I’ve just now received the letter from you all spotted with tears. That means you don’t want to go; that means you’re being carried off forcibly, that means you feel sorry for me, that means you love me!”

Вот я от вас письмо сейчас получил, всё слезами закапанное. Стало быть, вам не хочется ехать; стало быть, вас насильно увозят, стало быть, вам жаль меня, стало быть, вы меня любите!

This final narrativizing, this final act of assigning to her signs the signals he wants them to carry, goes unanswered, just as his initial reading of her curtains went unconfirmed.

A concern with the consequences of privileged knowledge—the intimate, penetrating ability to “read” characters, to make minds transparent—inheres in *Poor Folk* from its opening lines. But, as Carol de Dobay Rifelj writes: “For characters who seek complete knowledge about the other, the necessary incompleteness of narrative is maddening.”³⁹ Countering Martha Nussbaum’s suggestion that the rendering of life as narrative (itself a tactic she believes is taught by novel-reading) reinforces one’s ability to empathize, Galen Strawson argues that “narrative self-articulation” actually promotes “an ideal of control and self-awareness in human life that is mistaken and potentially pernicious.”⁴⁰ *Poor Folk* models this reductive narrative self-articulation by both undercutting itself and cross-contaminating reading and knowing, as staged by the characters who interpret each other: just as Makar Devushkin reads and knows Pushkin and Gogol, so too does he read and (try to) know Varvara Alekseevna, in the process attempting narratively what Bykov succeeds in achieving physically. In this way, the novel stages the danger inherent in such impoverishing narrativizing, when the object of one’s gaze becomes reduced to a knowable character in one’s story.

Poor Folk is the story of its characters as reader-narrators, of texts as well as of each other. Beyond its overt focus on narrative, the novel becomes, as Carol Apollonio convincingly writes, a story “about the body’s encounter with the book” (18). It further becomes, I would argue, the oxymoronic story of the body’s sublation by the book: Makar’s narrative misreading (“I already know you’re thinking about me over there”) attempts the very courtyard-crossing voyeurism that so upsets him elsewhere (“What happens then, when they know everything down to the last detail!”), a moment of violation couched as a gesture at intimacy. The antinomies of Makar’s misreadings form the novel’s narrative ethics, which makes a show of representing how the process of reading and writing about fictional, narrative texts bleeds freely—and problematically—into the act of reading and writing about other, real people. The novel hinges on our making the same realization about Makar’s reading of Varvara as we have about his reading of Pushkin and Gogol, inviting us to question what impoverishes these *Poor Folk* more: the intrusive, outside gaze that Makar so fears, or his own. In the process, we are confronted with

³⁹ de Dobay Rifelj, *Reading the Other*, 21.

⁴⁰ Strawson, “Against Narrativity,” 447.

the ethical violation inherent to the act of reading these private letters, which now reach an end in one final reminder of Makar's narcissistic project: "to whom will I send my letters?" (1:108).

VII. "That's the horror of it all: I understand everything!"

Makar's fear that he will lose his audience finds its echo in the anxiously repeated question of the pawnbroker narrator of "The Meek One," who asks as he stands over the corpse of his wife: "But they will take her away tomorrow and—how can I stay here alone?" (24:6). "The Meek One" takes up and grotesquely magnifies the narrative-ethical concerns first explored in *Poor Folk*, for the narrativizing hero is now left not with a blank page on his writing table, but a dead body on his card table.

"That's the horrible part: I understand everything!" [В том-то и весь ужас мой, что я всё понимаю!] (24:6), bemoans the pawnbroker as he recalls the events leading up to his wife's suicide, relegating the story of her life to a footnote in the story of his questionable ability to read, to know, and to narrate it reliably. The true "horror" of it all, he declares, is that he understands everything so well; this is truer than he realizes, however, and "The Meek One" plays with the reader's ironic realization of this phrase's alternate connotations: the horror not of his knowing, but *produced* by his knowing. Dominated by her husband's paraleptic narrative and reduced to a nearly voiceless character in his story (as well as a powerless agent in their marriage), the pawnbroker's wife of "The Meek One" ultimately wrests herself free of him—both as husband and as narrator—by escaping his control. Before the story's frame-narrative begins, she jumps out of her bedroom window and commits suicide, rendering herself physically what her husband has always already rendered her discursively: a mute, lifeless body. In this way "The Meek One" restages the reductive dangers of the overly confident gaze of the omniscient character-narrator as the tragic counter-point to the plot of *Poor Folk*, taking up the concerns of Dostoevsky's first novel and magnifying them to a grotesque degree, again inviting the reader to interrogate the ethical stakes at work behind its narrative situation.

"The Meek One" foregrounds its overt concern with parepsis in its opening lines. The preface to the story, which was published in the November 1876 edition of *A Writer's Diary* [Дневник писателя], comments on the fantastical nature of the sort of knowledge produced by its own narrative situation. Dostoevsky invites the reader to imagine a hypothetical focalizer,⁴¹ a stenographer who somehow has access to our hero's "psychological sequence" [психологический порядок] as he tries to bring his thoughts to a point, occasionally addressing the invisible listener in the process (24:6). Dostoevsky compares this situation—which gives the story its self-described "subcurrent of fantasy"—to the paraleptic narrative of Hugo's "The last Day of a Condemned Man" ["Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné", 1829], whose narrator keeps an impossible diary up to the minute of his own death.

The discourse of the unnamed narrator of "The Meek One" is heavily marked by parenthetical, self-aware references to his own knowledge, which he gained at some point during the gap between his story (about meeting and marrying his wife) and its narration (next to her now-dead body). When narrating his impressions on first meeting her, for example, his guess as

⁴¹ David Herman suggests this definition of hypothetical witnesses of events in his re-examination of Genette's categories of narrative mood using the categories of analysis of possible world semantics, as he redefines Genette's "focalization" as a field dispersed across varying levels of "epistemic modality," relating to words seeing, believing, and speculation in narrative situations. See Herman, "Hypothetical Focalization," *Narrative*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Oct. 1994), 234-36.

to her age (about fourteen) is immediately interrupted by the assertion of information he was later to have found out (she was exactly fifteen years and nine months old).⁴² These pendulum-swings back and forth, between guessing and then revising those guesses with the certainty of foreknowledge, are also themselves interrupted by defensive assertions: “I remember it, I haven’t forgotten anything!” [Помню, ничего не забыл!] (24:10).

As many have noted, this narrative situation, marked by modality and uncertainty, and punctuated by paraleptic assertions of certain knowledge, soon lead the reader to question the reliability of this narrator. M. M. Bakhtin famously comments on the unique field of vision possessed by the pawnbroker, who, in a series of dialogues with himself, must come to an understanding of the events leading up to his wife’s death only through his own self-utterance, a “dialogic” relationship between author and hero that Bakhtin ultimately interprets as evidence of Dostoevsky’s radically new discourse based around an ethical relationship towards the other.⁴³ L. Michael O’Toole catalogues the complex web of these dialogues threaded throughout the story, between the hero and his wife, social mores, his own chaotic thoughts, and his judging readers. The wife’s dead body, he argues, participates in this dialogue by providing a silent running commentary.⁴⁴ Harriet Murav, however, counters both Bakhtin and O’Toole, noting that the hero’s interactions with his wife are more often than not remarkably *monologic*, as a dead body cannot truly participate in dialogue; this Murav takes as her point of departure when she interrogates the status of female victimhood at the hands of male tormentors in Dostoevsky’s narrative in general.⁴⁵

I will expand on this revised reading of “The Meek One” to add that it is itself the revision and expansion of the thematic tensions first explored in *Poor Folk*, once again in a narrative situation that foregrounds the problematic consequences of over-stepping, misreading character-narrators. The narrator’s discourse, so marked by and famous for what Ruediger Heinze terms “local” paralepsis (the flitting back and forth between the narrating-I of *discours* and the experiencing-I of *histoire*, between modality and certainty, symptomatic of narrators who comment on their past knowledge, or lack thereof), also strays into “global” paralepsis, narrated from an inaccessible point, and marked by an excess of impossible-to-naturalize knowledge.⁴⁶ Throughout “The Meek One,” the narrator drifts from *interpreting* his wife’s interior to *asserting* his access to and understanding of it directly, just as he follows up guesses as to her age with precise facts. His narrative increasingly makes of her interior at first a knowable, and later a totally *known* quantity, rendering her a flat character in his (unreliably) omniscient narrative.

The narrator’s entire relationship to his wife is paraleptic, defined by his attempts to secure his superior narrative position over (as well as to gain totalizing knowledge of) her. They begin with a casual remark he makes after recounting their first meeting, when he notes that he “cannot help thinking that she must have been the same with all strangers, and to her of course I was not different from anyone else” [я думаю, и со всеми чужими была такая же, а я,

⁴² L. Michael O’Toole annotates this narrator’s slipping grasp on reality as a function of his heavy reliance on unspecified adverbs of time and modal speech, contrasted with his otherwise at times very firm grasp on time and facts about dates in the story. O’Toole, *Structure, Style, and Interpretation in the Russian Short Story* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982), 44-46.

⁴³ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 55-56, 154, 239.

⁴⁴ O’Toole, *Structure, Style, and Interpretation*, 42-43.

⁴⁵ Harriet Murav, “Reading Woman in Dostoevsky,” in *A Plot of Her Own: The Female Protagonist in Russian Literature*, ed. Sona Stephan Hoisington (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1995), 45-47.

⁴⁶ See Ruidiger Heinze, “Violations of Mimetic Epistemology,” 289-90.

разумеется, ей был всё равно что тот, что другой] (24:6). Within the space of this sentence, the pawnbroker's speculation as to her general characteristics with other people (entirely hypothesized, as he has not observed them) bleeds into his casually direct irruption into her interior, confidently declaring what *her* impression was of *him*.

His self-positioning as her narrative superior continues, as he attempts to learn more about her; from Luker'ia, his wife's former maid, he learns «прежнюю подноготную», the same salacious out-from-under-the-fingernail secrets that Odоеvskii's Aristidov bemoans in *Poor Folk's* epigraph, no less (24:10). He keeps constant watch on his wife, often by having Luker'ia spy on her and report back to him (24:30), and sometimes by eavesdropping himself, as when he listens in from behind an adjoining room on his wife's meeting with Efimovich, his former regiment-mate (24:18). Even the narrator's most ideal fantasy version of their possible future, which he soliloquizes to her corpse at the story's end as the happy, open marriage they might have had together if only she had not killed herself—“You would walk with him and laugh, and I would watch you from the other side of the street...” [Ты бы шла с ним и смеялась, а я бы смотрел с другой стороны улицы...] (24:35)—asserts that he would have been fine had she met and fallen in love with someone else, so long as he could carry on surveilling her from a distance.

In “The Meek One” as in *Poor Folk*, we are made acutely aware of a male narrator's over-stepping, misreading of the female object of his gaze. The narrator reads his wife's face for intimate knowledge of her thoughts, here noticing “fleeting looks” that play out on her face [беглую складку в лице] (24:12), there declaring that “she had such a serious look on her face that even then I might have read it!” [и такое у ней было серьезное личико, такое – что уж тогда бы я мог прочесть!] (24:12). At first his forays into omniscience begin by suggesting her train of thought by way of modal locutions and interpretive speculation, paying careful attention to what her expressions “seem” to say; while waiting for her response to his marriage proposal, he considers what *might* be going through her mind:

Do you know, while she was standing there by the gate, pondering whether to say *yes* to me, and I was wondering why she was taking such a long time over it, do you know that she may even have had some such thought as this...

Знаете, ведь у ней, когда она тогда у ворот стояла задумавшись, чтоб сказать мне «да», а я удивлялся, знаете ли, что у ней могла быть даже такая мысль... (24:12).

These speculations soon turn back into reified assertions of his own importance to the story, though, as the narrator interprets not just what his wife is thinking, but what she is thinking about *him* particularly.

Of his interpretation of *her* interpretation of his character traits, he hypothetically focalizes through her, quoting her imagined inner monologue: “He has some sort of purpose, he wants to show off the strength of his character.” [Цели, дескать, имеет, твердый характер показывает] (24:15). While he watches over her during her recuperation after an illness, he finds it diverting to wonder if they are having the same thoughts: “And I thought that she was doing the same, and found it extremely diverting to try and guess: just what was she thinking of just then?” [Я думал, что и она тоже, и для меня было страшно занимательно угадывать: об чем именно она теперь про себя думает?] (24:23).

This character-narrator's paralectic stabs at omniscience begin to cohere around the same set of repeated problems: his narration of her thoughts results only in confirming some sort of self-reflexive mental isomorphism, a closed loop with no outside referent. He not only assumes he can lay bare her hidden interior, but also finds in that act of laying bare nothing but confirmation of what he already had assumed about the two of them. There can be no outsideness to his monologic, narrativizing gaze. Eventually, this narrator's increasingly paralectic narrative not only puts words in his wife's mouth, but thoughts in her mind. After her response to his quoting Goethe to her, he notes with confidence that she now thought him educated, despite her previous assumptions to the contrary: "What she really wanted to say was: 'I never expected that you were an educated man,' but she didn't say it, though I knew she thought it; I had pleased her enormously." [Ей хотелось сказать: я не ожидала, что вы человек образованный, но она не сказала, зато я знал, что она это подумала; ужасно я угодил ей] (24:9). Not only is this thought attributed to his wife a postulation with no referent outside the narrator's presumptions, but so are both the thought that it allegedly countermands (that is, her subverted expectation that he would not be able to quote Goethe) and the reaction that it supposedly produces (her newfound interest in him); all are the product of the husband's paralectic, narrativizing gaze, and all are both unconfirmed and unconfirmable.

The pawnbroker's assertion of his own narrative superiority over his wife also incudes—akin to Makar Devushkin's rejection of the characterization "Lovelace" and hatred for the idea of others gossiping about his relationship—the intense rejection of the taste of his own medicine. He subverts his wife's attempts to know *him* in the same way that he knows her. While he encourages his wife to tell him all about her childhood and her life, her questions to him are met with stony silence, meant to reinforce his status as an unknowable mystery, a difficult-to-read enigma: "To her transports I replied with silence. Benevolent silence, no doubt, but all the same she soon realized that we were different and that I was an enigma." [На восторги я отвечал молчанием, благосклонным, конечно... но всё же она быстро увидела, что мы разница и что я – загадка. Я а, главное, и бил на загадку!] (24:13).

When his wife later learns about his past and confronts him with the embarrassing details of his ouster from the military, he minces words while silently fuming that she has had the effrontery to assume *any* knowledge about *him*:

And all of a sudden this sixteen-year-old girl collected a whole dossier of the most detailed information about me from all sorts of scoundrels, and she thought she knew everything, while the inner-most mystery remained buried in the breast of this man!

И вдруг эта шестнадцатилетняя нахватала обо мне потом подробностей от подлых людей и думала, что всё знает, а сокровенное между тем оставалось лишь в груди этого человека! (24:14).

By this point in the story, the pawnbroker's assertions have the ring of irony, as for the reader of the "The Meek One," it is the wife who remains a total mystery, and not the pawnbroker. We have total—too much—access to his interiority, while the pawnbroker's wife does not exist outside of his rendering of her, and is denied a voice inside it. The story makes the reader aware of this even at their first meeting, which sees the pawnbroker interrupt his future wife as she is attempting to pawn her things – by putting an advert in *The Voice*. The few words of hers we do encounter are met with derision, as the narrator begins recalling the language of her ad before

simply collapsing it all into a belittling summary: “and so on, and so on...” [и проч., и проч.] (24:6).

VIII. Narrative dueling

The scene of the “duel” between these two characters, a pivotal moment in the story that signals the downward spiral of their relationship and ends the first section, plays out as an aggrandized and violent version of Makar Devushkin reading the position of Varvara Alekseevna’s curtains. This sequence is shot-through with the hypocritical and anxious narrativizing that marks much of Makar’s discourse and most of the narrator’s of “The Meek One”: a paraleptic assumption of omniscience that not only posits the narrator’s ability to read his wife’s mind, but that also imposes onto her mind his own (otherwise unspoken) reading of a set of signs. This two-fold mechanism sets up a kind of false idiolect, the *assumption*, but not the confirmation, of a shared language that exists only in a self-confirming, closed loop.

One day the narrator wakes up to hear his wife moving, and suddenly sees her looming over him with his loaded revolver pointed at his head (24:20). He shuts his eyes again very quickly, and immediately explains this as a function of his reading of *her* probable reading of *his* reading of the situation:

...she certainly could have assumed that I was really asleep and that I had seen nothing, particularly as it is scarcely conceivable that, having seen what I had seen, I should at such a moment have closed my eyes again

--она решительно могла предположить, что я в самом деле сплю и что ничего не видал, тем более что совсем невероятно, увидав то, что я увидел, закрыть в *такое* мгновение опять глаза (24:21).

He further assumes that her interpretation of what must be going through *his* mind must itself be exercising its influence over her readiness to kill him: “If that was so (I felt), if she guessed the truth and knew that I was not asleep, then I had crushed her already by my readiness to accept death, and now her hand might falter.” [В таком случае (почувствовалось мне), если она угадала правду и знает, что я не сплю, то я уже раздавил ее моею готовностью принять смерть и у ней теперь может дрогнуть рука].

He explains victoriously that, by way of the single signal of his rapidly shut eyes, he has likely both stopped her from killing him and expelled his earlier cowardice by demonstrating his readiness to accept death, her certainty of which relies entirely on his projection into her, as well as “if she guessed the truth,” that he was not asleep [если только угадала правду] (24:21). Although he briefly falters in this reading, wondering whether any of these thoughts actually happened, or were merely the product of later analysis—“Perhaps nothing of the sort really happened. Perhaps I never had those thoughts at the time” [Может быть, этого и не было, может быть, я этого и не мыслил тогда] (24:22)—he then immediately reneges on this uncertainty, apostrophizing the hypothetical judge by objecting to any attempt to penetrate into *his* thoughts: “How is it possible to know what I was feeling then?” [Почем знать, что я тогда мог чувствовать?] (24:21).

The question of “how is it possible to know” [почем знать] is less a coda to this scene than its programmatic code, the question the reader is invited to ask of nearly everything the pawnbroker says. After building up a non-existent idiolect with his wife—by which they both

accurately “read” his rapidly shut eyes as a sign of readiness and a symptom of his dominance—the narrator goes further, directly quoting her inner monologue:

And suddenly – suddenly – seeing that I was looking at her, she smiled palely with her pale lips, with a timid question in her eyes. ‘So she is still uncertain, she is still asking herself: does he or doesn’t he know? did he or didn’t he see?’

И вдруг – и вдруг, видя, что я смотрю на нее, она бледно усмехнулась бледными губами, с робким вопросом в глазах. «Стало быть, всё еще сомневается и спрашивает себя: знает он иль не знает, видел он иль не видел?» (24:22)

Here his hypothetical focalization itself extends to *her* hypothetical focalization of him: he becomes the third-person pronoun in his own speculation of her inner discourse, itself all read by him “in her eyes,” and hinging entirely on his assumption of her own impossibly accurate shared “reading” of the situation.

Later that day he has an extra bed brought into the house, which “made her realize that ‘I saw everything and knew everything’ and that there could be no more any doubt about that” [Это была кровать для нее, но я ей не сказал ни слова. И без слов поняла, через эту кровать, что я «всё видел и всё знаю» и что сомнений уже более нет] (24:22). Here, the reification of the narrator’s complex *paralepsis* comes full-circle, as he quotes *his own* earlier reporting of her inner monologue, in one sentence taking on a huge mantle of omniscience, asserting that his wife’s (assumed) questions about her (assumed) reading of his thoughts are confirmed by her (assumed) reading of this new sign, all confirmed without speaking, and in addition to his earlier basic assumptions of her thoughts, his presumption of the process by which she reads his, and her further presumed reaction to her presumed reading of his mind. This complicated scene closes the story’s first part, and ends with the illness that will spell the beginning of the end for the pawnbroker’s wife.

Here the bed and the narrator’s eye-flutter stand in for Varvara Alekseevna’s curtains; they are the meaning-bearing vehicles of an assumed idiolect between male and female characters, one of whom presumes both that he is reading the other impossibly accurately, and that they share the same interpretation of an esoteric system of signs. Local *paralepsis* becomes global as the pawnbroker continues to assert more and more control over his wife, intently watching over her during her recuperation, unironically finding it “strange that not once till the end of the winter did it occur to me that while I liked looking at her stealthily, I had never during all those winter months caught her looking at me!” [Конечно странно, что мне ни разу, почти до конца зимы, не пришло в голову, что я вот исподтишка люблю смотреть на нее, а ни одного-то ее взгляда за всю зиму я не поймал на себе!] (24:25). By now his wife is stripped of her agency and of her voice; she is rendered incapable of “meaning” on her own, without first meaning something in relation to or by way of her husband.

The narrator is mortified when he hears his wife singing one day, interpreting this as proof of her indifference to him: “She sings, and before me! *Has she forgotten about me?*” [Поет, и при мне! *Забывла она про меня, что ли?*] (24:27). After this incident, he stumbles into her room and attempts, falteringly, to speak with her, but is met only with a look of “stern surprise” in her eyes and on her face, which deals him “a stunning blow. ‘So it’s love you still want? Love?’ that look of surprise asked me, though she herself never uttered a word. But I read it all. I read it all” [Она смотрела на меня большими глазами. Эта строгость, это строгое

удивление разом так и разможили меня: «Так тебе еще любви? Любви?» - как будто спросилось вдруг в этом удивлении, хоть она и молчала. Но я всё прочел, всё] (24:28). Small perceived slights continue to snowball into negatively valenced bearers of more meaning; her seemingly involuntary response—“I thought you’d leave me alone”—stabs through his heart, because of the extra meaning it bears: “It explained everything to me, everything...” [Всё оно объяснило мне, всё...] (24:29).

By the time the reader reaches the chapter entitled “I understand all too well” [Слишком понимаю], the polyvalence of this phrase is already evident; the narrator understands not too well, but assumes he understands *too much*. In this chapter the narrator breaks down and confesses to his wife all of his past transgressions and fears about himself, demanding the judgmental reader not think him an egoist in the moment that he egoistically continues to assert his total knowledge, quoting Makar Devushkin in the process: “I realized, of course, that I was worrying her. Do not imagine I was such a fool or such an egoist as not to see it. *I saw everything. Everything to the last detail. I saw and I knew everything more than anyone.*” [Я видел ведь, что я ей в тягость, не думайте, что я был так глуп и такой эгоист, что этого не видел. *Я всё видел, всё до последней черты, видел и знал лучше всех*] (24:30, emphasis mine).

After his confession, he proposes plans for their future, and reads agreement into her silence and onto her smile [Так и положили, потому что она ничего не сказала... она только улыбнулась], which simply signal to the pawnbroker the confirmation of his own desires. His wife’s power to “mean” anything outside of his own discourse is effectively and totally effaced. Even her suicide—the only act she is able to take out from under his vision and control—takes on significance in the story only insofar as it reinforces his narrative superiority: he declares at the end of the story that if only he had arrived home five minutes earlier, “it would have all ended with her understanding everything” [кончилось бы тем, что она бы всё поняла] (24:34), making of her suicide a problem of knowledge that he could have fixed if only he had been there to supply his narratively superior perspective, to *explain* everything to her.

IX. Conclusions

Written into both *Poor Folk* and “The Meek One” is a deep concern with the ethical consequences of narrative. Both works feature male narrators who confidently misread the women in their lives, and end with those women sacrificing their bodies—Varvara by marrying Bykov, the meek one by killing herself—to escape. Much recent scholarly focus has explored the ethics—as well as the ethical consequences—that narratives both model and represent.⁴⁷ From his first work’s first word, Dostoevsky’s narratives cast a spotlight on these issues, as his character-narrators seek problematic, total knowledge of the other, but are also, in Carol de Dobay Rifelj’s term, maddened by the “necessary incompleteness of narrative.”⁴⁸

Poor Folk tasks its readers with attending to the ethics of our reading, of texts as of the other. With its self-ironizing, undercutting stance, the novel shuffles the reader into a space above and against the limited first-person perspective of its characters’ narration, which model the reductive effects of rendering minds too-easily transparent, of reading the mind of the other with suspicious ease. The novel rehearses this act on a small scale with Makar’s reading of

⁴⁷ As Dorothy Hale notes, many of these different studies posit the primary value of literature to come down to a felt encounter with alterity, be it in the form of a character we care about, or the experience of being frustrated by the limits of our own understanding. Hale, “Aesthetics and the New Ethics,” 898-902.

⁴⁸ De Dobay Rifelj, *Reading the Other*, 21.

Varvara, while also inviting the reader to consider it on a larger one by granting a certain ironic distance from its characters from the outset, as the reader's text (titled, ordered, and possessed of an epigraph) exceeds that to which the characters have access, but also constantly reminds us of the act of violation inherent to our act of reading it.

In the beginning, Makar renders Varvara fixed, emplotted, and knowable, a character in his own story, both insulating himself from the narrativizing of others, as well as rejecting the limits of his position as a first-person narrator. By the end, however, his posturing has been decisively rejected, both physically (Varvara leaves him for Bykov) and discursively (in her last letter, which leaves him as the narrative superior, able to write his every wish onto her, but without any real interlocutor). The novel's title puns on this denouement, while also foreshadowing it: the narrative voice that attempts to "know everything down to the last detail" ultimately can only impoverish the object of its gaze, and in the process is also itself left worse off and alone.

Both *Poor Folk* and "The Meek One" end as they began, with Varvara an unknowable other to Makar's gaze, her curtains drawn, and the pawnbroker's wife left voiceless by her husband's hand, and lifeless by her own. "The Meek One" tragically restages the narrative-ethical concerns first explored in *Poor Folk*, substituting the dead meek one for the married-off Varvara. It is tricky for the reader to find a position outside the overwhelming field of vision possessed by the unreliably omniscient, over-reporting character-narrator, but this is the point. As with *Poor Folk*, this story's title reinforces its central problem, as even here the dead wife remains an unnamed "meek woman," a designation lifted straight from her husband's discourse about her. Only the pawnbroker's wife's suicide can stand outside the narrator's overwhelming attempts at narrative control, an act of narrative rebellion on the part of the character. While her suicide, as Harriet Murav notes, signals "the radical unknowability of another's consciousness" as well as "the limits of discourse," so too does the ending of *Poor Folk*.⁴⁹ The "meek one's" leap from the window stands in for Varvara's blank letter, the means by which she allows herself to be discursively rendered as a character in the love story Makar wants so desperately to narrate, while actually physically absenting herself. The pawnbroker's wife's fate is the grotesque, magnified echo of Varvara's, for while she also manages to usurp narrative control from an overbearing character-narrator—standing outside of his penetrating gaze, and beyond the reach of his ability to read and narrate her for just five minutes—she does so by manifesting herself physically into what she has up until this point already been discursively: a character as voiceless and dead as when she was alive.

In the end, we are also made aware that our own reading echoes that of Dostoevsky's characters. Our access to the meek one is entirely filtered through the unreliable narrative of her overbearing husband, just as our reading of the epistolary novel restages an inherently voyeuristic act, violating the so-valued privacy of Makar and Varvara. In foregrounding such ethical problems and staging such episodes of misreading, Dostoevsky's narratives demand his readers attend to what is truly "horrible" about attempting to "understand everything."

⁴⁹ Murav, "Reading Woman in Dostoevsky," 49

CHAPTER 3

**“I read what I ought not to know”:
The ethics of overreading in Tolstoy’s early narrative omniscience**

I. Introduction

An accepted truism about Tolstoy has it that the first appearance of what we have since come to identify as distinctly *his* narrator is to be found in the early sketch “Sevastopol in May” [Севастополь в мае, 1855].¹ While a recognizably Tolstoyan narrative voice certainly takes shape in this story (insofar as its omniscience and authority prefigure the narratives of his later major novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*), it is less a sudden appearance than a gradual development, born out of the labor of Tolstoy’s earlier narrative experiments.

Tolstoy’s early writings—sketches and autobiographical novels alike—are not so much pre-omniscient, as proto-omniscient. They are invested both in the possibility of making minds transparent, as well as in attending to the inevitable consequences of doing so. His early narrators comment on their ability to access the minds of characters, and remark on the illegibility of secret thoughts and hidden feelings, which play out all the same, fleetingly yet legibly, across characters’ faces and in the movements of their hands and bodies.

But the secrecy of these secret thoughts—even amidst their revelation—remains a source of anxiety in Tolstoy’s early storytelling. While playing cards with a desirable but married young woman, the narrator² of Tolstoy’s early unfinished work “A History of Yesterday” [История вчерашнего дня, 1851] maps out a grammar of her body language. The glances and movements he observes, the narrator suggests, not only supplant the role of speech, but supersede it; they lead to “secret relationships, expressed by an imperceptible smile or by the eyes, and which are

¹ In a contemporary review in *Notes of the Fatherland*, the critic Stepan Dudyshkin rejected Tolstoy’s war sketches as unexciting portraits devoid of action, but also successfully mapped out the writer’s omniscient narrative technique: “Count Tolstoy, in his two following descriptions ‘Sevastopol in May’ and ‘Sevastopol in August,’ appears as the same psychologist-observer, from whom not a single detail escapes” [гр. Толстой, в двух следующих описаниях «Севастополь в мае» и «Севастополь в декабре», явился тем же психологом-наблюдателем, от которого не ускользает ни одна мелочь...]. V. A. Zelinskii, *Russkaia kriticheskaia literatura o proizvedeniiakh L. N. Tolstogo: khronologicheskii sbornik kritiko-bibliograficheskikh statei* (M: Tip. E. Lisserna i Iu. Romana, 1888-1903), 93. See also Eric de Haard, *Narrative and Anti-Narrative Structures in Lev Tolstoj’s Early Works* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989), 88. Eikhenbaum, writing on the second of the three Sevastopol sketches, turns this negative into a positive: “Вот явилось то «думал», в праве на которое давно нуждалась Толстой.” Eikhenbaum, *Lev Tolstoi* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1968), 176. This new device of representing interiority is often figured as a moment of empowerment for Tolstoy: Eric de Haard credits “Sevastopol in May” with the development of Tolstoy’s “strongly authorial” narrator, who is possessed of a “newly acquired ‘right’ to delve deep into the mind of his character.” de Haard, *Narrative and Anti-Narrative Structures*, 79-82.

² While this narrative is based in fact, and while the narrator in question is Tolstoy’s own self-literacization, the degree to which events and experiences within the diegetic worlds of the works under examination dovetail with (or are based on) Tolstoy’s biographical reality (which is already well-documented) stands outside the scope of my present chapter, which is concerned instead with a more formalist investigation into the ways different narrative situations negotiate and deal with the ethical properties and consequences of privileged knowledge, figured as an act of (violatory) reading. To that end, this chapter will make reference to the particular shape and limits of a work’s narrative voice, and not its author.

impossible to explain. It is not that one person understands the other, but that each understands that the other understands that he understands him, and so on” [тайнственные отношения, выражающиеся незаметной улыбкой и глазами, и которых объяснить нельзя. Не то, чтобы один другого понял, но каждый понимает, что другой понимает, что он его понимает, и т. д.] (1:381).³ True communication is a mostly silent communion, as characters navigate a matrix of legibility: each is aware not only of the other’s successful “reading” of their own body language, eyes, and gestures, but of their mutual susceptibility to such a reading, as well.

But such moments of “reading” are also marked as problems: the narrator addresses the “imperceptibility” of the smiles he has not only perceived, but also exhaustively explained. His narrative creates the body in order to penetrate it, pointing to the interior that lies beyond it, making flesh the site of exposure, the point of access for the mind.⁴ In negotiating privileged knowledge, Tolstoy’s early narratives first perform this paradoxical two-step, professing limits in

³ All quotations drawn from Tolstoy’s works will refer in inline parenthetical citations to L. N. Tolstoi, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati tomakh*. (M: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1960). Translation of “A History of Yesterday” adapted from Michael Katz’s.

⁴ The significance of “reading” bodily gestures, looks, and glances in Tolstoy’s fiction has of course been extensively annotated. Terming Tolstoy the “seer of the flesh,” D. S. Merezhkovskii maps out a catalogue of Tolstoy’s “human bodily language” [язык человеческих телодвижений], which betrays the essential hidden nature of man sooner and more readily than do words. Merezhkovskii, *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii: zhizn’ i tvorchestvo* (SPb: 1909), 153-58. V. V. Vinogradov notes that Tolstoy is interested in the interplay of words and gestures, poses, and bodily movements, which reveal hidden internal thoughts. Vinogradov, “O iazyke Tolstogo 50-60e gody,” in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* (M: 1939), 203-204. R. F. Christian asserts that Tolstoy frequently draws attention to the impressions made by his major characters’ facial expressions, and focuses at length on how they look (or don’t look) at other characters. He suggests that the “closely knit family” organizes this behavior, for characters, as if in a family, know each other instinctively, such that “a gesture is more significant than a spoken word.” See Christian, *Tolstoy: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Camb UP, 1969), 119, 122, 124. Lydia Ginzburg posits that Tolstoy’s overall project – representing all verbal manifestations in their widest possible variety, demonstrating in the process the disparity between internal states and external expression – manifests in a sort of theatricalism made up of “external appearance, physical accessories, words, and gestures, but having nothing in common with theatricality,” in which the interpretation of gesture forms part of the larger, ever-present authorial analysis of the discourse of dialogue. See Ginzburg, *On Psychological Prose*, trans. J. Rosengrant (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991), 283-96. Edward Wasiolek notes the frequency with which Anna Karenina is described by her facial features and gestures, “as someone in whom energy brims over into her brilliant eyes and smile.” Wasiolek, *Tolstoy’s Major Fiction* (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1978), 133. Vladimir Alexandrov further suggests that semiotics serves as the model for understanding how characters in *Anna Karenina* interpret each other’s gestures in exegetic moments of reading. Alexandrov, *Limits to Interpretation: The Meanings of Anna Karenina* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2004), 138. Justin Weir notes that in the wake of Anna Karenina’s inability to communicate verbally, she relies increasingly on acts of nonverbal communication, but ultimately that “the language of looks and gestures has only a limited potential for the communication of important ideas, and still less is it able to express that crucial ‘complexity of feelings’ in Anna’s soul, which most requires language’s power of clarity and definition.” Weir, *Leo Tolstoy and the Alibi of Narrative* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2011), 104-106. Liza Knapp notes that in Tolstoy, some “special people” have “a natural instinct for ‘reading’ the thoughts and feelings of others through a wordless, ‘immediate communication,’ a ‘mystic’ intercourse that grants to certain glances and words a deeper meaning that only specific interlocutors are able to catch. Knapp, “‘Tue-la! Tue-le!’: Death Sentences, Words, and Inner Monologue in Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* and ‘Three More Deaths,’” *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, vol. 11 (1999), 10.

the process of exceeding them. Mirroring Tolstoy's famous tautological anxiety over the limitations of speech, which he of course still expresses in speech, the bodies of his characters must be "read" *before* their (ontologically prior) interiors can be narrated – in the very narratives in which both interior and body are constructed in the first place.⁵

Boundaries are therefore structured in order to be exceeded: smiles deemed "imperceptible" are perceived and parsed all the same, just as the word-made flesh must itself be read, wordlessly, in order to be understood accurately. In this way, authority in Tolstoy's early, proto-omniscient narratives takes the shape of a staged act of *silent, penetrative reading*, bridging the equally staged gap separating narrative bodies from narrative minds. Such readings lead to an understanding "that each understands the other": narrator and character alike participate in a system of surveillance that reads the flesh to access (and render narratable) the minds it cannot help but express.

In a series of close readings, I will track how Tolstoy's early narrators' "readings" form an ethically charged mediation between, on the one hand, what they profess to be unnarratable, and on the other, what they must narrate all the same. The discourse of Tolstoy's early narrators—in which limited, first-person, embodied narrative voices perform such "readings" in order to gain access to the hidden and the private—thus already take on the shape of omniscience. That is, insofar as "omniscience"—which I will continue to employ as a useful if flawed catch-all for the performance of narrative authority, rendering legible the hidden and the secret—is empowered by a process of reading bodies and faces, Tolstoy's early autobiographical experimentations in the first-person narrative voice *already* border on the omniscient.⁶

Despite the self-professed impossibility of tracking all the impressions and thoughts that enter one's head throughout the day, the narrator of "A History of Yesterday" attempts it all the same, and not in the case of his head alone. The ostensibly limited and embodied narrative voices that follow this first one—including first-person character narrators, like Nikolén'ka Irten'ev—

⁵ Tolstoy's lifelong struggle with the constraints of narrative and problems of self-expression manifest in his fiction as this central paradox of language – namely, his use of narrative and language to question narrative and language's very ability to convey meaning. This paradox is well-known to Tolstoy's readers and scholars alike: Gary Saul Morson has clearly formulated this problem, suggesting that *War and Peace* is structured according to a strategy of "negative narration" that avoids the falsifying effects of emplotment. See Morson, *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in War and Peace* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988), 130-89. Recent engagement with this issue includes Justin Weir's *Leo Tolstoy & the Alibi of Narrative*, which catalogues Tolstoy's narrative strategies of diversion and their role in the creation of meaning. Liza Knapp addresses this issue as a problem of communication among characters, positing that near-death experiences alter the course of normal verbal signification. If language is a Rousseauian social contract, "where the meaning of words depends on the conventions of the community of bearers of this language," then Anna Karenina's spiritual distance from her community prompts her simultaneous loss of any ability to depend on its language, while Levin, meanwhile, is troubled by the "arbitrariness and artificiality of conventionalized language." To the extent that language fails, "for Tolstoy, it is perhaps better for the soul to be silent, or else develop hidden and indirect means of expressing itself." Knapp, "Death Sentences," 6-9. This chapter will examine the narrative manifestations of such indirect means of expression. For an exhaustive catalogue of bodily language, and its employment in literature as a means of verbalizing the non-verbal, see Barbara Korte, *Body Language in Literature* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1997).

⁶ See pp. 3-6 of the introduction of this dissertation for an excursus on my use of "omniscience" as a term that denotes the establishment of limitation as much as it signposts the presence of authority. See also Jaffe, *Vanishing Points*, 168.

are split not only diachronically, caught up in the temporal gap separating an experiencing focalizer and an experienced future self, but synchronically, as well; they play with the tension between limitation and privilege, frequently breaking through epistemic boundaries, penetrating the interiors and detailing the histories of other characters with impossible accuracy and perspicacity. In creating textual bodies in order that the secret grammar of their faces, gestures, eyes, and movements may be parsed and interpreted, *Childhood* [Детство, 1852] privileges a mechanism of silent, non-verbal reading as a higher order of narrating. *Boyhood* [Отрочество, 1854] and *Youth* [Юность, 1857] equate these scenes of reading with the intimacy of filial closeness, suggesting that the model for the aesthetically proper reading of people follows that of a closely-knit family, a coterie of like-minded interpreters, well-versed in the silent reading of each other's exteriors, while also warning against the potentially pernicious consequences of reductively reading other people as one reads literary characters.

As it proceeds from the anxious antinomies of narrating the unnarratable in "A History of Yesterday" to flatly narrating what constitutes truth in "Sevastopol in May," Tolstoy's early working-out of narrative voice becomes a working-through of narrative ethics. The "reading" Tolstoy's early narrators perform comes wrapped up in a negative, deontic modal: in paying lip service to the imperceptibility of characters' still-perceived smiles, Tolstoy's early narrators grapple with their acts of reading, seeing, and knowing what they *ought not* read, see, and know. Tolstoy's early narrative voices structure the textual space of intimacy and privacy—the boundaries of the bodies and minds of the other—in order to make a display of violating them. His early narratives are invested in the ethical consequences of the penetrative, revelatory acts of reading that they also stage. His pseudo-autobiographical, proto-omniscient texts walk the line between professing limitation while performing authority, delaying the direct penetration of the mind in order to model the right kind of reading first: Tolstoy's narrators see the flesh, but wait.

II. "God alone knows": negotiating privileged knowledge in "A History of Yesterday"

Written over the course of a few weeks in March 1851, Tolstoy's unfinished "A History of Yesterday" is from its opening lines concerned with the representation of impossible, secret, or privileged narrative knowledge. An attempt to record all the impressions, thoughts, and experiences of a single day, the narrative immediately gets caught up in the tricky requirements it sets for itself. The narrator wakes up late, a fact that quickly redraws the narrative's attention to the events of the *previous* day, as the details of that night's activities must precede the narration of their effects the following morning. The sketch promises to form a sort of Zeno's paradox of narrative, never quite able to get to its own subject; it ends after detailing the narrator's dream, returning to the morning of the (still-unnarrated) titular day. The unfinished sketch lays bare not only the nature of narrative for Tolstoy,⁷ but the problematics of "laying bare" itself; it is as concerned with the devices of omniscience and the ability to represent privileged knowledge as it is with the possibilities (and limitations) of storytelling. "A History of Yesterday" plays with the aporias inherent to the act of its narration, as the devices that underwrite the narrative also fundamentally undermine it.

⁷ As Irina Paperno notes, narrative time in "A History of Yesterday" flows backwards in a series of recursive digressions, which predicts the aporetic false-starts Tolstoy would later experience again with the opening of *War and Peace*, as well as, I would add, the nature of the narrative penetration of the mind full-stop. Paperno, *"Who, What Am I?" Tolstoy Struggles to Narrate the Self* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2014), 15-16.

As the opening lines profess, the narrator's motivation has little to do with plot, since the day in question was by no means remarkable—"I am writing a history of yesterday not because yesterday was extraordinary in any way, for it might rather be called ordinary..." [Пишу я историю вчерашнего дня, не потому, чтобы вчерашний день был кем-нибудь замечателен, скорее мог назваться замечательным]—and more to do with revelation and *exposure*: "...but because I have long wished to narrate the intimate side of life through an entire day." [а потому, что давно хотелось мне рассказать задушевную сторону жизни одного дня.] (1:377). This *narration of the intimate*, however, is by no means easy, as "God alone knows how many diverse and diverting impressions, and thoughts awakened by those impressions which, though obscure and confused, are still comprehensible to our minds, occur in a single day" [Бог один знает, сколько разнообразных, занимательных впечатлений и мыслей, которые возбуждают эти впечатления, хотя темных, неясных, но не менее того понятных душе нашей, проходит в один день].

This great unrecorded mass of thoughts and impressions challenge all technologies of transcription, for "even if they were narratable" [Ежели бы можно было рассказать их] and in some way able to be turned into a single book, there would still not "be enough ink in the world to write it, or typesetters to put it into print" [недостало бы чернил на свете написать ее и типографщиков напечатать]. Having paid lip-service to the nigh-on impossibility of narrating the intimate and giving expression to interiority, however, the narrator then optimistically gets down to the business of such a project anyway [К делу] (1:377). Here, the narrator's «Бог один знает» already signposts an apparatus of omniscience that underwrites the very narrative privilege it claims to divest itself from, as the narrator begins anyway the impossible task of deciphering and recording what "God alone knows."

Almost immediately, the requirements of faithfully recording the day's impressions and thoughts bog the narrative down in digressions, while also calling to action a wide field of vision: that the narrator woke up at 9:45 is justified (he went to sleep the night before after midnight) before being recast in the context both of his personal goals ("It has long been my rule never to go to bed after midnight" [Я дал себе давно правило не ложиться позже 12]) as well as of his recent habits ("yet this happens to me about three times a week" [и все-таки в неделю раза 3 это со мною случается]) (1:377). The narrator then apologizes for the digression that will take up the majority of the rest of the unfinished sketch, noting that it is, after all, a novelistic convention to devote "entire chapters" to the backgrounds of literary heroes (1:378). The mandate to narrate the intimate side of life reinforces the position of the narrative voice that must negotiate all the resultant digressions and revelations; the narration of the intimate—unfinished autobiographical sketch or not—draws its own comparisons to novelistic narrative, while also necessarily relying on the narration of figural consciousness, history, and habits.⁸

Within this digression into the day *before* yesterday, the barest furtherance of the plot ("I was playing cards" [Я играл в карты]) yields yet another long digression, this time into the nature and types of conversations, which card-playing supplants as an activity. Speech, the

⁸ Of course, it has long been an accepted truism among both scholars and readers alike that in Tolstoy, the auto-referential feeds into and informs the fictional. In his famous articles on early Tolstoy, N. G. Chernyshevsky puts the author's narrative finesse down to his likely ability to self-observe and self-psychologize. Chernyshevsky, *Pis'ma bez adresa* (M: Sovremennik, 1983), 117. Boris Eikhenbaum's influential series of monographs on Tolstoy asserts that his early diaries lay the groundwork for the devices of observation and psychologization that will later be continually employed in his fiction. See Eikhenbaum, *The Young Tolstoy*, trans. Gary Kern (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1972), 7-46.

narrator maintains, can seemingly only fail; interlocutors either do not listen, or are so entrenched in their own point of view that they end a discussion further apart than when they started, or they carry on speech only “because it would be improper not to say something” [не прилично было бы не говорить]. This last type of conversation encodes an awareness of its own emptiness, by way of the privileged knowledge of interiority: “One person thinks, ‘You know quite well that I have no real interest in what I am saying, but it is necessary,’ and the other, ‘Talk away, talk away, poor soul—I know it is necessary’” [Одна сторона думает: ведь вы знаете, что мне никакого дела нет до того, о чем я говорю, но нужно; а другая: говори, говори, бедняжка, -- я знаю, что необходимо.] (1:379). Here again, as in the disparity between «бог один знает» and «к делу» in the opening paragraph, the performance of authority is wrapped up in an ostensible divestiture from it; the apologized-for digression differentiates various kinds of empty speech ultimately by way of the *thoughts that they mask*, which the narrator is empowered to contrast by *unveiling them* (“One person thinks...”). His superior field of vision relies on the third-person narration of the thoughts of hypothetical characters, as contrasted with their speech, a model in miniature of the narrative situation of Tolstoy’s later fiction.

A similarly penetrative field of vision patterns the narrator’s interactions with other characters in the story, beyond those of his own digressions or hypothetical focalization.⁹ The limits and reach of his access as a narrator define his relationship with the woman he desires, and with whom he is playing a game of erotically charged mutual *observation*, as much as he is cards.¹⁰ When detailing her semi-coquettish behavior (defined as a function of her own desire *to be seen*: “no, not coquettish, but she does love to please, and even to turn heads” [нет, не кокетка, а любит нравиться, даже кружить голову]), the narrator judges her *visible* habits against her *hidden but true* desires and intentions, which reveal themselves to his gaze:

She has a bad habit of sweet-talking with her husband in front of others, but this does not bother me; it means no more to me than if she should kiss the stove or the table. She is playing with her husband as a swallow plays with a blossom, because she has a good soul and this makes her happy.

У нее дурная привычка ворковаться с мужем при других, но мне и дела до этого нет; мне все равно, что он целовала печку или стол, -- она играет с мужем как ласточка с пушком, потому что душа хорошая и от этого веселая. (1:380)

⁹ David Herman suggests the phrase “hypothetical focalization” (a reworking of Genette’s narratological categories) to cover the narration of “what might be or have been seen or perceived – if only there were someone who could have adopted the requisite perspective on the situations and events at issue.” Herman, “Hypothetical Focalization,” 231.

¹⁰ The significance of observation to the sketch has not gone unobserved; as Irina Paperno notes, the stenographic-like narrative is more than a stream of consciousness, but is rather “a special case: a stream of consciousness with an observer.” Paperno, *Who, What Am I*, 17. Viktor Shklovsky argues that had the sketch been completed, it would have approached the stream of consciousness later to be found in James Joyce. See Shklovsky, *Povesti o proze: razmyshleniia i razbory, tom 2: v kotorom rasskazyvaetsia o russkoi proze*. (M: Izdat. khud. lit., 1966), 272.

Although the narrator insists he does not want to possess this woman (1:380), his narrative both closely follows her body, hands, and movements, and renders her husband into a non-character, denying him animacy by turning him into a “stove or the table.”

He also closely tracks *her* observation of *him*; when checking his watch, he remarks: “It is astonishing: except when I am speaking to her, I never catch her gaze on me, and yet she sees all my movements” [Удивительно: исключая как когда я с ней говорю, я никогда не видал на себе ее взгляда и вместе с тем он а видит все мои движения] (1:380-81)—an observation interrupted by the direct, reported speech of her noticing his watch [«Ах, какие у него розовые часы!»]. This mildly discomforts him, but he notices that *she* notices that they “both understood that it was funny, and smiled” [Должно было, ей было жалко, что она сказала вещь, которая меня поставила в неловкое положение. Мы оба поняли, что смешно, и улыбнулись] (1:381), moving in short order from external observation of her to focalization through her.

Watching becomes transitive in this game of mutual surveillance; the narrator’s gaze follows the card-playing woman’s movements closely, here frustrated by their illegibility, there narrating her interior directly, laying bare her desires and thoughts. At the same time, he too is subject to such a gaze, and is aware that his movements are also being tracked. Muddying the line between character and narrator, who are both implicated in a system of mutual reading, the narrative plays with the boundaries between the obvious and the intimate, the visible and the hidden. Indeed, the sketch frequently draws attention to this tricky boundary, as the narrator’s observation and narrativizing comes to confound his presence as a character. He intensely—to the point of distraction—follows the woman’s movements, mapping out all her possible motivations for suggesting that they continue their game, in a scene of chalk-writing that will be echoed by the moment of impossible communication between Kitty and Levin:

Whether she wished to end this conversation which I found so sweet, or to see how I would refuse, or whether I would refuse, or whether she simply wished to continue playing, she looked at the figures which were written on the table, drew the chalk across the table – making a figure that could be classified neither as mathematical nor pictorial – looked at her husband, then between him and me, and said: ‘Let’s play three more rubbers.’ I was so absorbed in the contemplation not of her movements alone, but of everything that is called *charme*—which is impossible to describe—that my imagination was very far away, and I did not have time to clothe my words in a felicitous form. I simply said: ‘No, I can’t.’

Хотелось ли ей кончить этот милый для меня разговор, или посмотреть, как я откажусь, и знать, откажусь ли я, или просто еще играть она посмотрела на цифры, написанные на столе, провела мелком по столу, нарисовала какую-то, не определенную ни математи[кой], ни живописью фигуру, посмотрела на мужа, потом между им и мной и «давайте еще играть 3 робера». Я так был погружен в рассматривание на этих движений, но всего, что называют *charme*, который описать нельзя, что мое воображение было очень далеко и не поспело, чтобы облечь слова мои в форму удачную; я просто сказал: «нет, не могу» (1:381)

Here the narrative encodes a self-awareness of its own overt concentration on reading, as well as on the distance separating the split selves of the experiencing character and the experienced narrator. The narrator’s conversation with the woman falls victim to the overriding demands of

its future retelling: the activities of reading that empower his ex-post-facto narrativizing—closely observing movements, while detailing the possible interior states that those movements signify—*distract* the narrator-as-character, interrupting his speech and leaving his words exposed and “unclothed.”

The narrative plays with the gap between character and narrator, threading itself between devices that distract one, but empower the other. The married female card-player’s narrative rendering of the *narrator* indexes further value for him, and sets off yet another digression. She speaks of him aloud in French, referring to him in the third person [“*Comme il est aimable, ce jeune homme*”], a sentence which he notes “interrupted my reflections” before pausing to reflect again:

How I love to have her speak of me in the third person. In German this is rude, but I would love it even in German. Why doesn’t she find a decent name for me? It is clearly awkward for her to call me either by my given name or by my surname and title. Can this be because I...

Как я люблю, что она меня называет в 3-м лице. По-немецки это грубость, но я бы любил и по-немецки. Отчего она не находит мне приличного названия? Заметно, как ей неловко звать меня по имени, но фамилии и по титулу. Неужели это от того, что я... (1:382).

His reflections further narrativize the possible meaning of having himself been narrativized; the epistemological boundary separating character from narrator is made slippery by their mutual implication in the same system of reading and narrating, all while the demands of (first-person) narration impinge upon the experience [of] being narrated (in the third person).

In this narrative, the elements of narrative itself—the rendering of characters in a story, the making legible of interiority, the relaying of conversation—all become already problematic, meta-literary signposts of authority, marked by a self-aware tension between knowledge and its absence. Following with sharp, self-denyingly erotic focus the hands, head, face, eyes, and “the narrow, sharp little nose and the mouth that was one with the eyes and always expressed something new” of his fellow card-player, the narrator laments, “At this moment who could say what it expressed,” before precisely saying what it expressed: “There was pensiveness and mockery, and pain, and a desire to keep from laughing, dignity, and capriciousness, and intelligence, and stupidity, and passion, and apathy, and much more” [В эту минуту, как сказать, что он выражал? Была и задумчивость, и насмешка, и болезненность, и желание удержаться от смеха, и важность, и каприз, и ум, у глупость, и страсть, и апатия, и еще мало ли что он выражал] (1:382). The narrative voice that asks “Who could say?” [как сказать?] of its own eventual object of representation denies complicity in an invasive narrative apparatus, in the moment of relying on it.

Such scenes of mutual reading underscore the early ethical stakes of narrative for Tolstoy. The characters of Tolstoy’s first first-person narrative come already interpenetrated, already invested in the ethics of the products of their own reading; the narrator professes his love for the “secret relationships” that are “impossible to explain,” evidenced by the smiles that, though “imperceptible,” still lead to mutual understanding. The narrative calls “secret” the revelations it exposes, “inexplicable” the relationships it explains and “imperceptible” the smiles it perceives. It is no surprise, then, that in the narrator’s unrealized, hypothetical, ideal version of

his domestic life, he returns home from cards to find his imaginary wife, reading (1:389). Erotic interest is vehemently denied by a narrative voice whose “readings” caress the body, hands, and skin of the objects of his observation, penetrating and unclothing the hidden desires that lie beneath them.

Such moments of mutual observation comprise an armature of devices that inform relationships in the diegetic world, including those between narrator and character—while also interrupting them. These devices both inform and distract, penetrate and obfuscate; their use also necessarily entails their own disavowal, as in attesting to the impossibility of representing («Бор один знает») what will eventually be represented anyway («К делу»). Interiors are accessed, but not without some difficulty: the narrative problematizes the legibility of gestures in the process of reading them, making “the intimate side of life” a difficult-to-access space of privilege, pointed to by the textual bodies it lies beyond.

III. “I read what I ought not to know”: the ethics of overreading in *Childhood*

The ethics inherent to the reading and narrating of the minds of characters takes center stage in Tolstoy’s semi-autobiographical literary debut *Childhood* [Детство, 1852]. The novel’s narrative situation—split temporally between the first-person experiences of the young boy Nikolai Irten’ev and his older self, reflecting on his memories from a future vantage point—draws special attention to the antinomies of narrative authority. This multileveled narrative foregrounds the devices that underwrite it; it focuses on the act of telling, as well as on the mechanics of memory and observation. The result is a narrative voice caught up in a tension strung between, on the one hand, an inexperienced child observing his family impossibly well, and on the other, an older narrator recalling these events impossibly accurately.

Nikolai’s character-narration is both flooded with foreknowledge and also subjectively limited; his story-telling is defined by a pendulum-swing between privileged knowledge and limitation, between penetrating vision and naïveté.¹¹ His ethically invested reading mediates between these two poles, serving as a conduit for both the unimpeachability of narrative

¹¹ *Childhood*—first published in the September 1852 edition of the “thick journal” *The Contemporary* [Современник], and signed only “L.N.”—is possessed of a murky generic identity that Andrew Wachtel convincingly demonstrates to be “pseudo-autobiography.” Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood: Creation of a Russian Myth* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990), 15. Although it contains many elements drawn from Tolstoy’s life, he claims (see PSS 34:348) it is more accurately based on the lives of his childhood friends, the children of A. M. Islenev, Tolstoy’s wife’s grandfather. Christian, *Tolstoy: A Critical Introduction*, 22. As he was to recount to the journal’s editor, Nikolai Nekrasov (see PSS 59:193), Tolstoy initially conceived of the novel as the first of a tetralogy (see Eikhenbaum, *The Young Tolstoi*, 83) entitled *The Four Epochs of Development*, although the fourth part, *Молодость*, was never written (Ibid., 41). Initial public and critical response to the novel was very positive; see Bilinkis, *O tvorchestve L. N. Tolstogo* (L: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1959), 17. However, Tolstoy objected strongly to the unauthorized changes Nekrasov made to his original manuscript, including the reworked (and more autobiographical) title *The History of My Childhood* [История моего детства] (see PSS 59:211 and De Haard, *Narrative and Anti-Narrative*, 24). As Andrew Wachtel argues, the pseudo-autobiography generates a multi-voicedness of perspectives that are in constant dialogue with each other, including not only author, narrator, and protagonist, but the past and present selves of the same person (*The Battle for Childhood*, 17-20), an interplay of narrative voice that “affords the novelist an unusual opportunity. He can use material from his own life in a form that has traditionally engendered an illusion of truth in readers, yet he is not bound by truth and is able to create the kind of fictional world characteristic for the novel” (*The Battle for Childhood*, 18).

authority and, simultaneously, the self-effacement of narrative perspective, a negotiation between the «бог знает» and «к делу» of “A History of Yesterday,” constantly drawing the reader’s attention to the possibility, shape, and consequences of the narrator’s privileged knowledge.

As an embodied character-narrator, the ten-year-old Nikolai engages in the silent reading of other characters, a process which privileges the visible as a means of accessing the invisible: thoughts, intentions, and desires play out on the faces, in the eyes, and through the movements of the hands of other characters. However, the signification of hidden meaning by visible gesture is complicated by the architectonics of Nikolai’s temporally split narrative situation: while he is of course invested with the foreknowledge of a future vantage point, at times caught between focalizing through his younger self and recasting his narrative with the benefit of hindsight, he also both over-reports and *overreads*, exceeding the limits of his possible knowledge by focalizing through *other characters*, and even narrating their interiors directly. Even during such moments of paraleptic overreading, Nikolai still reverts to “reading” (impossible-to-observe) exteriors, narrating *within* the (already-exceeded) boundaries of his field of vision.¹² In the end, the exercise of narrative authority in the novel plays out in a matrix of legibility that obscures what it also exposes, making difficult-to-access the spaces and secrets that the ostensibly limited character-narrator penetrates and reveals all the same.¹³

The opening scene establishes the novel’s ethical stakes, highlighting its overt focus on overreading as a consequence of budding self-authorship, as well as of childhood itself. The novel begins with Nikolai Irten’ev being rudely awakened by his German tutor, Karl Ivanych, who has swatted a fly over Nikolai’s head. We gain access to Nikolai’s thoughts immediately, as he wonders why he, and not his older brother Volodya, is being bothered and “tormented,” concluding with a moment of over-reporting: “All he thinks about his whole life,’ I whispered, ‘is how to annoy me. He sees quite well that he has wakened and frightened me, but he acts as though he did not notice it. He is a contemptible fellow! And his dressing-gown and cap, and tassel, -- they are all contemptible!” [Только о том и думает всю жизнь, -- прошептал я, -- как бы мне делать неприятности. Он очень хорошо видит, что разбудил и испугал меня, но выказывает, как будто не замечает... противный человек! И халат, и шапочка, и кисточка – какие противные!] (1:17).¹⁴ Nikolai’s narration here takes the shape of an ethically charged moment of overreading. His angry judgement of Karl Ivanych conflates the entirety of his character with a single action, immediately exhausting any position the character might occupy outside the field of vision of the young boy, who overly confidently reports on “all he thinks

¹² In his taxonomy of structuralist narratological terms, Gerard Genette suggests “paralepsis” as the moment of epistemological violation, when a focalized character reports more than is possible to be observed or known from their subject position (*Narrative Discourse*, 189), although the term’s limitations—including its prioritization of some sort of knowledge that must be attributed and justified before the act of storytelling—have been extensively annotated (see Dawson, *The Return of the Omniscient Narrator*, 196-204).

¹³ Richard Gustafson draws attention to the complicated narrative situation of *Childhood* as an epistemological problem, a function of its “double-layered telling, the story told by Nikolenka and the story recalled by Irtenev,” but notes that since the novel’s protagonist is also its first-person narrator, his “way of knowing” is “unmediated by any outside narrator. The character himself tells, and therefore his ways to know are embodied and revealed in his narration.” Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger: A Study in Fiction and Theology* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986), 234.

¹⁴ Translation of *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, and *Youth* adapted from Leo Wiener’s.

about his whole life,” the disparity between what “he sees quite well” and what “he acts as though he did not notice,” and the inner state (contemptibility) evidenced by the external markers supposedly pointing to it (the tutor’s dressing-gown and other bedclothes). By drawing attention to this moment of overreading the other, *Childhood* from its opening page makes us aware of the ethical stakes of its narrative voice.

Indeed, the narrator’s ability to read and judge other characters is immediately thrown into relief. When Karl Ivanych returns and attempts to tickle him awake, the frustrated and crying Nikolai—who had been pretending to be asleep before crying out to the tutor, “*Ach, lassen sie,*”—first notes (using the modalizing locutions expected of a limited character-narrator) that Karl Ivanych is “evidently in the pleasantest of moods” [как заметно было, в самом приятном расположении духа], before reneging on his earlier judgement, seeing the concern with which Karl Ivanych responds to the evident tears in his eyes: “Oh, how he is good, and how he loves us; how could I have thought so ill of him!” [«Какой он добрый и как нас любит, а я мог так дурно о нем думать!»] (1:18).¹⁵ Formerly seemingly legible exterior signs—and the interior states for which they stand—now become slippery and mutable, and a moment of confusion, not clarity:

His good German face and the interest which he evinced in trying to ascertain the cause of my tears made them flow more copiously; I felt ashamed, and I could not understand how a minute ago I could have disliked Karl Ivanych, and how I could have found his dressing-gown, his cap, and his tassel contemptible. Now, on the contrary, all those things appeared particularly charming to me, and even the tassel seemed to be an evident proof of his goodness.

Его доброе немецкое лицо, участие, с которым он старался угадать причину моих слез, заставляли их течь еще обильнее: мне было совестно, и я не понимал, как за минуту перед тем я мог не любить Карла Ивановича и находить противными его халат, шапочку и кисточку; теперь, напротив, все это казалось мне чрезвычайно милым, и даже кисточка казалась явным доказательством его доброты. (1:18)

The same exterior markers now indicate the very opposite of what they seemed to Nikolai to represent only moments earlier. With this sudden reversal, *Childhood* problematizes Nikolai’s reading of the other, making of his misfired face-reading a bad-tempered moment of youthful impatience, literally a problem of childhood. In drawing our attention to the exigencies of Nikolai’s gaze as a narrator, as well as to the problems seemingly inherent to his reading other characters, *Childhood* early on makes an issue out of the representation of interiority. Starting with this first moment of being overread, the potential for characters to mean something *outside* of the context they serve within Nikolai’s reading of them will increasingly become a central tenet of this trilogy of novels.

Nikolai invokes the role of the reading and judging narrator as a means of rejecting and overcoming his other, simultaneous status -- as a read and judged *character* himself. He is aware of and plays with his own exposure just as he (believes he) perceives that of Karl Ivanych. When

¹⁵ Genette notes how the use of “modalizing locutions” (phrases like “it seemed”) mark moments of internal focalization through a character (that is, narration strictly within a limited perspective), which plead ignorance of external focalization (*Narrative Discourse*, 203), moments that in Tolstoy index the activation of the way of knowing of a particular character (*Ibid.*, 193-94).

asked about the source of his tears (having had his own face read, as it were), Nikolai narrates a made-up story about a non-existent bad dream to explain them away:

I told him that I was crying because I had had a bad dream, that I had dreamt *maman* had died and was being buried. I had made up all that myself, because I really did not remember what it was I had dreamt about that night; but when Karl Ivanch, touched by my story, began to console me, it seemed to me that I had actually had such a terrible dream, and my tears began to flow, this time from an entirely different cause.

Я сказал ему, что плачу оттого, что видел дурной сон – будто маман умерла и ее несут хоронить. Все это я выдумал, потому что решительно не помнил, что мне снилось в эту ночь; но когда Карл Иваныч, тронутый моим рассказом, стал утешать и успокаивать меня, мне казалось, что я точно видел этот страшный сон, и слезы полились уже от другой причины. (1:18-19)

With this dream, the novel plays further with Nikolai's role (and authority) as a simultaneous narrator and character, ethically invested in the consequences of his reading. On one level, this is a moment of crossover, replicating in miniature the novel's narrative at large: Nikolai the character, whose exterior signs are read by Karl Ivanych, responds to this exposure by experimenting with [self-]authorship, taking on the role of fictive omniscient narrator, composing a story about an unseen interior, the dream, that he "made up all" himself in order to overcome being "read" in the same way he reads others. This fiction has a marked effect, however, as Nikolai now overreads once more, this time *over-identifying with the plight of the protagonist depicted in his own story*; he begins to cry again, now because of his own self-narrated explanation for his earlier tears, as the "dark thoughts about the made-up dream" remain [но мрачные мысли о выдуманном сне не оставляли меня] (1:19). His stab at composing an fictitious omniscient narrative has proved too powerful, and has only caused the very emotional reaction he was seeking to explain away in the first place.

Here *Childhood* suggests the potentially wide-reaching effects of story-telling itself, including its own. The novel playfully points to the falsity that lies at the heart of empathizing with fictional characters possessed of fictitious interiors, as the story Nikolai has narrated is a lie, but has produced tears all the same.¹⁶ The dream is also yet another moment of overreading, laying bare the complicated architectonics of Nikolai's dual narrative position as both limited focalizer and omniscient narrator: the narration of the process that leads to the terrible but made-up dream eventually "seeming real" to Nikolai *exceeds his possible memory of it*, and therefore

¹⁶ As Justin Weir notes, here Nikolai's "very real emotion has its basis in the recollection of something that never happened" which suggests that the novel as a whole "is composed of events which, though they may never have existed, are meant to evoke genuine emotion." Weir, "Language and Death in Tolstoy's *Childhood* and *Boyhood*: Rousseau and the Holy Fool," *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, Vol. 10 (1998), 49. Robin Feuer Miller details the centrality of this false dream to broader Tolstoyan realizations about the status of the "creative impulse" and how "lies can express truth," as "[b]y the end of the day Nikolai is haunted by both a dream he never dreamt and by memories he never had. Yet these non-events are central to the later depiction of his childhood, and they are thus in some ways as real as anything else. As with the false dream, the lie—the false recollection—can become real and thus functions disturbingly as a kind of truth." R. F. Miller, "The Creative Impulse in *Childhood*," in *Before They Were Titans: Essays on the Early Works of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy*. Ed. E. C. Allen (Boston: Ars Rossica, 2015), 172.

stands outside of what he could narrate after the fact. In a recursive moment that recalls “A History of Yesterday,” Nikolai’s impossible pronouncement (“it seemed to me that I had actually had such a terrible dream”) belies its own complexity, as the effects of the made-up dream become unnarratable (having replaced, and become already more real than, the actual reality of that night; that is, a now *unremembered* dream) in the moment that they are narrated.

By exposing the exigencies of and flaws inherent to its narrator-protagonist’s ability to narrate “the intimate side of life” with any authority, *Childhood* casts a spotlight on the effects of its narration—including on its own narrator. This opening scene of overreading also serves as metafictional foreshadowing, as the novel—again like “History of Yesterday”—will end how it began, with Nikolai *once more* narrating the story of his mother’s death, and dwelling on its effects. The novel plays again with the antinomies of Nikolai’s narration, further suggesting the potentially deleterious consequences of narrative storytelling: at first a lie, and then a moment of early proto-omniscient narration, Nikolai’s story produces an emotional response, before eventually *coming true*, ending the novel that frames it. In this sense, Nikolai fictionally kills his mother twice; both narratives, which bookend the novel, hurt him deeply.

From this opening scene, *Childhood* casts the processes that underwrite the novel’s matrix of legibility as *problems of childhood*. The overly confident overreading, that reduces Karl Ivanych to a contemptible mass of exterior signs, is written-off as a symptom of a fickle youthful temper, while the narration of a made-up dream negotiates and limits self-exposure (explaining away tears of frustration), in the process predicting the event that will mark the end of both the novel and Nikolai’s childhood itself.¹⁷

However, we are also made aware that young Nikolai’s reading (of other characters, as well as of the significance of their gestures or speech) stands potentially ever correctible with the benefit of the hindsight still to come, supplied by his older self, who is less a frame narrator than a fluid presence throughout the novel, here and there interrupting the narration of his immediate experience with a running commentary on memory and age.¹⁸ The novel’s chapter titles rehearse the split between these two narrative levels: at first cohering around the major elements that define the experiences of a young child (“My Teacher Karl Ivanych,” “Maman,” “Papa,” “Classes”), they become increasingly complicated, eventually acquiring the slant of the experienced older version of Nikolai (“Something akin to first love” [Что-то вроде первой

¹⁷ Boris Eikhenbaum famously argues that the chapters of *Childhood* are organized not by a central plot, but by a series of “diverse scenes” that are “ordered by time,” linked together by several leit-motifs, including that of the mother. Eikhenbaum, *The Young Tolstoi*, 56-58. Eikhenbaum—employing various visual metaphors to define Nikolen’ka’s narrative position, describing him first as a “window through which we look at a changing series of scenes and characters,” and then the means through which the world is “examined under a microscope”—notes the centrality of “poses” and the “details of movements, gestures, intonations, etc.” to the characters under description, as if “the figures are split up, spread throughout history and channeled through the perception of Nikolenka.” *Ibid.*, 63. Edward Wasiolek, referencing the three earlier versions of *Childhood*, counters Eikhenbaum’s argument, suggesting instead that the novel is concerned not with motherhood or the linkage of мелочность, but rather by the thematic of death. Wasiolek, *Tolstoy’s Major Fiction*, 21.

¹⁸ As Charles Isenberg writes, the frame narrator (of a story within, and often about, another story) becomes an intradiegetic participant in both narratives, a situation which ultimately engenders a heightened awareness of the setting of narration, the act of telling, and the distance between the inset story and its outer frame, conditions by which “frame narratives gesture at being machines for modulating the force and direction of narrative authority.” See Isenberg, *Telling Silence: Russian Frame Narratives of Renunciation* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1993), 2, 30.

любви], “What kind of a man was my father?” [Что за человек был мой отец?]). Within these chapters, the line separating the two narrative voices often becomes muddled, as even individual sentences demonstrate a constant tension between them. Grammatical tense, narrative voice, and verbal aspect all mark a continual, fluid change in perspective from one to the other.

Childhood's first chapter shifts from the past tense narration of the opening episode of being rudely awakened to a description of Nikolai's memory—and *ability* to remember—Karl Ivanych's corner and possessions, changing tense and aspect in the process. Nikolai details Karl Ivanych's reading habits and books, noting: “Among the objects which lay on Karl Ivanovich's shelf, there was one which more than any other reminds me of him.” [В числе предметов, лежавших на полочке Карла Ивановича, был один, который больше всего мне его напоминает] (1:20). After this shift to present tense, Nikolai recalls Karl Ivanych from a position of some remove, marveling at how even now he can see before him “the long figure in the cotton dressing-gown and red cap, underneath which peep out scant grey hairs” [Как теперь вижу я перед собой длинную фигуру в ваточном халате и в красной шапочке, из-под которой виднеются редкие седые волосы] (1:20).

These present-tense recollections then give way to generalized, iterative memories marked by unspecific adverbs of time (иногда), imperfective-only verbs marking general and repeated occurrences (бывало), and the use of the impersonal second person:

At times, you would run yourself tired in the hall downstairs, and you would steal upstairs on tiptoes, into the study, and you would see Karl Ivanych sitting all alone in his armchair, reading one of his favorite books with a calmly sublime expression. Sometimes I caught him in moments when he was not reading [...]. At times he did not notice me, when I stood at the door and thought, ‘Poor, poor old man!’

Бывало, как досыта набегаешься внизу по зале, на цыпочках прокрадешься на верх, в классную, смотришь – Карл Иванович сидит себе один на своем кресле и с спокойно-величавым выражением читает какую-нибудь из своих любимых книг. Иногда я заставал его и в такие минуты, когда он не читал [...]. Бывало, он меня не замечает, а я стою у двери и думаю: «Бедный, бедный старик!» (1:20-21).

These generalized memories—more clearly filtered through the slant of the more experienced, older, reflecting Nikolai than was the earlier past-tense narration of his immediate experience of being woken up—conclude with another remark about the memorable corner that began this digression—“How I remember that corner!” [Как мне памятен этот угол!] (1:21)—before ultimately returning to the perfective narration of the same morning that started the chapter.¹⁹

The novel's apparatus for activating privileged information—be it commentary that clearly stands outside the field of vision of a young boy, or general information he is meant to have found out later—is comprised not of the memories of Nikolai's childhood filtered through the lens of his later experience, but rather of a dance between both perspectives, at times marked

¹⁹ Andrew Wachtel extensively annotates the “iterative markers” that here “give the effect of stopped time or of the simultaneity of action and its expression,” including some forays into the second person, throughout *Childhood*. Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood*, 27-28. By “iterative,” I refer to Genette's category of “telescoped” narratives with future, recollecting narrators, which in psycho-narration “can as readily summarize an inner development over a long period of time as it can render the flow of successive thoughts and feelings, or expand and elaborate a mental instant.” Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 33-37.

by mid-sentence shifts from one to the other. In some cases, the direct signaling of privilege serves to mark the presence of the older Nikolai, as certain comments and judgements—while thematically related to the past-tense narration of young Nikolai’s immediate experiences—nonetheless stand beyond the boundaries of his possible knowledge.²⁰

Chapter two begins with such a signal; a long excursus on memory repeats the imagery of tears associated with both his mother and his role as a narrator:

So many memories of the past rise up, when you try to resurrect in your imagination the features of a beloved being, that you see them dimly through these recollections as through tears. When I try to recall my mother as she was at that time, I can think only of her brown eyes, which always expressed the same kindness and love, of a birthmark upon her neck, a little below the place where the small hairs curled, of her white linen collar, of her tender dry hand which had so often fondled me, and which I had so often kissed; her general expression escapes me.

Так много возникает воспоминаний прошедшего, когда стараешься воскресить в воображении черты любимого существа, что сквозь эти воспоминания, как сквозь слезы, смутно видишь их. Это слезы воображения. Когда я стараюсь вспомнить мамушку такую, какою она была в это время, мне представляются только ее карие глаза, выражающие всегда одинаковую доброту и любовь, родинка на шее, немного ниже того места, где выются маленькие волоски,шитый белый воротничок, нежная сухая рука, которая так часто меня ласкала и которую я так часто целовал; но общее выражение ускользает от меня. (1:22-23)

In the previous chapter, tears served as both a legible, external marker of Nikolai’s interior (read by Karl Ivanych) and a simultaneous symptom of his *rejection* of that legibility, prompting Nikolai’s made-up dream, the narration of which in turn produced even more tears. Here again they signal the distance separating the experiencing-Nikolai from the remembering-Nikolai, while also *making a problem of legibility* (as these dim memories are clouded, as “through tears”). While such musings on the vicissitudes of fleeting memories indicate the slant of the older, future-version of Nikolai, the continuing narration of his day also eclipses this pronouncement, as he—despite his self-professed spotty memory—goes on to describe his mother in great detail.

When Nikolai’s story about his mother’s death eventually comes true, the novel again draws our attention to the after-effects of story-telling, to the consequences of narrating. The mechanics of narration appear to be emotionally charged for the elder narrator. The specific and detailed description of the smell of decomposition in Nikolai’s mother’s room in chapter 26, for example, culminates in an observation about the upsetting effects of sense memory: “That odor struck me so powerfully, that not only when I smell it, but even when I think of it, my imagination immediately transfers me into that gloomy, close room, and reproduces all the minutest details of that terrible moment” [Запах этот так поразил меня, что, не только когда я

²⁰ As Andrew Wachtel notes, the “separation between the voices of narrator and past self is sustained in a variety of ways” in *Childhood*, including most significantly an “epistemic gap: sentences in the child’s present must contain nothing that is incongruous with what the child could have *known* at the time. If they do, they become sentences that are attributed to the adult narrator.” Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood*, 27.

слышу это, но когда лишь вспоминаю о нем, воображение мгновенно переносит меня в эту мрачную, душную комнату и воспроизводит все мельчайшие подробности ужасной минуты] (1:108). Like many such moments in the novel, this description simultaneously paints a detailed portrait not only of the present scene itself (listing a series of odors in the vein of a physiological sketch), but also of the elder Nikolai's emotional state. It also both recalls the previous time Nikolai narrated (and made up) just such an event, as well as serves as a justification for his seemingly impossibly well-preserved and detailed memory, which can report, years hence, on all of the room's odor's constitutive parts: "I was in great anguish then, but I involuntarily noticed all the details." [Я был сильном горе в эту минуту, но невольно замечал все мелочи] (1:108). While Nikolai's assumption of the role of overreading, assertive narrator in chapter one left him crying and plagued by the gloomy thoughts his story produced (recalling Aristidov's rejection of storytellers in the epigraph of *Poor Folk*), here the same effect is both repeated and literalized. In the process of narrating it, this moment *makes narrative* [of] one of the fundamental experiences of childhood; the literal mechanics of the novel's narrative situation—remembering (which "transports" Nikolai [переносит меня] back to this painful past moment) and then expressing those memories ("reproducing all the minutest details")—are here cast as a rehearsal of the most unpleasant of childhood experiences: coming to grips with the mortality of one's parents.

Nikolai's second, now-real narration of his mother's death begins to fill in the silhouette of his elder half, who is so easily transported to a "dark," "gloomy," and "terrible" place that even the *thoughts* of smells disturb him. Such scenes leave open the question of what has become of Nikolai, whose happy life in his memories stands in stark relief when compared to his unrevealed present situation. The open question of this distance, separating the happy, impetuous ten-year-old from the gloomy elder self, crops up again as one of the novel's central problems in its titular chapter, when Nikolai asks outright: "Is it possible life has left such heavy traces in my heart that these tears and that ecstasy have for ever gone from me? Is it possible, nothing but memories are left?" [Неужели жизнь оставила такие тяжелые следы в моем сердце, что навеки отошли от меня слезы и восторги эти? Неужели остались одни воспоминания?] (1:64). Tears again metaphorize Nikolai's unrecoverable past and dramatize his present state.

The end of the novel repeats this move, first describing the graves of Nikolai's family, before switching again to the imperfective present tense for its final sentence, which trails-off with a dark, self-directed interrogation: "At times I stop in silence between the chapel and the black fence. In my soul again arise gloomy recollections, and I think: has Providence connected me with these two beings only that I may eternally regret them?.." [Иногда я молча останавливаюсь между часовней и черной решеткой. В душе моей вдруг пробуждаются тяжелые воспоминания. Мне приходит мысль: неужели провидение для того только соединило меня с этими двумя существами, чтобы вечно заставить сожалеть о них?..] (1:122). These ellipses end the novel, which has again connected the process of story-telling and narration with a set of its long-lived emotional after-effects.

Childhood draws attention to the mechanisms of realist narrative—including the process of reading, recollection, and the transcription of minute details—all of which not only give particular shape to the relationship of this future frame narrator with his past self, but also to some degree or another serve as painful reminders to the elder Nikolai about the unrecoverability of the past life of his inset narrative. Within the diegetic world of *Childhood*, narrative both mutually defines the elder and younger Nikolais, and also informs the disparity between them.

Narrative both separates and unites them: the act of narrating reconnects the elder Nikolai with his past, but also confirms for him its painful unrecoverability; in being transported to the memories of his lost family, narration harms this narrator.

When we *are* focalized through the young Nikolai, absent the hindsight and attendant focus on memory of his elder half, we follow his immediate experiences as he “reads” the world around him, enacting the subjective limits otherwise expected of a character-narrator. However, as we have seen with the opening scene, such silent scenes of reading obviate narrative omniscience by effectively rendering figural consciousness always legible anyway. When visiting his father’s study in chapter three, for example, Nikolai silently observes a long conversation between his father and the steward Yakov Mikhailovich about the disbursement of money and the running of the family estate. Despite the absence of the more knowledgeable elder Nikolai here, this scene still unveils the privileged knowledge of character interiority by way of the young Nikolai’s penetrative overreading. Like the narrator of “A History of Yesterday,” Nikolai here closely follows the thread of the conversation by observing the movement of Yakov Mikhailovich’s fingers, which seem to him to be a means of “guessing Yakov’s secret thoughts” [По их движениям, мне кажется, можно бы был угадывать тайные мысли Якова], which he compares to the expression of his face (1:25). Nikolai’s close reading of Yakov’s fingers precipitate his access to otherwise inaccessibly privileged knowledge; a few lines later, although Yakov says nothing, Nikolai divines his hidden intentions, and can tell “by the rapidity with which his fingers moved he wanted to retort something” [Но по быстроте движений пальцами я заметил, что он хотел возразить] (1:26). Thoughts and desires play out on the hands and face, as Nikolai’s reading becomes a proto-omniscient device that underwrites his access to privileged information.

The novel, however, again makes a problem of this legibility, as Nikolai’s father picks up on his son’s precocious perspicacity: “Evidently noticing that I had read what I ought not to know, папа placed his hand upon my shoulder, and with a slight motion indicated a direction away from the table.” [Должно быть, заметив, что я прочел то, чего мне знать не нужно, папа положил мне руку на плечо и легким движением показал направление прочь от стола] (1:26). *Childhood* both relies on and problematizes the legibility of the mind. Just as Nikolai’s previous overreading of Karl Ivanych is literally made a problem of his youthful temper—of his childhood—this moment of overreading is rendered as an over-stepping beyond the scope of young Nikolai’s rightful field of vision. His access to *too much information* is figured as a negative deontic modal, a recapitulation of the very issue of omniscience itself, inasmuch as it makes public what *should* be private, rendering legible what one “*ought* not to know.” Just as in “History of Yesterday,” several levels of mutual surveillance are at work at once here, as Nikolai notices (in an observation softened by a further modal) that his father “evidently” has noticed that he himself has already noticed what is going on in the conversation. The novel represents the “understanding of understanding,” but also makes a problem out of it. In this moment *Childhood* turns a statement seemingly about a father’s concern with propriety (and his son’s presence at an adult meeting) into a commentary on the consequences of narrative omniscience, drawing attention to its own ethics in the process.

After problematizing Nikolai’s reading, the novel now begins to suggest the potential problems of *our* reading, too, for the narrative has trained us to be just as good a reader of Yakov as Nikolai has become. A few paragraphs later we read Yakov’s reaction to Nikolai’s father without direct, intervening commentary, but instead with a catalogue of his hands’ movements: “Yakov was silent for a few moments; then suddenly his fingers began to move with increased

rapidity[...]" [Яков помолчал несколько секунд; потом вдруг пальцы его завертелись с усиленной быстротой...] (1:26). Yakov's satisfaction about the outcome of the conversation—in which he managed to convince Nikolai's father to change his mind about the estate—is further made evident only through these movements and gestures, given to us without interpolating commentary [По выражению лица и пальцев Якова заметно было, что последнее приказание доставило ему большое удовольствие] (1:27). We have taken the weight of Nikolai's self-awardedly *inappropriate* reading on our own shoulders, now penetrating into the interiority of this serf without his commentary, aware that—thanks to the novel's own definition—we are seeing and knowing what one *ought not*.

Narrative authority in *Childhood* is defined by a matrix of legibility. Characters mutually observe each other, including observing each other observing each other. Nikolai's preternatural reading grants him omniscient access to the interiors of characters' minds, but this privileged knowledge of figural consciousness come at a price: it engenders a self-awareness of its own status as a violation, as a moment of *overreading*. Nikolai is aghast at his own overreading of Karl Ivanych, but then immediately falls victim to the emotional after-effects of narrating his own fictional interior. In casting such a spotlight not only on the consequences of reading, but on the falsity inherent to overreading, *Childhood* implicates its own readers, and invites us to interrogate our response to the text. On the one hand, we come to know that Nikolai's narrativizing is painful, that his reading reduces Karl Ivanych to an exhaustible and knowable figure, and that Nikolai's emotional reaction to his own fictionalized narration of his own fictionalized interior is a moment of falsity. Is our own reading of *Childhood* indicted in the perpetration of such painful falsities? On the other hand, it is only *through* our reading that *Childhood* casts reading—including, potentially, our own—as yet another moment of violation, for we, too, have been trained in the careful overreading of characters, in the seeing of what one ought not see.

Within these complicated layers of mutual surveillance and mutual legibility, the novel makes of the distinction between interiority and exteriority a boundary set up in the moment of its being crossed. Nikolai constantly returns to a sense of the “impurity” of illicitly acquired intimate information. The privileged knowledge he gains from overreading causes him—within his own diegetic frame narrative—guilt and distress, as he continues to “read what he ought not to know.” The family estate's lumber-room serves as a nexus for these feelings of simultaneous excess and guilt, both epistemic and intimate. In chapter twelve, Nikolai and his siblings steal away to the lumber-room to eavesdrop and spy on Grisha, a local holy fool, who is undressing down to his linens and praying feverishly. While the other children laugh, Nikolai's furtive surveillance of the character's private moment causes him deep contrition and sadness (1:52-53). Later, after dancing with Sonechka at the mazurka, Nikolai casts a glance at the same room of illicit observation, and wonders: “What happiness that would be if it were possible to pass an eternity with her in that dark lumber-room, and if no one knew that we were living there” [«Что бы это было за счастье, если бы можно было весь век прожить с ней в этом темном чулане! и чтобы никто не знал, что мы там живем»] (1:97). Nikolai's daydream playfully unites erotic curiosity with the space of illicit eavesdropping, all while pointing toward the shape of the narrator he is angling to become: the all-knowing narrative voice that is outside of time

(весь век) and beyond the field of vision of other characters (чтобы никто не знал, что мы там), able to see all that he wants to see.²¹

The illicit quality of Nikolai's drive to acquire intimate, privileged, at-times erotic information distresses him, however. During Nikolai's grandmother's party, he overhears an entire chapter's worth of information, including a long disagreement between his grandmother and Prince Ivan Ivanovich. At the end of the conversation, Nikolai justifies his knowledge while also casting it once again as a violation: "Having involuntarily heard the conversation, which I ought not to have heard, I slipped out of the room on tiptoe, and in great agitation." [Невольюно подслушав разговор, которого мне не должно было слушать, я на цыпочках и в сильном волнении выбрался из комнаты] (1:78). Likewise, Nikolai's observations of people at his mother's funeral are also self-admittedly furtive, part and parcel—he believes—of his other *inappropriate behaviors* (not praying with enough conviction, being too worried about the fit of his clothes and about not soiling the knees of his pants). After noting this behavior, he "stealthily made observations upon all of the people present" [и украдкой делал наблюдения над всеми присутствовавшими] (1:111), which follow for pages.

These moments are marked by the absence of the perspective of the future Nikolai. The insight young Nikolai demonstrates comes as the result once again of his reading the other, which is once again cast as an ethically fraught short-cut to privileged narrative knowledge. A slippery play between legibility and illegibility develops, as the novel continues to indict the process of reading that it also relies on. In the chapter entitled "Classes" [Классы], Nikolai again "reads" Karl Ivanych, noting that he was in an ill humor, "evident from his knit brow" and other external markers, including (in a scene reminiscent of Tatiana's reading of Evgenii Onegin) the depth of his thumbprints left in his copy of their German lesson dialogue book [и как сильно черкнул ногтем по книге диалогов, чтобы означить то место, до которого мы должны были вытвердить] (1:29).²² Tears once again metaphorize legibility, here by occluding it, as Nikolai—preoccupied with the thoughts of his family's impending departure for Moscow (and with it, Karl Ivanych's unexpected dismissal)—begins to cry again, now producing tears that blotch his writing, making it illegible. Karl Ivanych threatens Nikolai with discipline, and then storms off into another room and slams the door, leaving the children in the classroom, where they overhear (through the closed door) his conversation with the valet, another Nikolai.

Here the narrative device of reading spills over itself; it is exceeded in the moment it is also deployed, as young Nikolai reports extensively on the *visual cues of a conversation that he can only hear*, through a closed door. Nikolai reports that the valet, sitting by a window, *silently* reacts to Karl Ivanych ("he nodded his head in affirmation" [утвердительно кивнул головой]), who "raises his eyes" and "smiles ironically" during his harangue about Nikolai's family. The substance of Karl Ivanych's speech is shortened and summarized; indeed, Nikolai's report on

²¹ As Donna Orwin notes, the novel thematizes the interplay of the erotic, its satiation, and the quest for knowledge and information as central to the arousal and development of Nikolai's curiosity; an earlier version of chapter nine (PSS 1:319), she notes, in which Nikolen'ka kisses Katen'ka, included a longer description of the pleasure he felt at this contact. Orwin, *Tolstoy's Art and Thought, 1847-1880* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993), 451.

²² With Evgenii gone, Tatiana explores the empty rooms of his castle, and after coming upon his library, reads the impressions and marginalia he has left in his books: Хранили многие страницы / отметку резкую ногтей; / глаза внимательной девицы / устремлены на них живей. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh* (M: izdat. akademii nauk SSSR, 1949), 7:23.

this conversation focuses more on the characters' silent visual reactions than on what they say (and on what he possibly could have overheard).

In the end, after Karl Ivanych wonders aloud if he will be able to find work elsewhere, Nikolai looks at him "as if he wanted to assure himself that he would really be able to find a piece of bread, but he did not say anything" [как будто желая удостовериться, действительно ли может он найти кусок хлеба, -- но ничего не сказал.] (1:31). Once Karl Ivanych returns to the classroom, Nikolai once more reads the "expression of his innermost thought" in the way Karl Ivanych continues the German lesson [Несколько раз, с различными интонациями и с выражением величайшего удовольствия, прочел он это изречение, выражавшее его задушевную мысль...] (1:31).²³ Nikolai has broken the boundaries of his possible field of vision, yet in the process still falls back on the process of *reading* these impossible-to-observe character exteriors *in order* to access the interiors they point to.

This spilling over of narrative perspective continues in scenes that not only exceed the perspectives of both the younger and elder Nikolai, but that also involve moments of paraleptic over-reporting in general, including even focalizing through other characters. In chapter five, at dinner that same day, Nikolai reports on what is happening *inside* his mother, who is visibly reacting to the presence of Grisha: "Mamma had been out of humor since this morning: the presence, words, and acts of Grisha perceptibly intensified that feeling in her" [Мама с утра была расстроена; присутствие, слова и поступки Гриши заметно усиливали в ней это расположение] (1:34). The narration of this entire dinner is peppered with such observations, including remarks about other characters' perceptiveness of each other, as when Nikolai's father notices with a smile "that this conversation did not please mother" [заметив, что этот разговор очень не нравился матушке...] (1:35). In the following chapter, as the family prepares for a hunt and picnic the following day, Nikolai focalizes through his mother directly, who is put off by the boys' casual insouciance at her perceived fear of their going on the hunt: "This word, 'hunter's horse,' somehow sounded strange in *maman's* ears; it seemed to her that a hunter's horse must be some kind of a ferocious animal, which must by all means run away with and kill Volodya." [Это слово: «охотничья лошадь»-- как-то странно звучало в ушах маман: ей казалось, что охотничья лошадь должна быть что-то вроде бешеного зверя и что она непременно понесет у убьет Володю] (1:36-37).²⁴ Similarly, when detailing the "kind of man" his father was, Nikolai breaks into a series of observations, broad conclusions, and reminiscences about the character of his father, concluding with a denial of the very knowledge he is simultaneously invoking: "God knows whether he had any moral convictions. His life was so full of distractions of all kinds that he had had no time to form them, and he was so fortunate in his life that he saw no need for them." [Бог знает, были ли у него какие-нибудь нравственные убеждения? Жизнь его была так полна увлечениями всякого рода, что ему некогда было

²³ Eikhenbaum notes that even though this scene is recorded as if the narrator can see and hear the events described, it unfolds "outside of Nikolenka's perception." Eikhenbaum, *The Young Tolstoi*, 63.

²⁴ As Andrew Wachtel notes, this chapter further represents a violation of the epistemological boundaries of Nikolai's field of vision by way of its impossibly detailed recollection: "Irten'ev describes himself in the natural world for the first time when he recalls the hunt on the day before his departure for Moscow. If Irten'ev's ability to recall the tiniest details of long-past events seemed amazing when he described people, then his photographic recall of the scene before the hunt is completely beyond the realm of the possible. The description is meant to be in the voice of the child, but it is so hyperrealistic that it cannot possible be read as a remembered moment. At moments like these, Tolstoy's realism of description ends up contradicting his psychological realism[...]" Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood*, 54.

составлять себе их, да он и был так счастлив в жизни, что не видел в том необходимости] (1:47).

Later, at his grandmother's name day party, Nikolai's narration of the arrival of guests is similarly bolstered by a plethora of facts about them that he not only would have not possessed at ten, but would not have learned afterward, either; of Madame Valakhina's beautiful dark blond curls, for example, he notes that he "should not have believed anybody, not even Karl Ivanych, that they curled in this way because, ever since the morning, they had been tied in bits of the *Moscow Gazette*, and because they had been curled with hot curling-irons. It seemed to me she was born that way, with her curly head." [...что никому, даже самому Карлу Иванычу, я не поверил бы, что они бьются так оттого, что с утра были завернуты в кусочки «Московских ведомостей» и что их прижигали горячими железными щипцами. Казалось, она так и родилась с этой курчавой головкой] (1:86). In these scenes, Nikolai's proto-omniscient overreading penetrates and reveals; his narrativizing takes the shape of the knowledgeable, penetrative Tolstoyan narrator still to come.

Narrative authority in *Childhood* plays out almost in spite of itself. In implicating our reading and indicting the process of narrativizing, Nikolai's doubly-focalized character narration swings between penetrating vision and naivete, between drawing attention to the ethics of his own gaze, and taking it for granted. The activities granting young Nikolen'ka access to both privileged information and, at times, the minds of others (including his eavesdropping and furtive spying) are cast as near-illicit violations or written-off as youthful insouciance, just as the process of story-telling—be it a made-up dream, or its eventual realization—is imbued with seriously lasting emotional after-effects, from the younger Nikolai's tears to the elder Irten'ev's regrets. He bemoans the difficulty of reading and knowing what he also easily reads and knows, in the process rendering his knowledge a moment of ethical violation, of reading what he knows he ought not, *while also* demanding we do the same. *Childhood* turns this statement about Nikolai's presence at an adult conversation—out of his depth, yet preternaturally observant all the same—into a comment on the novel's narrative situation, drawing attention to the ethical after-effects of its own armature of proto-omniscient devices: the reading of faces and hands, the recording of minute details, the process of recollection and narration itself all become ethical problems both of and within the diegetic world, of Nikolai's reading as of our own.

IV: “For him it was the movement of a pen, but for me it was the greatest unhappiness”: the ethics of alterity in *Boyhood*

Boyhood [Отрочество, 1854], Tolstoy's first follow-up to *Childhood*, continues to track the development of Nikolai's proto-omniscient ability to read and narrate the minds of others.²⁵ The novel maps Nikolai's oftentimes contradictory and oxymoronic trajectory as a character-narrator, exploring how other characters exist *outside* of his gaze, and therefore beyond the reach of his ability to read them. The novel stages alterity as a problem: Nikolai's silent reading of other characters functions simultaneously as a marker of intimacy as well as a symptom of its

²⁵ Tolstoy—as well as his reading public—had a progressively lower opinion of the lackluster follow-ups to *Childhood*, including their inability to be read independently. See de Haard, *Narrative and Anti-Narrative*, 29. Tolstoy found it particularly difficult to continue writing *Boyhood* in 1853 after having read Turgenev, and he abandoned the project several times. Eikhnenbaum, *The Young Tolstoi*, 152-53. Tolstoy was ultimately left unsatisfied with *Boyhood*, which elicited a poor reception by critics, who objected to both its style and content. Christian, *Tolstoy: A Critical Introduction*, 42-46.

violation.²⁶ Moving beyond the naïve aesthetics of the over-reaching, overreading of the other of his childhood, *Boyhood* takes Nikolai to the next stage of his narrative reading, turning it into a marker of his membership in a family of like-minded readers, a coterie of interpreters who can preternaturally understand each other non-verbally, by look and gesture alone. Just as it models this “family of readers,” however, so too does *Boyhood* make a problem of the myopia of their gaze, which erases the true otherness of the others they read and observe. Where *Childhood* explored the limits of Nikolai’s narrative authority by exposing the antinomies of his ability to penetrate minds and narrate interiors, *Boyhood* instead draws attention to the immediate after-effects of Nikolai’s penetrating reading-as-narration, inviting us to question the ethics of his often reductive gaze.

Boyhood makes the process of the penetrative reading (first modelled in *Childhood* and “A History of Yesterday”) the major problem of its stage of development. The novel is less concerned than its predecessor with exploring the distance between the representation of immediate experience and its future narration, and instead highlights several important developmental moments in its narrator’s awareness of both the world and the other characters populating it. After laying out his thoughts about the nature of boyhood in the nineteenth chapter, Nikolai considers them once more from the distinctly privileged perspective of age and distance, a narrative position otherwise rarely seen in this novel. He muses of the novel’s collapsed time-frame: “I involuntarily want to run through the desert of my boyhood as fast as possible [...]. I shall not follow my memories hourly, but shall cast a rapid glance at the most important events...” [Мне невольно хочется пробежать скорее пустыню отрочества [...]. Не стану час за часом следить за своими воспоминаниями, но брошу быстрый взгляд на главнейшие из них с того времени, до которого я довел свое повествование...] (1:187). As a result of this self-aware desert sprint, often absent in *Boyhood* are the subtle and complicated shifts in focalization between the experiencing-I and his experienced future self that defined the narrative situation of the preceding novel.

Instead, Nikolai’s awareness of alterity (or lack thereof) takes center stage as the major development of *Boyhood*. At the novel’s opening, the Irten’ev children, whose mother died at the end of *Childhood*, are on their way to Moscow to live with their grandmother. During the trip through the country that opens the novel, Nikolai discusses with his sister Katen’ka his “moral transformation,” a result of his realization of the poverty of the people they are passing by in their carriage:

[...]and from this I count the beginning of my boyhood. I obtained for the first time a clear idea of the fact that we, that is, our family, were not alone in the world, that not all interests centered about us, and that there was another life of people who had nothing in common with us, who did not care for us, and who even did not have any idea of our existence.

²⁶ Anna Berman convincingly demonstrates the centrality of such filial bonds to Tolstoy’s work, which she argues develop as “a sense of lateral belonging among *svoi*,” and which serve not just as a model for his fictional representations of the family, but also as “a template for all human connection.” Berman, *Siblings in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky: The Path to Universal Brotherhood* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2015), 4-8.

...с которого я и считаю начало моего отрочества. Мне в первый раз пришла в голову ясная мысль о том, что не мы одни, то есть наше семейство, живем на свете, что не все интересы вертятся около нас, а что существует другая жизнь людей, ничего не имеющих общего с нами, не заботящихся о нас и даже не имеющих понятия о нашем существовании. (1:138-39)

This realization leads into a long paragraph in which Nikolai for the first time questions and thinks about unknown people and their “other lives,” a “new view” (the chapter’s title) which becomes “even more perceptible” in Moscow.²⁷ The novel suggests that the outsiders, otherness, and knowability—of characters as of their inner lives—will quite literally thematize, as Tolstoy puts it, “the beginning of my boyhood.”²⁸

However, despite this epistemological, ethical realization, its inverse unfolds in the space the novel devotes to developing and tracing the intricate relationships *within* the Irten’ev family, rather than outside it. On that same trip to Moscow, both Nikolai and Katen’ka “read” each other, engaging in a conversation shot-through with visual markers of interiority, and which constantly verges on the omniscient, as their thoughts always become readily apparent in their faces. The animation of Katen’ka’s answer to a question Nikolai poses her “proves that [his] remark interested her,” while Nikolai’s nose and eyes serve as further signs: “No, let me finish,” I interrupted her, as I began to feel a light tickling in my nose, which preceded the tears that always stood in my eyes when I expressed a long repressed secret thought.” [Нет, дай мне договорить, -- перебил я, уже начиная ощущать легкое щекотанье в носу, предшествующее слезам, которые всегда навертывались мне на глаза, когда я высказывал давно сдержанную задушевную мысль] (1:137). In this interplay of legibility and revelation, the distinction between what is hidden and what is visible becomes hazy: the tickling in Nikolai’s nose (known only to him) serves as a sign of the coming (visible) tears, themselves a further sign of the upcoming exposure of a hidden secret thought (itself noted to be a general habit of his).

Nikolai then breaks the convention of the novel’s narrative situation by *directly focalizing through Katen’ka*, at one point interpreting her reaction to a question he has posed her from her perspective: “But, with the instinctive feeling, with which one guesses the thoughts of another, and which serves as the guiding thread to a conversation, Katen’ka understood that her indifference pained me.” [Но по тому инстинктивному чувству, которым один человек

²⁷ Kate Hamburger sees this ‘new view’ as evidence that a critical engagement with ethics lies at the heart of *Boyhood*, wherein Nikolai experiences “the first sudden realization that there are other lives in the world besides one’s own,” and becomes aware of “the experience of one’s fellow creatures,” issues she notes are central to Tolstoyanism. Hamburger, “Tolstoy’s Art,” in *Tolstoy: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Ralph A. Matlaw (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 67.

²⁸ The existence (and knowability) of the inner lives of other people was an important concept for Tolstoy throughout his life. As R. F. Christian recounts (citing Gusev’s rendering of Sofia Tolstaya’s recollection of the event), Tolstoy’s reading of Lawrence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) in 1851 introduced him to the concept that others possess complex, unknown inner lives: “One day, after reading Sterne’s *Voyage Sentimental*, and being excited and absorbed by his reading, he was sitting by the window deep in thought and watching everything going on outside. There goes a policeman. Who is he? What sort of life does he live? And there goes a carriage. Who is inside? Where is he going and what is he thinking about? And who lives in that house? What is their inner life like? How interesting it would be to describe it all; what an interesting book one could make of it.” Cited in Christian, *Tolstoy: A Critical Introduction*, 11. See also N. N. Gusev, *Materialy k biografii, 1828-1855* (M: Nauka, 1970), 275

угадывает мысли другого и которое служит путеводною нитью разговора, Катенька поняла, что мне больно ее равнодушие; она подняла голову и обратилась ко мне] (1:136). Even in this moment of slippage, Nikolai—without couching his narration of his sister’s interior in the verbiage of reading, or the modalizing locutions of the first-person narrator—notes that she, too, possesses the ability to preternaturally read the thoughts of others. In scenes like this, where family members have conversations bolstered by their mutual silent reading of each other, *Boyhood* draws attention to the increasingly privileged (and still undeniably conflicted) field of vision that defines its narrative voice. The narrating-as-reading of “A History of Yesterday” and the limit-exceeding, preternatural overreading of *Childhood* become in *Boyhood* a family affair.

This familiar, now familial reading develops along gendered lines. Having arrived at Moscow in *Boyhood*’s fourth chapter (1:139), Nikolai explains the changes that are beginning to take shape in the family, observing that an “invisible barrier” has fallen between the Irten’ev brothers and sisters, who are beginning to keep secrets from each other [Между девочками и нами тоже появилась какая-то невидимая преграда; у них и у нас были уже свои секреты] (1:140). The chapters that follow then focus on individual family members, before beginning the inset story of Karl Ivanych. Chapter five (“My Older Brother”) focuses on the special bond developing between Nikolai and Volodya, which draws attention to the shape of the Irten’evs’ communicative abilities:

Who has not noticed those mysterious, wordless relations which manifest themselves in a scarcely visible smile, in the motion or glance of persons who always live together, in brothers, friends, husband and wife, master and servant, especially when these people are not entirely open to each other? How many unuttered desires, thoughts, and fears of not being understood are expressed in one casual glance, when your eyes meet timidly and with indecision!

Кто не замечал тех таинственных бессловесных отношений, проявляющихся в незаметной улыбке, движении или взгляде между людьми, живущими постоянно вместе: братьями, друзьями, мужем и женой, господином и слугой, в особенности когда люди эти не во всем откровенны между собой. Сколько недосказанных желаний, мыслей и страха – быть понятым – выражается в одном случайном взгляде, когда робко и нерешительно встречаются ваши глаза! (1:141)

Here the secret language of gestures unfolds as an issue of filial intimacy, the result of cohabitation and closeness.²⁹ The matrix of legibility in which these “mysterious, wordless relations” plays out becomes paradoxical, though; it is at once common knowledge (“Who has not noticed [them]?”) and yet a sign of extreme intimacy, revealed only over time to “people in constant contact with each other” [между людьми, живущими постоянно вместе].

As the visible ever points to the invisible, the line between them blurs, leading to further slippage between both. The ability to read into the “scarcely visible smiles” of intimate partners

²⁹ As Anna Berman notes, such “unspoken relations,” like those developing between Volodya and Nikolai, model the intimacy of close relationships throughout Tolstoy’s works: “Painfully self-aware and self-critical, [Nikolai] is obsessed with his peers’ perception of him, most importantly his brother’s. Nikolenka is wounded when he senses that Volodya is trying to act older and superior and pretending not to understand him. The drama of the trilogy hinges on just such subtle psychological maneuvering.” Berman, *Siblings in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky*, 29.

and family members comes in spite of (and not thanks to) their openness, as the ready legibility of gestural, non-verbal language manifests “especially when these people are not entirely open to each other.” Such moments of “reading,” of parsing the thoughts that lie behind the “unuttered desires” playing out on the face and in gestures, takes the shape of an act of penetration. It opens what is closed, and reveals what is (and otherwise *ought to be*) secret. Nikolai’s narrative acts of reading are both a signpost of filial intimacy *as well as its repudiation*. This intimacy participates in its own violation; thoughts and desires are marked as private in the moment of their being made public.

As a result, virtual omniscience is achieved: with secret thoughts rendered so easily legible on the face, the invisible nature of character interiority remains invisible in name only. The matrix of legibility in which Nikolai’s narrative authority unfolds also turns other characters—at least, those who are also members of this family of interpreters—into equal participants, reader-narrators in their own right. After a fight between the two brothers, for example, Nikolai is able to read Volodya’s thoughts, but so too is Volodya able to read his:

When I passed by Volodya, I felt at heart like going to him and making up with him, but I pouted and tried to look angry. Volodya just happened to raise his head, and he looked at me with a barely noticeable, open-hearted, derisive smile. Our eyes met, and I knew that he understood me, and that he understood that I knew that he understood, but some irresistible feeling made me turn away.

Проходя мимо Володи, несмотря на то, что мне хотелось подойти и помириться с ним, я надулся и старался сделать сердитое лицо. Володя в это самое время поднял голову и с чуть заметной добродушно насмешливой улыбкой смело посмотрел на меня. Глаза наши встретились, и я понял, что он понимает меня и то, что я понимаю, что он понимает меня; но какое-то непреодолимое чувство заставило меня отвернуться. (1:143)

The “understanding of understanding” of “A History of Yesterday” resurfaces in this more complicated encounter. Despite his true feelings of contrition, Nikolai here attempts to express interpretable signs of anger (literally, “to make an angry face” [сделать сердитое лицо]) but is unable to effect this ruse, as a scene of silent interpretation results in the brothers wordlessly understanding each other anyway. Nikolai’s reading of other characters continues to fold in on itself, resulting in a reading of *their* reading of him, of having himself been read. All characters in the diegetic world are potentially imbued with the authority of the narrator.

Boyhood constantly draws our attention to this sublation of narrative authority by various acts of reading. In another moment of silent communion between the two now-distant brothers, in chapter 26 (“Reflections”), Nikolai enters Volodya’s room as he is reading a French novel. Volodya looks at Nikolai with a loaded glance:

It seemed to me that in his glance was expressed the question why I had come there, and that in the rapid inclination of his head was manifested a desire of concealing from me the meaning of that glance. This tendency to give a meaning to the simplest motion was a characteristic of mine at that period.

Мне показалось, что во взгляде его выражался вопрос, зачем я пришел сюда, а в быстром наклонении головы желание скрыть от меня значение взгляда. Эта склонность придавать значение самому простому движению составляла во мне характеристическую черту того возраста (1:199).

In the end, Nikolai picks up a book, but continues to think only about his brother. Here the levels of reading are multiplied, but confound each other: in a scene bookended by both brothers seeming to read narrative fiction, Nikolai first reads meaning into Volodya's glance (a habit the novel once again notes to be literally characteristic of boyhood) before coming to understand not only that Volodya's movement attempts to thwart his being read by Nikolai, but also that both have accurately read and understood each other anyway. Here the novel suggests that real communication, and real understanding, is inevitable; the brothers' intimacy pierces through any attempts at subterfuge, and their understanding of understanding comes *despite* what novels they are pretending to read.

However, we increasingly come to recognize the problematic absence of outsidership, of a position not exhaustible by Nikolai's gaze, when he performs such readings. In this scene, even Volodya's understanding (that his own understanding has itself been understood) is readily and instantly legible. In moments like these—as well as in the other scenes of silent reading that it mirrors throughout the trilogy—*Boyhood* redraws our attention to its negotiation with alterity. The people Nikolai sees along the roadside as he travels to Moscow from the safety of his carriage alert him to the existence of life, people, and knowledge outside of his immediate family circle. The majority of Nikolai's other encounters, however, are epistemologically self-centered, hinging on close family members reading each other's thoughts and intentions without fail.

Boyhood overtly plays with this disparity, which crops up again when Nikolai relays, in an inset story, the history of Karl Ivanych's life (1:148-158). Nikolai, as a competing narrator now *encountering alterity* in the form of the word of another, distances himself from this story, editorializing its language and undermining it, commenting on its unverifiability.³⁰ He notes the whole history is told “with too much feeling and methodical consistency, which form the chief characteristics of verisimilitude, not to be believed; on the other hand, there were too many poetical beauties in his history, so that these very beauties provoked doubt” [с слишком живым чувством и методическою последовательностью, составляющими главные признаки правдоподобности, рассказывал свою историю, чтобы можно было не верить ей; с другой стороны, слишком много было поэтических красот в его истории; так что именно красоты эти вызывали сомнения] (1:150). Nikolai further notes that Karl Ivanych's story potentially “originated during his lonely life in our house, and which he had himself come to believe from his frequent repetitions,” reducing Karl Ivanych's life to a mere *offshoot of his own*.

³⁰ Eric De Haard suggests that this inset story, given in chapters 8-10, forms a “novel in a nutshell,” unique from the rest of the text in that it is filled with conventions borrowed from the sentimentalist novel, military memoir, and picaresque. De Haard, *Narrative and Anti-Narrative*, 48. He argues that Nikolai's “lengthy cautionary introduction, which interrupts Karl Ivanych after his very first sentence,” serves as a device aimed “at creating a huge gap, if not a barrier, between primary and secondary narrative,” representative of Nikolai's attempts to wrangle “maximal control over this alien narrative. He attempts to deny any responsibility for its contents and voices a number of cautions in order to ensure that it is seen in its true proportions.” *Ibid.*, 50. De Haard traces the many “editorial lapses” on the part of Irten'ev in translating into Russian Karl Ivanych's German, which create a further distancing (and parodic) effect. *Ibid.*, 62-63.

Inasmuch as the rest of the novel tracks Nikolai's command (or concern for his lack of command) over the objects of his narrative gaze, this inset story forms the exception that proves the rule: as Nikolai for the first time enters the role of frame narrator, shepherding the words of another, he becomes concerned with the provenance and believability of the story, and distances himself from it – a story that he cannot confirm. Chapter ten then relays the entire sad history of Karl Ivanych, a pastiche of different careworn tropes of romantic entanglements, prison escape, and the return home of an unrecognized prodigal son.³¹ The following chapter—jumping forward in time several months—ironically caps the tragic story of Karl Ivanych's life by returning (in a nearly comical juxtaposition) back to Nikolai, who now experiences his own “greatest misfortune” in life: a poor mark in history class.

Speaking of the offending history teacher (his new tutor St-Jerome) Nikolai bemoans: “For him it was a movement of a pen, but for me it was the greatest misfortune” [Для него движение пера, а для меня величайшее несчастье] (1:162). In the overconfident assumption that collapses the epistemic distance between the “for him” and the “but for me” of this sentence, Nikolai abrogates the alterity of his teacher, reducing him to the role of a (legible) minor character in the story of his own temporary unhappiness, just as he has just reduced Karl Ivanych once more. Furthermore, like the narrative-produced tears of *Childhood's* falsified dream, this move plays with the possible meta-literary effects the text suggests of itself: Nikolai's most emotionally charged moment is produced by the “movements of a pen,” which supersede the effects of the novelistic narrative [of and about the other] that he has just retold.

Indeed, Nikolai—locked in his room in chapter fifteen and threatened with corporal punishment for speaking out against St-Jerome—again responds to emotional distress by experimenting with authorship, first imagining that he had been orphaned as a child only to be adopted by his current family, a fantasy (reminiscent of Fielding) that he compares to Karl Ivanych's story from a few chapters earlier: “It was a relief for me to think that I was unhappy not because I was guilty, but because that had been my fate since my very birth, and because my fate resembled that of unfortunate Karl Ivanych” [Мне отрадно думать, что я несчастен не потому, что виноват, но потому, что такова моя судьба с самого моего рождения и что участь моя похожа на участь несчастного Карла Ивановича] (1:170). Blind to his entirely tone-deaf comparison with the fate of Karl Ivanych, Nikolai imagines first confronting his father about the secret of his birth, and then imagines he would join the hussars and become a celebrated war general, in order to petition the tsar for permission to exact revenge against St-Jerome.

He then fantasizes that his punishment at his teacher's hands might instead lead to his death, a fate that would free him from the bounds of corporeal existence and allow him to spy and eavesdrop on his family and witness their genuine feelings about him, recalling Odоеvsky's Aristidov once again:

I recalled the stories of Natalya Savishna about the soul of a deceased person not leaving the house for forty days, and I mentally passed unnoticed, after my death, through all the

³¹ Karl Ivanych's background and story, as Eikhenbaum suggests when writing of the character's introduction in *Childhood*, would have also already felt reminiscent to the contemporary reader of familiar narrative tropes, particularly those of the titular German tutor character Adam Adamovich from the *povest'* by M. Mikhailov, as well as P. A. Kulisha's story “The History of Ul'iana Terent'eva” from the edition of *The Contemporary* immediately preceding Tolstoy's debut. Eikhenbaum, *Lev Tolstoi*, 92-93.

rooms of grandmother's house, and eavesdropped on the genuine tears of Liubochka, on the laments of grandmother, and on papa's conversation with August Antonovich.

Вспоминая рассказы Натальи Савишны о том, что душа усопшего до сорока дней не оставляет дома, я мысленно после смерти ношусь невидимкой по всем комнатам бабушкиного дома и подслушиваю искренние слезы Любочки, сожаления бабушки и разговор папа с Августом Антонычем (1:172).

In these fantasies, the concerns underlying Nikolai's role as narrator come to the fore: on the one hand, his fictionalized origin as a secret orphan and imagined future as a war hero borrow from novelistic tropes and draw a self-aware comparison to the highly novelistic inset history of Karl Ivanych's life. On the other hand, the fantasy about his own death revolves singularly around *non-corporeal unobserved observation*, and around allowing panoptic access to the privileged conversations, private moments, and otherwise inaccessible minds of other characters.³² These dreams, then, thematize fantasies not about Nikolai the character, but about Nikolai the *narrator*, calling for the very shape of disembodied novelistic narrative omniscience.

Boyhood questions the ethics of the legibility its narrative relies on. Its self-professed focus on alterity, on the existence and knowability of other people, is tempered by the special attention it pays to the esoteric, intimate way the brothers communicate – certainly a system as entirely *devoid* of outsidership as it is of illegibility. The novel questions Nikolai's status as a discerning narrator, as he belittles (by editorializing) the words of others, reproducing the powerful “movements of a pen” that otherwise so distress him.

Despite these experiments with authorship, and despite his otherwise increasingly privileged gaze, Nikolai also at times *reneges* on the authority of his position as a narrator; just as the sudden existence of unknown people is tempered by the unfettered legibility of his close family members, Nikolai's editorializing of Karl Ivanych's story is countered by the moments in which his acts of penetrative reading still both fail and shame him. In the case of his father, Nikolai feels his overreading is tantamount to sacrilege. Sent up to his father's room to retrieve a gift for his sister, Nikolai instead uses his father's keys to open a locked portfolio filled with private papers he has been forbidden from touching. The stakes of his spying are clear: “I felt that papa was living in an entirely separate, beautiful, inapproachable, and incomprehensible sphere, and that it would be a kind of sacrilege for me to try to penetrate the secrets of his life.” [Я чувствовал, что папа должен жить в сфере совершенно особенной, прекрасной, недоступной и непостижимой для меня, и что стараться проникать тайны его жизни было бы с моей стороны чем-то вроде святотатства] (1:164). Nikolai's violation of his father's privacy is cast as an issue of bounds overstepped and of epistemological lines crossed, of broaching a sacrosanct interiority that, though violated, still maintains its unknowability.³³

³² This dream (which recalls the experiences of Odoevsky's narrator Aristidov in “The Living Dead Man,” cited in the epigraph of Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk*) negotiates the authority of narrative omniscience insofar as, as Audrey Jaffe puts it, “to imagine oneself as bodiless, as invisible, is to occupy without threat the position of the observing other.” Jaffe, *Vanishing Points*, 20.

³³ Writing on *Childhood*, Gustafson suggests that Nikolai's knowing of his father and mother map out unique epistemological modes of “affective memory which represents knowledge not as abstract ideas about sense data, nor as impressions from sense data, but as the result of an act of going forth from self into other to seize the other for the self,” as Nikolai's father remains an unknowable yet deduced ideal,

Indeed, the incident leaves him feeling ashamed and ill-at-ease, unable to digest (or report on) anything he read in the papers because of his overwhelming feeling of guilt.³⁴

In such scenes of shamed overreading, interrupted narration, and anxious editorializing, *Boyhood* explores the contradictions of self and other central to its narrative project; its narrator relies entirely on the intimacy of his family while claiming to appreciate the alienness of those outside it. These contradictions extend to the novel's narrative ethics, taking the shape of opposing, simultaneous poles: the minds of characters are at once sacrosanct and yet legible, unreachable and yet commonplace. Privileged knowledge in the novel is a symptom of intimacy, but is had thanks to its violation, and at times at the expense of its own re-telling: Nikolai's closeness with his brothers and sisters underwrites his ability to read their minds – and to reveal their secrets. His fascination with the hidden world of his father—which he knows he ought not to read—renders whatever he finds there unnarratable anyway. The unknowability of other people reinforces the closeness of intimate partners and family members, while still marking knowledge of them as a violation. At the center of these contradictions lies Nikolai, the oxymoronic union of limited character and privileged narrator, whose abilities as one exist in tension with his role as the other. In his experimentations with [self-] authorship—including his rendering legible the minds of the other, as well as his editorializing commentary on the words of other character-narrators—Nikolai assumes the mantle of an increasingly perspicacious, powerful, and privileged narrative position.

V. “The author himself did not exist for me”: metafictional reading in *Youth*

The contradictions at the heart of Nikolai's role as a character-narrator—concerned with the effects of the narrative he also performs, ethically invested in the consequences of his own gaze, reliant upon the intimacy that he also violates—are multiplied in *Youth* [Юность] (1857). In this final novel in the trilogy, Nikolai's overreading unfolds as an overt strategy for self-authorship. The novel demonstrates how his penetration into the minds of other characters serves only to reinforce his own self-understanding, as Nikolai constantly wonders not about what others think, but specifically about what they think *about him*. By continuing to track the development of Nikolai as a narrator, and particularly by drawing attention to his navel-gazing and myopic field of vision—which still slips constantly into a state of narrative omniscience—*Youth* invites the reader to question again the effects of such overreading.

In several simultaneously self-referential and metafictional moments, *Youth* plays with the idea of literary self-fashioning, a phenomenon Nikolai returns to several times. In chapter thirty, while detailing the various “occupations” that define his experience of youth, including his growing fondness for playing music, Nikolai for the first time addresses the topic of novels, and his own manner of reading them:

All the most unnatural persons and incidents were as true to me as reality, and I not only did not dare to suspect the author of lying, but the author himself did not exist for me; from the printed page rose before me the living, real people and incidents. If I nowhere

while his mother is a recreation, brought into being by his memory of her. Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*, 234-36.

³⁴ Elsewhere, as Nikolai thinks of his spying on the maids' chambers, the activity of eavesdropping is likewise cast-off as a symptom of a now-quit stage of development, a boyhood activity that now causes shame. See 1:197.

had met people that resembled those of whom I read, I did not for a moment doubt that I should someday. I experienced in myself all the passions described, and perceived a similarity between me and all the characters, both the heroes and the villains of every novel, just as a susceptible man finds in himself the symptoms of every possible disease when he reads a medical work.

Все самые неестественные лица и события были для меня так же живы, как действительность, я не только не смел заподозрить автора во лжи, но сам автор не существовал для меня, а сами собой являлись передо мной, из печатной книги, живые, действительные люди и события. Ежели я нигде не встречал лиц, похожих на те, про которых я читал, то я ни секунды не сомневался в том, что они *будут*. Я находил в себе все описываемые страсти и сходство со всеми характерами, и с героями, и с злодеями каждого романа, как мнительный человек находит в себе признаки всех возможных болезней, читая медицинскую книгу. (1:311)

Nikolai's reading is self-consciously unaesthetic, with an eye not towards fictionality or authorship but rather defined by a hypochondriacal and sympathetic over-identification with literary characters.³⁵ He finds a multidirectional continuum between the printed page and reality, both accepting the existence of the characters he reads about as well as presuming that they possess analogues in his own life, and that real people might be [readable] like characters.³⁶

The boundary between fiction and reality within *Youth* is then blurred further, as Nikolai notes how he once strived to reach the ideal of moral perfection as represented by certain (ultimately forgettable) fictional characters: "I wished above everything in all my acts and affairs to be 'noble' [...], then to be passionate, and finally, to be as *comme il faut* as possible, for which, however, I had a leaning even before. I tried in my looks and habits to resemble the heroes who had any of these qualities." [Прежде всего я желал быть во всех своих делах и поступках «пoble» [...], потом быть *страстным* и, наконец, к чему у меня и прежде была склонность, быть как можно более *comme il faut*] (1:311). Nikolai recalls one noble and passionate hero in particular who was possessed of very bushy eyebrows, and whom he was "anxious to resemble." In his attempt to cut his eyebrows to ensure that they grew back even thicker, Nikolai accidentally removes them entirely, and is forced to apply false replacement eyebrows with gunpowder borrowed from Volodya. By the time Nikolai's eyebrows do eventually grow back in, he "had entirely forgotten about the passionate man" (1:311-312). This farcical memory plays with the exteriorization of interiority, the same mechanism that underwrites Nikolai's ability to read other characters as a narrator: he finds evidence of his

³⁵ And which both recalls the reading habits of Dostoevsky's Makar Devushkin as well as predicts the categories of aesthetic and unaesthetic reading in M. M. Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel," the former of which necessitates the reconstruction of the authorial perspective, in contradistinction to an over-identification or sympathy with any given character. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, op. cit., 312-15.

³⁶ This strategy of reading recalls the unpublished preface of the second (of four) redactions to *Childhood* entitled "To My Readers" (К читателям), in which Tolstoy outlines the shape of his ideal, sympathetic reader (as well as his desire for the absence of the "imprint of authorship" from the final text): "You should be sensitive—that is, you should sometimes be able to experience heartfelt pity and even shed a few tears over a fictitious person you have loved, or rejoice for him with all your heart and not be ashamed of it." Quoted in Christian, *Tolstoy: A Critical Introduction*, 23.

sister's feelings in her facial expression just as he finds proof of a character's definite (and his own potential) passion in their eyebrows. Of course, in this case Nikolai's self-authoring lets him down, and here the novel plays again with its own potential afterlife: Nikolai not only fails to successfully mimic his favorite character, but eventually forgets all about him anyway.

Nikolai's intra-diegetic experience of reading (including both the felt reality and importance of literary characters, as well as the irrelevance of their authors) directly counters his own role as an author, of himself as of the text.³⁷ His narration makes a display of its own authority in the process of ostensibly renouncing it; in the aborted attempt to literally *fashion himself a literary character*, Nikolai instead reinforces his authority as a narrator (of the text in which he of course is also a character), impossibly recalling, ex-post-facto, the process of *having forgotten* about the character in question.

Nikolai's intra-diegetic reading of literary characters (in the text within the text) spills over into his narration of other people, whom he reads and narrates—just as he does their fictional analogues—with an eye to their function in his own self-understanding. This reading fails him, however; the readings he now transports into his everyday life from his reading of fiction leave him unable to appreciate those who stand beyond the limitations of his strict understanding of social status. In chapter thirty-one, Nikolai explains his ability to read the social currency of others: “I had common signs, by which I decided to what category a man belonged, even without speaking to him. My chief sign, outside of the room, gloves, handwriting, and carriage, were the feet. The relation of a man's boots to his pantaloons at once decided in my eyes his standing.” [Кроме того, у меня были общие признаки, по которым я, не говоря с человеком, решал, к какому разряду он принадлежит. Главным из этих признаков, кроме убранства комнаты, печатки, почерка, экипажа, были ноги. Отношение сапог к панталонам тотчас решало в моих глазах положение человека] (1:313). His gaze ultimately proves too narrow, as it distances him from the classmates he haughtily judges lack the requisite amount of visible *comme il faut*-ness.

After returning home from an evening with his new acquaintances, he is flummoxed by the disparity between their positive inner qualities and their seemingly negative external signs: “I long wavered between respect for them, to which their knowledge, their simplicity, honesty, and poetry of youth and careless bravery led me, and revulsion, produced by their indecent exterior.” [Я долго, не засыпая, колебался, с одной стороны, между уважением к ним, к которому располагали меня их знания, простота, честность и поэзия молодости и удалства, с другой стороны – между отталкивающей меня их непорядочной внешностью] (1:362). Just as *Childhood* implicated our reading of it by repeatedly drawing attention to the reductive and painful readings performed by its narrator, here *Youth* also puts its reader on the hook, reminding us of the problematic after-effects of reading others as we read fictional characters.

³⁷ The centrality of reading to Tolstoy's aesthetic project has not gone unnoticed; Gustafson convincingly asserts that the act of reading in Tolstoy—in more ways than one—overlaps with the act of knowing. See Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*, 277-78. Thomas Seifrid, cataloging the “visualism” that links knowing, seeing, and reading throughout Tolstoy, ultimately formulates the issue as a function of his authorship: “Thus for Tolstoy the spectacle of human affairs is subsumed within the world of the book. Given the role perspective plays in Tolstoyan narrative, it is perhaps only natural for him to depict in perspectival terms experiences as significant for him as reading and writing.” Seifrid, “Gazing on Life's Page: Perspectival Vision in Tolstoy,” *PMLA*, Vol. 113, No. 3 (May 1998), 445.

In the process of representing Nikolai's constant reading of other people as exhaustible, knowable literary characters, *Youth* repeatedly racks focus to the mistake inherent to such a conflation. When Nikolai takes a trip to a monastery in chapters seven and eight, he is ever the narrator in search of characters to read, and whose interiors he might narrate. He becomes intensely concerned with the impression he is making, constantly reading those around him in order to discern how they in turn have read *him*.³⁸ As he leaves the church, Nikolai wonders to himself: "What could the monks have thought of me, as they gazed at me, upon issuing, one after another, from the church?" [Но что обо мне могли думать монахи, которые, друг за другом выходя из церкви, все глядели на меня?] (1:225). He runs through his own exterior markers, noting the state of his face, hair, boots, and clothes, wondering: "To what category of men did the monks mentally refer me as they gazed at me? They certainly surveyed me attentively. [К какому разряду людей относили меня мысленно монахи, глядевшие на меня? А они смотрели на меня внимательно] (1:225). Upon returning to the church a second time, Nikolai again wonders how he is seen (and has been read) by the priest, who "must be reflecting that he had never, in all his life, met, nor ever should meet, such a beautiful soul in a young man such as I was, and even that there could not be the like of me." [верно, думает, что такой прекрасной души молодого человека, как я, он никогда не встречал в жизни, да и не встретит, что даже и не бывает подобных] (1:227). Nikolai's projection into the minds of the monks and priest at the monastery is entirely self-focused, as he seeks confirmation of his own brilliance, of which he is already certain. Although Nikolai does not comment on the myopia of this gaze, the novel ironizes his narrative position; returning to his carriage, Nikolai fishes for a compliment from his driver and—expecting praise—asks the driver if he knows why he had gone up the monastery again, only to be confronted with a simple response – Не могу знать, барин (1:228) – that dismisses and repudiates his entire process of reading the chapter's other characters.

In Nikolai's overreading of these characters, linked to his mode of reading fiction, no outsidership is possible; their legibility to Nikolai (which the novel invites us to see as a moment of unaware vanity) serves only his own cause of budding [self-]authorship, while he remains blind to the simple truth of the carriage driver's statement that some things are unknowable. Alterity is similarly curtailed in *Youth*'s other silent scenes of interpretation. The family of like-minded readers of *Boyhood* is now broken along gendered lines, but those who belong to it are rendered as readable as those outside it. Nikolai notes again that intimate family members possess a certain "private faculty," a special kind of "understanding," that allows them to both preternaturally read each other as well as to immediately understand the truth of any given situation, to "see at exactly the same moment where praise ends and irony begins, where enthusiasm ends and hypocrisy begins." He explains, however, that a peculiar fraternal idiolect develops as a side-effect:

To facilitate this equal understanding among the members of the same circle or family, there establishes itself a conventional language, conventional expressions, and even words, which define those shades of meaning that do not exist for others. In our family, this understanding was highly developed between papa and us brothers.

³⁸ Frederic Jameson suggests that Tolstoy's overt focus on—and fascination with the details of—the body of the other is a sign of the "warming over" of narcissism, although I would argue that in such scenes as this one, the novel is self-aware of the myopia of such a self-focused gaze. See Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), 90-91.

Для облегчения этого одинакового понимания между людьми одного кружка или семейства устанавливается свой язык, свои обороты речи, даже – слова, определяющие те оттенки понятий, которые для других не существуют. В нашем семействе, между папа и нами, братьями, понимание это было развито в высшей степени (1:307-308).³⁹

The novel is filled with such scenes of silent understanding between the Irten'ev brothers, who all successfully interpret each other's interiors, as gestures, glances, and looks supersede words. Volodya reads "suspicion of his knowledge" in both Nikolai's and Dmitri's eyes when explaining a complex mathematical topic (1:237). Dmitri's face, walk, and gestures outwardly express his frame of mind, convincing Nikolai that there are "two different men" inside him, the difference between which is demonstrable by what his "whole exterior, the sound of his voice, and all his movements seemed to say." [Когда он бывал в этом расположении духа, вся его наружность, звук голода, все движения говорили, казалось...] (1:247). When Nikolai and Dmitri arrive at Dubkov's and unexpectedly find Volodya there playing at cards, a scene of silent interpretation plays out *as if it were dialogue*, as looks and glances "speak" their meaning wordlessly between the brothers: "But there was no consternation in his look, -- it simply said: 'Yes, I play, and you are surprised because you are young. This is not only not bad, but quite the thing at our years.' I felt it and understood at once." [Но в его выражении не было заметно смущения, оно как будто говорило мне: «Да, играю, а ты удивляешься этому только потому, что еще молод. Это не только не дурно, но должно в наши лета». Я тотчас почувствовал и понял это] (1:248).

However, while the Irten'ev brothers have developed this special capacity for understanding, including both the signficatory power of facial expression and gesture as well as a secret verbal code, the *women* of the family are excluded. As a result, the act of silent reading, the "in-joke" of "understanding," serves as both a means of meaning-transmission as well as a method of virtue-signalling, negatively valancing those outside the exclusive circle of readers: "the girls did not have our understanding, and that was the chief cause of our moral disunion, and of the contempt which we felt for them" [Девочки не имели нашего понимания, и это-то было главною причиною нашего морального разъединения и презрения, которое мы к ним чувствовали] (1:308). Despite their exclusion from the boys' special argot, though, the women of the Irten'ev family remain themselves eminently legible, characters to the piercing gaze of Nikolai's narrator.

Avodtya Vasilevna Epifanova, Nikolai's new step-mother, is particularly marked as an interloper by her exclusion from the family of interpreters. Nikolai notes: "Besides, she was so entirely devoid of the faculty of 'understanding,' of which I have spoken before, and which was highly developed in our house, and her habits were so different from those which had taken deep root with us, that this alone went against her." [Притом в ней было такое отсутствие той в высшей степени развитой в нашем доме способности понимания, о которой я уже говорил, и привычки ее были так противоположны тем, которые укоренились в нашем доме, что уже это одно дурно располагало в ее пользу] (1:355). *Her* interior, meanwhile, including her

³⁹ Anna Berman notes how this "private language" as a "model for sibling intimacy will carry over into the depiction of brother-sister relations in *War and Peace* (1865-69). The Rostov siblings share a similar depth of understanding and connection based on childhood memories and associations," although in the case of this later model, ultimately the "distinction between sibling and romantic relationships is blurred," as "sibling bonds resemble asexual marriages." Berman, *Siblings in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky*, 31, 38.

particular feelings for Nikolai's father, remains easily legible "in every word, look, and motion of hers" [была видна в каждом слове, взгляде и движении] (1:354). Nikolai remarks that she is likewise marked by her "unbearably detestable" gestural tics, including smiling "with her lips only, and nodding, whenever she was told things that little interested her" (1:356-357). While she remains unable to read her husband's face, who she wrongfully accuses of philandering, her own inner feelings and "secret jealousy" are patently evident (1:358).

As the novel tracks Nikolai's development as a (seemingly) increasingly privileged narrator, the author of his life and the interpreter of the inner lives of those around him, it simultaneously suggests his growing blindness to the paucity of his gaze, which erases the alterity of those he observes and narrates. The resulting silent scenes of face-reading easily bleed into—in Dorrit Cohn's famous term—moments of psycho-narration, the revelation of figural consciousness, with increasingly few markers of limitation or subjectivity, moving away from the external observation of the body and increasingly towards the direct penetration into the hidden interiors of other characters. As he performs the duty of visiting several family acquaintances in the novel's later chapters, for example, Nikolai's narrative frequently slips into internal focalization, reporting on the secret thoughts of his acquaintances *without* reading them, in some cases noting how some characters' interiors run *counter* to their gestures or facial expressions.

In chapter seventeen, Nikolai achieves interiority while visiting Ilin'ka, noting that his forced smile conceals his secret, unexpressed feelings of shame (1:260), while in chapter twenty, when visiting the Ivins, Nikolai similarly notes that the general's son's expression masks his true feelings about the visit (1:269-70). Likewise, having left school and acquired his new uniform in chapter thirteen, Nikolai gads about town and spends his money on unnecessary "adult" purchases before running into his schoolmate Semenov, walking by in his citizen's mufti: "I see you are not in your uniform!" I said to him. Semenov stopped, blinked, and showed his teeth, as though it pained him to look into the sun, but, in reality, to show his indifference to my vehicle and uniform, gazed at me in silence, and walked on." [Семенов остановился, прищурил глаза и, оскалив свои белые зубы, как будто ему было больно смотреть на солнце, но собственно затем, чтобы показать свое равнодушие к моим дрожкам и мундиру, молча посмотрел на меня и пошел дальше] (1:245). While *Youth* often makes a problem of Nikolai's reductive gaze, Nikolai remains unaware of it, now constantly and confidently narrating the thoughts of those around him.

The tension inherent to the narrative situation of *Childhood*, as an experienced future narrator interrupts and reframes his childhood experiences with impossible accuracy, has evaporated, leaving instead only a constant slippage into omniscience, as Nikolai reports on the *actual* thoughts of his classmates and family, *as opposed to* their facial expressions; his ability to report on the former is not tethered to his capacity to parse the latter. But in the process of representing an increasingly empowered narrative voice, *Youth* also draws attention to the problematic after-effects of such moments of overreading, while also pointing again at our own reading of it.

VII. Conclusions: The Sevastopol Sketches, and Beyond

Childhood, *Boyhood* and *Youth* cast a spotlight on Nikolai's overreading of other characters, which erases their alterity, reduces their lives to the role they play as characters in his story of them, and at times, harms his relationship with them. In constantly demanding that we see the limits of their narrator, in constantly inviting us to be *better, more sensitive readers* than

Nikolai—of fictional texts, as well as of the other—*Childhood*, *Boyhood* and *Youth* make an ethical claim on us, putting on our shoulders the responsibility of attending to the ethics of the narrative voice. In focusing on Tolstoy’s early, first-person storytelling, I have aimed to demonstrate how his devices for representing consciousness are, to return to Cathy Popkin’s phrase, “born of restraint doubly abandoned,” reliant on representing what ought to be inviolate in the moment of exhibiting its violation.⁴⁰

In tracking the development of Nikolai as a young man, the trilogy of novels also tracks his development as a narrator, increasingly informed by penetrative, proto-omniscient acts of reading. The novels link the development of this gaze with the development of adulthood, and the same can be said of the development of Tolstoy’s own narrative devices, as his writing reaches its maturity. But what of Tolstoy’s later work?

The overt ethical concerns of Tolstoy’s later writing, and their intersection with the representation of the workings of the mind of characters, beginning with the Sevastopol sketches, have long been the subject of scholarly concern.⁴¹ The popular Sevastopol sketches, which followed the lackluster reception of *Boyhood*, raise the stakes of the ethically invested proto-omniscience of Tolstoy’s earlier pseudo-autobiographical work, directly implicating the reader in the act of bearing witness to the stories’ contents. The narrative of “Sevastopol in December” [Севастополь в декабре месяце, 1855] even directly accesses the thoughts of “you,” the second-person narratee, whose experience of the besieged city is guided by a knowledgeable narrator, who teaches us how to *read* the city’s inhabitants.⁴²

In “Sevastopol in May” [Севастополь в мае, 1855], however, the multitude of potential readings and false narratives—including soldiers’ exaggerated tales and newspaper accounts of the war—calls for a decidedly powerful, undeniably omniscient narrative voice. This voice quickly swoops along the fields and through the trenches surrounding the city, informing us of the desires, wishes, and thoughts of hundreds of men (2:148-49), later asking us to listen in on what “thousands” of people are thinking (2:155). However, despite the authority of his omniscient gaze, the narrator ends the sketch with a move that prefigures Turgenev’s “The Execution of Tropmann” fifteen years later: the narrator questions whether his story has had any value at all. He wonders whether his telling of it has actually been transgressive, rather than positive: “Perhaps I ought to have left it unsaid. What I have said perhaps belongs to that class of evil truths that lie unconsciously hidden in the soul of each man and should not be uttered lest

⁴⁰ Popkin, “Kiss and Tell,” 40.

⁴¹ Justin Weir asserts that “Sevastopol in December” “pushes and pulls the reader in order to impose an ‘experience’ of the violence of war,” an early instance of what he terms “narrative alibi,” a process that he asserts Tolstoy will constantly return to in his later writing. Weir, *Leo Tolstoy and the Alibi of Narrative*, 2. Liza Knapp compares the shame experienced before the suffering of others by the character of “you” in this sketch to its later reworking as the relationship between Levin and his dying brother in *Anna Karenina*, noting that the story here works to transfer that feeling of shame to the reader. Knapp, “Tolstoy’s *Sevastopol Tales*: Pathos, Sermon, Protest, and Stowe” in *Before They Were Titans*, op. cit., 211-223. Gary Saul Morson argues that Tolstoy’s “Sevastopol in December” implicates the implied reader who, as the direct addressee of the second-person, omniscient narrative voice, is forced to bear witness as well as responsibility for the violent acts that unfold for the pleasure of our reading them. Morson, “The Reader as Voyeur: Tolstoy and the Poetics of Didactic Fiction,” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, No. 12 (1978).

⁴² Eric de Haard argues that the second-person direct address of the sketch “is basically a variant of selective omniscient heterodiegetic ‘third person narration,’” although he maintains that the “you” character should not be confused with the reader. De Haard, *Narrative and Anti-Narrative*, 76.

they become harmful” [Может, не надо было говорить этого. Может быть, то, что я сказал, принадлежит к одной из тех злых истин, которые, бессознательно таясь в душе каждого, не должны быть высказываемы, чтобы не сделаться вредными...] (2:156). This move retains the authority of the narrative gaze while questioning the value of the narrative’s contents. “Sevastopol in May” lays bare the “truths that lie unconsciously hidden” *without* any of the uncertainty of Nikolai Irten’ev’s guesswork or reading.

In assuming the full mantle of authority afforded by third-person narrative omniscience, Tolstoy’s narrative voice in “Sevastopol in May” undoes the positive valence with which *Childhood* and the sequel novels invested the act of attentive reading. Nikolai Irten’ev, as I have attempted to show, gradually comes to master his world and those in it as a narrative authority, reading the others in his life as he does the literary characters with whom he so greatly empathizes— including his own fictionalizations of himself. “Sevastopol in May,” on the other hand, denies us this reading, famously ending with an accounting of its own failure to provide any positive moral model or ethical test case in any of its characters: “Where is the expression of evil which should be avoided? Where is the expression of good which should be imitated in this story? Who is the villain, who the hero? All are good, and all are evil.” [Где выражение зла, которого должно избегать? Где выражение добра, которому должно подражать в этой повести? Кто злодей, кто герой ее? Все хороши и все дурны.] (2:156).

Instead, the narrator presents truth—specifically the hidden, unconscious truth that *only he* is empowered to access and to represent—as the real hero of the story: “The hero of my story, who I love with all the strength of my soul, who I have tried to represent in all its beauty, and who is, has been, and always will be beautiful – is truth.” [Герой же моей повести, которого я люблю всеми силами души, которого старался воспроизвести во всей красоте его и который всегда был, ест и будет прекрасен, -- правда.] (2:156). This famous concluding line pulls the carpet out from underneath the attentive face-reading, brotherly intimacy, and ethically-minded interpolation of character interiority of the earlier novels. This move reserves all authority for the omniscient narrator, who alone is empowered to reveal the true hero of the story all along, *despite our reading of it*. We are implicated in the work that explores the ethical and aesthetic consequences—and failures—of our reading, in which “to observe is to act – and act badly.”⁴³

Tolstoy’s later works continue this thread: *War and Peace* [Война и мир, 1865-67] and *Anna Karenina* [Анна Каренина, 1873-77] both engage with the ethics of narrative omniscience and the problem of overreading the other in strikingly different ways, but this is the topic for a future study.⁴⁴

⁴³ Morson, “The Reader as Voyeur,” 467.

⁴⁴ To cite but two examples, from opposite ends of the humanist and theoretical narrative-ethical spectrum: David Parker examines the “ethical greatness of *Anna Karenina*” as a function of the novel’s ability to disorient the reader in “moral space,” representing both characters who awaken from habitual consciousness, as well as those who fail to confront alterity in their attempts to “see into” and picture the interiors of the other. See David Parker, *Ethics, Theory, and the Novel* (Cambridge: Camb UP, 1994), 107-119. From the opposite end of the ethical spectrum, Colin Radford and Michael Weston debate the ethical implications of the reader’s ability to sympathize with the fictional Anna Karenina. See Radford, Colin and Michael Weston, “How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, Vol. 49 (July 1975), 67-93. Although it stands outside the scope of the present dissertation’s focus on Tolstoy’s early proto-omniscience, I have started an exploration of the differences in the scope of narrative voice in Tolstoy’s major novels—and their relationship to the novels’ narrative ethical projects—and plan to develop this argument further. See

In the search for an authoritative narrative omniscience, Tolstoy's early narratives first "create limited subjects," in order to "have something to be omniscient about."⁴⁵ In the process, these early narratives draw attention to the after-effects of their story-telling, to the ethical consequences of their penetrative omniscience, and to the violation inherent to reading and narrating what one ought not know. As N. G. Chernyshevsky famously remarks, Tolstoy's talent for observation culminates in the ability "to observe people with a *penetrating eye*" [смотреть на людей пронизательным взглядом].⁴⁶ Tolstoy's earliest narrative voices demonstrate an intense awareness of the violence of this penetration, commenting on the paradoxical nature of their knowledge. His novels are invested in exploring the ethics of their narrators' gazes which, despite their limitations, attempt all the same to represent what "God only knows."

Thomas Dyne, "Silent Scenes of Interpretation: Visual and Verbal Language in Tolstoy's Narrative," *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, Vol. 28 (December 2016), 7-16.

⁴⁵ Jaffe, *Vanishing Points*, 25.

⁴⁶ Chernyshevsky, *Pis'ma bez adresa*, 117, emphasis added.

EPILOGUE

In the preface to the New York edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*, Henry James makes reference to the architecture of Turgenev's writing, which is populated by characters he has first and foremost *seen* in their entirety, "who hovered before him, soliciting him, as the active or passive figure, interesting him and appealing to him just as they were and by what they were."¹ Later in the same essay, James famously refers to the "house of fiction" of his own oeuvre, an edifice comprised of a multitude of windows, "every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision."²

Extending this image, I have argued that Russian narratives of the mid nineteenth-century positions its narrating agents in a liminal space, both inside and outside the windows it shows itself peering through, ever making us aware of our complicity in a piercing, penetrating vision in the same moment that it disavows the effects of that vision. "God only knows" indexes this newly omniscient Russian narrative voice of the mid-nineteenth century, who—in attending to the consequences of penetrating the mind of the other—denies authority in the moment of acting on it. The standard narrative questions—"who sees and who tells?"—become irretrievably wrapped up in follow-up ethical questions of epistemological promiscuity: "who sees how much, and how, and who can they tell about it?" In the nineteenth-century Russian novel, this is a problem drawn across the lines separating interior and exterior; the narratives I have examined are intensely invested in the ethics of their acts of representation, pointing to the inviolability of the mind and body of the other in the moment of showing themselves violating them.

As I have aimed to demonstrate, in the search for authoritative narrative omniscience, Turgenev's, Dostoevsky's, and Tolstoy's narratives first "create limited subjects," in order to "have something to be omniscient about."³ This move, in the terms of Peter Brooks, turns narrative into a nexus of desire and epistemology, and leaves the body the subject of stories told "in the effort to know and to have it."⁴ The knowing and possessing of bodies overlap as simultaneous goals, insofar as "the plot of the novel is very often the story of success or failure in gaining access to the body—and the story of the fulfillment or disillusionment that this brings," which suggests a "larger story" to do with "the desire to pierce the mysteries of life that are so often subsumed for us in the otherness of other people."⁵ In Turgenev's, Dostoevsky's, and Tolstoy's omniscient narratives, these concerns inhere not only in the way narrators render minds legible on the body, but in the way they also constantly interrogate this process. Their

¹ James, "Preface to *Portrait of a Lady*" in *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 2011), 42-43.

² "The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million — a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will. These apertures, of dissimilar shape and size, hang so, all together, over the human scene that we might have expected of them a greater sameness of report than we find. They are but windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life. But they have this mark of their own that at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other." *Ibid.*, 46.

³ Jaffe, *Vanishing Points*, 25.

⁴ Brooks, *Body Works*, 5-6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

character-narrators become interpreters of the grammar that plays out on the body, “in quest of what goes on inside, of the interiors beyond the signifying surfaces of face and skin.”⁶

The narrative ethics of nascent Russian omniscience is predicated on a philosophy of doubt. The narrative voice that disavows its own authority sows doubt on its own ability to penetrate the body of the other, and to access the mind of the character.⁷ Although it lies beyond the remit of this dissertation, the process of reckoning with the ethical consequences of a penetrative narrative gaze I see indexed by “God only knows” also speaks to a distinction in the study of ethics itself. In examining the ethics of the face-to-face encounter in Emmanuel Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity*, Robert Eaglestone metaphorizes the difference between actual presence and merely the representation of presence as the distinction between the icon and the idol. Transcendence is not possible through language, and consequently, through the work of art, just as the divine other, God, is not reachable through an idol: “That is, the idol is measured only in terms of the aesthesis, the experience of an art work. It is the aesthetic object, façade, frozen, with no access to transcendence.”⁸ The icon, however, shows us a face, calling us to responsibility. Thus, “all art is idolatrous for Levinas, unable to achieve the transcendence that is sometimes ascribed to art. Art is constituted by idols, ethics by icons.” Art, the construct of language, is bereft of access to the face, and therefore to transcendence.⁹

⁶ Juliet McMaster, *Reading the Body in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 3. McMaster examines how the sciences of physiognomy and pathognomy overlap with the representation of the body in the eighteenth-century Anglophone novel, noting that in certain works (Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, Burnley, and others) character interiority and exteriority directly corresponds, such that flesh becomes a “lucid medium,” and the narrator its interpreter. *Ibid.*, 25-26. However, in Sterne, among others, the body works as a covering, preventing direct access to the thoughts that gestures, looks, and glances otherwise lay bare. While Tom Jones’s good nature is always already visible in his face, for example, negative characters are also marked by their deceptive maneuvering, simulating external bodily semiotic signals to index false internal emotions. *Ibid.*, 52, 104. The plot of the misread face, McMaster argues convincingly, as well as the physiognomic science behind it, “gave the reading public a vocabulary and mode of discussion for aspects of experience and representation which were familiar, but which they had not hitherto found means to articulate. The newly codified practices of acting enabled novelists to tap this developing interest of the literate public. Rendering actions and expressions became for them not just a shorthand for communicating emotion – between narrator and reader, or between one character and another – but a major subject for debate, a way of showing they were conversant with current discourses, and had something of their own to add to them.” *Ibid.*, 83-84.

⁷ John Wisdom elaborates the philosophy of doubt when it comes to the mind of the other: “There must always be some doubt, practically negligible if you like, but still some doubt as to what is going on in the mind of another. What lies behind the smiling face, pleasure or pain, or nothing?” See Wisdom, *Other Minds*, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1968), 6.

⁸ Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism*, 119.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 124. See also Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg: Duquesne UP, 2007), 140-171. Eaglestone goes on to contrast Levinas’s later reworking of his ontological terminology and language in *Otherwise than Being*, in which, Eaglestone argues, Levinas makes a “linguistic turn”: “Whereas before he understood the ethical to be made manifest through the face-to-face relationship, now the ethical appears through language.” Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism*, 138-40. Michael Eskin further writes that Levinas’s ethics is *pre-verbal*, in that it conditions and precedes our verbal and dialogic response to the other, who becomes a sign herself, signifying herself; for Levinas, Eskin argues, “poetry is the textual manifestation, the objectivization of ethics as a fundamentally semiotic dynamic and, simultaneously, this dynamic itself. See Michael Eskin, *Ethics and Dialogue in the Works of Levinas, Bakhtin, Mandel’shtam, and Celan* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 8-10.

As I have aimed to demonstrate, however, the omniscient narratives of Turgenev, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy attend to the face in the process of reading it. Their narrators cast the process of penetrating the body to access the mind of the other an ethically fraught maneuver, and frequently become caught up in the minutiae of reading the grammar of bodily language, of the gestures playing out on the faces of characters, often flummoxed by their inability to know truly what is going on inside the mind of the other. The privileged information that they do successfully represent also still comes invested in its own ethics, figured as the result of a violation. Tolstoy's *Childhood* draws attention to how Nikolai exceeds the boundaries of his possible field of vision; Turgenev's hunter-narrator constantly casts his own stories as the product of eavesdropping, spying, and impossibly felicitous coincidences; Dostoevsky's narratives highlight the ethical violation inherent to our reading them, forcing us into the position of the voyeur from the courtyard, peering at the windows of strangers just as we read their private correspondence. The narrative voices I have investigated, then, do not just employ an easy, idolatrous process of penetrative, omniscient representation, but make that process *difficult*, ever pointing to the problematic iconography of the face of the other, which must be read *before* the mind it belies can be represented.

I take early Russian narrative omniscience to be an ethically invested display, tied up with an erotic visual focus on the body as a site of meaning construction, anxious about making permeable the boundaries that it also constructs, worried about exactly how to represent—as well as the stakes of representing—what “God only knows.”

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