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Dostoevsky, ‘Mister Prokharchin,’ and Naturalist Poetics

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DOSTOEVSKIJ, NATURALIST POETICS
AND "MR. PROCHARČIN"

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1.

Dostoevskij's early stories have traditionally been interpreted as a recasting of Gogol's work, while little attention has been paid to their relationship to the writing of Dostoevskij's contemporaries. Perhaps for this reason, his third story, "Mr. Procharčin", has been misunderstood to this day. Both Belinskij and modern critics have felt that the extremely grotesque style of "Mr. Procharčin" undermines its serious purpose. For Belinskij that purpose was the humanization of Gogol's poor clerk; for modern critics, reading through the prism of Crime and Punishment, it is the theme of "Napoleonism". Evaluated in these terms, the story may be considered unsuccessful, but placed in the context of the literary polemics of the 1840's, it emerges as a powerful statement of Dostoevskij's artistic credo. Far from being a trivial experiment as has been supposed, "Mr. Procharčin" contains a coherent critique of Naturalist poetics, taking as cases in point two of the most successful works published in 1845-1846, Nikolaj Nekrasov's "Petersburg Corners", and Apollon Majkov's "Mašen'ka". It is the purpose of this article to analyze that critique.

Dostoevskij began to write at a turning point in Russian literature. A transition from the "high" tradition of aristocratic authors like Puškin was being effected by a new group of writers and journalists of varied background who were more concerned with the mass reader - clerks, merchants, petit bourgeois, provincial landowners. From among such writers came the followers of Gogol' who formed themselves into what came to be called the Naturalist School. Belinskij, first as the critic for The Fatherland Notes and then for the Contemporary, became the principal ideologue
of Naturalism, which sought to carry on the tradition established by Gogol' in his Petersburg stories, "The Government Inspector" (1836), and particularly, *Dead Souls* and "The Overcoat" (1842). For Belinskij, Gogol's importance lay in his humane concern for the "little man", and for his realistic unmasking of the corruption of Russian social institutions; he wanted to create a new literature which would plead the cause of the "insulted and injured", and the writers of the Naturalist School accordingly began writing sympathetic stories about the Petersburg poor. In the 1840's the stories of Butkov, Grebenka, Dal', Nekrasov and others describe the abysmal poverty and vain aspirations of the petty clerk, and by implication, the immorality of the society that created these conditions. Thus the school defined itself in terms of its "democratic" ideology. Generically, it limited itself mostly to stories and physiological sketches. But, as Gukovskij has pointed out (1931:378), "style" was eliminated as a consideration for the Naturalists, since, in the tradition of the French realists, the underlying principle of the "physiological" sketch was the scientific, daguerreotype reproduction of nature; the word was considered to be in direct correspondence to its referent. This represents the most crucial aspect of the Naturalists' rejection of the "high" tradition of the 1820's and 1830's, a tradition in which literature itself was as "real" a referent as "reality", and style carried essential levels of meaning.¹

Dostoevskij's early work needs to be seen in this context.² Style is, after all, Dostoevskij's central concern in his first stories, and is vitally connected to his ideas about human personality. From his point of view, Belinskij, because of his insistence on literature as social commentary, had distorted Gogol's work, and was consequently insensitive to that aspect of Dostoevskij's work which contains a deep analysis of the stylistic dimensions of Gogol's prose that Belinskij ignored.³ Yet it was Belinskij and his circle that wanted to found a "Gogolian" school which was to determine the future direction of Russian literature, and to found it on a view of literature in crucial ways opposed to Gogol's. The conflict between Belinskij's "sociological" and Dostoevskij's aesthetic position became clear with the publication of *The Double*. Dostoevskij's next work addresses that conflict directly: "Mr. Procharčin" is a disquisition on levels of style and their effect on the poor clerk which uses all the features of the typical Naturalist tale to make its point. In it, Dostoevskij demonstrates the implications of the Naturalist position by exaggerating the tone of their stories so much that even those most impervious to stylistic nuance could not fail to notice. They did notice, but they misunderstood. Instead of seeing the hyperbolism as a parody of their own manner, they took it for a bad imitation of Gogol's. Here we must unravel the parody from the parodied. In order to understand the underlying conflict of views, it is useful to begin by discussing the discrepancy between Dostoevskij's intentions in his first two stories and Belinskij's misunderstanding of them.

2.

When Belinskij called Dostoevskij a "new Gogol" upon reading his first novel, *Poor Folk*, in 1845, it was because of his humane depiction of the poor clerk, Makar Devuškin, in which "the author (...) shows us how much beauty, nobility and holiness there is in the most limited human being" (X 205). Dostoevskij had renovated Naturalist poetics by reinforcing elements of sentimentalism: he has Devuškin tell his own story of the humiliations suffered by the Petersburg poor in an epistolary novel. Through his letter writing, the hero himself gains a growing awareness of style as it is linked to the question of human dignity. Crucial to Dostoevskij in this was the elimination of the omniscient narrator, a convention which could only provide an outside view of the hero. The inhumanity of the subject-object relationship of narrator and hero concerned Dostoevskij throughout his career. In Belinskij's reading of *Poor Folk*, it was the successful integration of pathos with the grotesque that was new, the more realistic embodiment of Gogol's "philanthropic" message, not the principles of style behind it. Misunderstanding Dostoevskij's focus in this way, Belinskij was understandably surprised by what he called the "fantastic coloration" of Dostoevskij's next story, *The Double* (1845), in which the comic grotesque aspects of Goljadkin's madness seemed to mask its "tragic pathos" (X 205). Bachtin's analysis (1929:175-184) shows *The Double* to be a continuation of Dostoevskij's experimentation with the narrator-hero relationship which elaborates the dichotomy between the external view of the individual (through the eyes of the Other) and the individual's internal perception of himself, a feature which had been well received when rendered (albeit less radically) in a more sentimental style in *Poor Folk*. Bachtin explains the cruelly mocking narrator of *The Double* as Goljadkin's exaggerated representation of the feared
voice of the Other, just as Goljakkin's double is an exaggeration and parody of his own feared aspirations to a position of prestige.

The Double has traditionally been understood as part of Dostoevskij's "struggle" with Gogol: the use of the mock epic and the character of Goljakkin relate to *Dead Souls* and the poor clerk "with ambition" - to "The Nose" and "The Diary of a Madman". The nature of Dostoevskij's response to Gogol becomes clearer, however, when seen as part of a three-way conversation with the Naturalists. Dostoevskij then appears not to be "correcting Gogol" as much as correcting the Naturalists by rephrasing the most profound aspects of Gogol's work for their edification. The Naturalists seemed not to have learned enough from Gogol: the aspiring poor clerk is one of the stock figures of their repertoire, but their mechanical plots provide no analysis of the interrelationship between the hero and his society, and their use of comic and tragic devices and motifs is given only superficial motivation. The stories in Jakov Butkov's *Petersburg Heights* (1845) are typical. In "One Hundred Rubles" the hero cannot find a job to maintain his family and passively accepts his fate. His friend then buys him a lottery ticket and he becomes obsessed with new hope, but when after two weeks of intense anticipation his ticket (N.6666!) actually wins, the shock drives him insane. The realization of his hopes in itself seems insufficient to cause his madness, despite Butkov's attempt to show it as a reaction to an oppressive society: the opening ironic observations about a person's worth being determined by how many rubles he has seem irrelevant to the hero's fate, an artificially appended piece of undigested social criticism.

In *The Double*, Dostoevskij gives a deeper interpretation of this typical tale of disappointed hopes which lead to madness. Emphasizing the idea of "The Nose", he shows that social injustice has more complex moral and psychological ramifications than the Naturalists are aware of, and that the conflict lies finally within the clerk himself. Goljakkin goes mad not simply because the boss's daughter refuses him and he is ignominiously turned out, but because of his own ambivalence: whether to act upon his internalized values of success which by their hollow nature necessitate "wearing a mask"; or to insist on his independent identity, though it be at the cost of being rejected by "respectable" people.

But Dostoevskij's audience, focussed on exposing social ills, was incapable of understanding his analysis. They were concerned with the external - hence their misuse of the Romantic device of madness; in *The Double*, Dostoevskij shows how madness is caused by the conflict between the external and the internal. In "Mr. Procharčin", he makes the same point again, but simplifies the conflict and isolates the internal from the external: Procharčin has no social façade, only an unconscious, mute, internal self; the lodgers with their teasing represent his deepest fears in an externalized way. And to make his point clearer, Dostoevskij carefully differentiates the inner from the outer voices by allotting them very disparate styles: Procharčin stutters incoherently; Mark Ivanović speaks ornately; the narrator takes narrational conventions to ludicrous extremes.

But again, contemporaries could understand "Mr. Procharčin" only in terms of the themes and ideology of the Naturalist tale of the poor clerk; thus while Dostoevskij's sympathetic treatment of Devuškin had ideologically allied him with the Naturalists, his seemingly mocking depiction of Goljakkin and then his thoroughly grotesque portrait of Procharčin completely alienated his former supporters. If in Devuškin Dostoevskij had humanized Gogol's Akakij Akakjevič, then the character of Procharčin, still more grotesque than Goljakkin, could only be perceived as a step backwards from Gogol. Procharčin is an even more inarticulate automaton than Akakij, and, as in *The Double*, the narrator's "sympathy" for the hero is utterly annihilating. Belinskij wrote of "Mr. Procharčin":

Not inspiration, not free and naive creativity produced this strange tale, but something like ... either ostentation or pretension ... otherwise it wouldn't be so contrived, affected, incomprehensible, more like some real but strange and confused event than a poetic creation.

(X 420)

Belinskij was too close to understand "Mr. Procharčin", and subsequent critics have perhaps been too distant. All were puzzled: why should Dostoevskij use the same comic grotesque he attacked and recast in *Poor Folk* if he wanted to humanize the poor clerk? The reason why "Mr. Procharčin" has remained a mystery for 150 years is that no one saw its parodic intent. But the discovery of the object of Dostoevskij's parody answers their question: Dostoevskij's exaggerated grotesque parodies the Naturalists' misuse of Gogol's stylistic devices. Nekrasov's story, "Petersburg Corners", is the specific object of Dostoevskij's parody, but to under-
stand his commentary we had better begin with what "Petersburg Corners" represented for Dostoevskij, that is, the Naturalist sketch in general.

3.

In the early 1840's, Butkov, Dal' Grebenka, Grigorovič, Nekrasov and others produced numerous stories and sketches which described the lives of the Petersburg poor in what was considered to be the spirit of Gogol's "overcoat", at once comic and "philanthropic". The typical physiological sketch described lower class types by profession, as in Grigorovič's "Petersburg Organ-grinders" (1845), and Dal's "A Petersburg Janitor" (1845) and "The Orderly" (1845). The description of the "little man", complete with pithy samples of his sub-standard Russian, is given by a narrator who is clearly identified by language and point of view as belonging to the educated class. The very choice of a lower class hero as a subject worthy of attention was taken as proof of the author's "progressive" intent. The comic treatment of the hero was apparently felt to convey benevolence. Here is Dal's description of the orderly:

He became an orderly because of his shortness and hunchness, was besides this left-handed, used to loo at the ground as he walked, wave his arms, fall over, and wear loose clothing. From the pockets of his trousers and Kazach kafkan almost always hung the ends of threads and ropes, and at the bottom of his patched mos, chalk, a handful of peas and other handy belongings ...

Belinskiţk praised Dal's work. In "Russian literature for 1845" he quotes Dal's "Petersburg Janitor", whose hero has rudely refused to give a gentleman directions:

... the gentleman turned to our friend rather insistently: "Aren't you the janitor here, hey!"

"What do you want?"

"Titular councillor Bylov".

"Go left under the archway, up to the top, the doors on the left".

"Why didn't you tell me before when I asked you - You're the janitor here, aren't you?"

"The janitor! There are all sorts of janitors! Other people, good landladies, have three or four of them, but ours only has one".

Belinskiţk enthuses: "How true this is, how full of good-natured and graceful humor!" (IX 364). Elsewhere he calls Dal'a "true poet" of the physiological genre who finds the "true meaning of reality" (X 116). Dal's "graceful" humor is based on the contrast between the odd habits of "our friend" the janitor and the expectations of the upper class author and his readers. For example:

... washing his two pots, even once in a while, Grigorovitch considered completely superfluous, having become convinced by experience that however much ya wash'sem, they're always black. (Dal' 1961:250)

The "poor clerk" tale was equally as important as the physiological sketch. In it authors tried to evoke compassion for the hero by describing all the sordid details of his daily life. The features of the clerk's communal lodgings became topos of the "poor clerk" tale: the dilapidated courtyard and dank stairway; the rude janitor; the mercenary landlady and her peasant speech; the economising on food, tea, fuel, candles and clothing; payday and its rituals - paying the landlady and splurging on food and drink. These elements were combined variously as the setting for a limited number of plots which had their origin in burlesques and other low genres of popular culture. A typical plot would involve the desperate search for a job, culminating either in failure which leads to starvation or madness; or in success gained by illicit means (taking over the boss's mistress; selling a wife's favours) which in turn leads to further corruption. The narrative tone ranges from lightly ironic to facetious, as in, for example, Butkov's "The Little Ribbon" (1845):

It has already been said that Ivan Anisimovič worked for ten years at the same rank, at the same occupation, but it has not yet been said that he was excellent at sharpening quills and that virtue, however neglected she may be, will sooner or later win out. Here is what happened to Ivan Anisimovič in the eleventh year of his zealous and diligent service.

Belinskiţk did not notice the contradiction between the tone and alleged intention of these tales. In a review of the "Physiology of Petersburg", he quotes Nekrasov's "Clerk" at length. Here is an excerpt which de-
cribes the clerk's taste in theater:

He loved shootings, bloodthirsty plots,
Where evil is punished at the end...
And, listening to juicy couplets,
Would give his wife a gentle nudge.
He loved to whisper during intermission with a plump lady -
(Sly Petersburg will teach you everything) -
That passions and actions are necessary in drama
And that Shakespeare is a great playwright, -
But he wasn't completely sure of that
And an hour later would affirm the opposite...

Belinskij considered the poem "striking in its truthfulness and seriousness", "One of the best works of Russian literature in 1845" (1910:IX 472).

While the authors of physiological sketches and tales of the poor clerk intended their irony to be directed at the institutions that oppressed the poor hero, as they understood it to be in "The Overcoat", a superficial adaptation of Gogol's manner lead them to ridicule the hero himself (throwing the baby into the dirty bathwater). Although more serious in intent than the works of "Gogol's orchestra" in the 1830's, the stories of the 1840's which were designed to promote the Gogolian tradition were inadvertently more like a travesty of it: The shallow recombinations of comic grotesque elements betrayed a lack of understanding of Gogol's tragic content. Yet Belinskij, for whom Dosto- evskij had gained a deep respect years before they met in 1845, praised these hack works, at the same time as he was becoming disenchanted with Dostoevskij. In "Mr. Procharčin" Dostoevskij exaggerates the inherent condescension of the Naturalist sketches which Belinskij was blind to. But contemporaries lacked the perspective to notice a critique of the stories they regarded as models of democratic concern for their "brothers in Christ", the most progressive of the time. Now it is easier to see that Dostoevskij is reworking the aspects of Naturalist themes, plots, topoi and narrative whose superficiality offended him.

That Dostoevskij chose Nekrasov's "Petersburg Corners" for the particular object of his parody is understandable for both literary and personal reasons. It was one of the most successful stories published the year before "Mr. Procharčin" was written, and therefore well-known to Dostoevskij's audience. More important, it was also one of the first stories to be praised as a serious successor to the mature Gogolian traditions of the 1840's. "Petersburg Corners", part of an uncom-

completed novel The Life and Adventures of Tionh Trostnikov, appeared in The Physiology of Petersburg (1845), a collection Nekrasov put together with a view to stimulating the growth of the new "Gogolian School". Nekrasov, Dostoevskij's exact contemporary, was already a well-known writer when Dostoevskij was entering literature. Nekrasov was Belinskij's protegé, and the executor of his ideas, and even edited his reviews. In fact, he rendered Belinskij's reviews of The Double and "Mr. Procharčin" considerably more harsh, which suggests some (sibling?) rivalry between Dostoevskij, who was notoriously competitive with the writers of the Contemporary circle, and Nekrasov in relation to Belinskij and to the literary scene in general.

Another protegé of Belinskij's, also born in 1821, was the poet Apollon Majkov. When he published his first collection of verse in 1842, it created a sensation both in society and in literary circles. Belinskij devoted an entire article to it in which he three times compared Majkov's talent to Puškin's (VII 81-102). Majkov, who joined the Contemporary circle in 1844 and was strongly influenced by its members, published a narrative poem, "Mašen'ka", in Nekrasov's second almanac, The Petersburg Collection (1846) (where Poor Folk first appeared) which strongly reflects that influence.

Dostoevskij "suffered with Procharčin all summer" (1928:1 108) in 1846, a time when he was upset about his own position in literature and in the Contemporary circle in particular. If Poor Folk contains his dialogue with Gogol' and Puškin, it is not surprising to find Nekrasov and Majkov joining the conversation in "Mr. Procharčin". Of all the Naturalist writers at the time, they were Dostoevskij's most serious rivals as interpreters of the tradition of Gogol' and Puškin, Nekrasov in "Petersburg Corners", Majkov in "Mašen'ka". In "Mr. Procharčin", Dostoevskij uses Nekrasov's story to demonstrate his own reworking of the Naturalist treatment of narrative voice, the use of "typical" detail, character composition, and plot construction. The relationship of Dostoevskij's commentary to Nekrasov's story will be set out in these categories in this order.

4. Narrative Voice

"Petersburg Corners" is a typical Naturalist story: it focusses on social milieu, deliberately avoiding psychologism, and depicts the poor objectively, in order to promote their equality. Belinskij felt it succeeded:
The story is narrated by the autobiographical hero Trostnikov, who tells how he rents a "corner" in an abysmal Petersburg lodging. In depressingly detail, he describes the swamplike courtyard, the haranguing landlady, and the dilapidated room he settles into, using many of Gogol's devices: sound repetition, the lady in the window who looks like a samovar, the illiterate signboards in the courtyard. Then his new fellow-lodgers enter the room one by one: the household serf lets out for service (obrok), a bearded man named Kirjanyč, and a drunkard referred to as the "green gentleman" are described in turn. The men begin to drink vodka and to tease the green gentleman, but are interrupted by a scream. The landlady rushes in for help and leads them into the women's room where one of the lodgers is brandishing a knife and foaming at the mouth in a hysterical fit. The household serf subdues her with his deep voice and some dire threats, and the men go back to their room where Trostnikov goes to sleep while the others pass through the stages of drunkenness from affectionate avowals to fisticuffs. Here Trostnikov's notes break off, and the story ends with an explanation from an unidentified "editor.

Nekrasov wants to provide an inside, sympathetic view of the poor lodgers, but the same contradiction between intention and stylistic realization arises as in the physiological sketches discussed above. Trostnikov's description of the green gentleman is indeed an excellent physiological sketch, but the fact that it comes from the green gentleman's fellow lodger accentuates the essentially unequal relationship of the describer to the person he describes:

Swaying from side to side, into the room entered a half-litre, stoppered with a human head instead of a cork; that is what I called at first glance a gentleman in a light green overcoat without a collar: the collar, having been needed for the repair of the remaining parts of the vestment, was cut off entirely already in 1819...

Trostnikov's description is delivered in sympathetic, gentlemanly tones, but is nonetheless highly grotesque. Only the voice of the "Other" could speak that way, and even if Trostnikov is motivated by "philanthropy", the effect of his description is to make his subject pitiable at best. Nekrasov, of course, is in addition motivated by the literary conventions of Gogol's comic grotesque, but since Gogol's use of it had been misconstrued as having a very local satirical function, the Naturalists' imitation of it contained that essential contradiction of intent by style. In "Mr. Procharčin", Dostoevskij clarifies this contradiction by exaggerating it. In "Petersburg Corners", Trostnikov functions both as narrator and as participating persona. In "Mr. Procharčin", Dostoevskij isolates the two voices, allotting Trostnikov's narrative function to an omniscient narrator, and the voice of Trostnikov's persona to one of Procharčin's fellow lodgers, Mark Ivanovič.

In "Petersburg Corners", Trostnikov is himself one of the poor lodgers and is in an ideal position to provide an inside view that would be in consonance with Dostoevskij's narratological principles. But Trostnikov's view of himself as an educated, well-read person prevents him from making the direct contact with his companions that would allow him to understand them in a truly humane way.

In "Mr. Procharčin", Mark Ivanovič is described as "an intelligent and well-read person" who, "being an intelligent man, formally took on the defense of Semen Ivanovič and explained rather successfully in a beautiful, fruited style, that Procharčin was a middle-aged and respectable person and had outlived his time of elegies" (1972: 241). It is Mark Ivanovič whose well-intentioned but incomprehending probing totally exasperates the delirious Procharčin. He is the one who declares that Procharčin's inert, miserly nature comes from a "lack of imagination", though it is rather an excess of imagination that leads to Procharčin's downfall. But Mark Ivanovič feels himself so superior, so different from the benighted Procharčin, that he cannot imagine (!) the complexity beneath Procharčin's "naturalist" surface.
Dostoevskij exposes this same “philanthropic” condescension in his treatment of the narrative voice. He shows that it is precisely the superior attitude of the narrator, who seems to be bringing his upper class readers some colorful moments from the lives of the city poor, that causes their humiliation. Dostoevskij increases the distance between the narrator and the world he describes by emphasizing his educated manner. The narrator of “Mr. Procharčin” speaks with infuriating “affectation”, “ostentation” and “pretentiousness”.

Here the biographer confesses that he would not for anything have decided to talk about such insignificant, even and even ticklish – let us say more, even insulting for some lover of elegant style – details [Procharčin’s scrimping on meals], if in all these details there were not contained one peculiarity, one controlling trait in the character of the hero of this tale ... (1972:1 242)

The narrator's annihilating respectfulness points up the offensive benevolence of the narrative manner of “Petersburg Corners” and of the Naturalist sketches of which it is a prime example. Dostoevskij's parody of the Naturalist dilemma and analyzes its both identifies the Naturalist dilemma and analyzes its source. He implies that the contradiction crept in through a superficial imitation of Gogol’s devices. For example, Trostnikov's comparison of the green gentleman to a bottle with a cork for a head uses Gogol’s device of rendering the animate inanimate, but for more comic effect. Dostoevskij takes the device much further. When the dead Procharčin’s mattress is being searched, Semen Ivanovič, who knew how to be courteous, first yielded a bit of space, rolling onto his side with his back to the searchers; then, at the second shake, settled face down and finally yielded still further, since the last side slat of the bed was missing, he suddenly quite unexpectedly plunged to the floor head first, leaving visible only two bony thin blue legs which stuck up like two twigs of a charred tree. Since this was already the second time that morning that Mr. Procharčin had inspected under his bed, he immediately aroused suspicion ...

(1972:1 260)

Procharčin, regarded as an inanimate puppet all his life, is only finally treated as an animate being after he dies. The grotesque is taken to its extreme to make him dies. But when Akakij returns from the dead as a ghost to seize the Important Personage’s overcoat, he is treated with awe and respect. Gogol’s treatment uses the supernatural, an elevated device taken from German Romanticism; Dostoevskij recasts Gogol’s model in a “low” stylistic setting to show how Gogol’s deeper message can be incorporated into a purely Naturalist method. In “Mr. Procharčin” Dostoevskij rejects an empty comic use of the grotesque. He uses it, as Gogol did, to tear a rent in the fabric of the everyday and point to a realm of eternal values.

In his parody of Nekrasov’s narrative voices, Dostoevskij’s first three works are based on the essence of Utopian Socialism as he understood it, that is, as the ideal Christian brotherhood. They form a trilogy, which demonstrates how stylistic considerations, precisely the ones ignored by the Naturalist School, are integral to the ideal of human equality.

5. Typical Detail

Nekrasov presents “Petersburg Corners” as reportage, as a mirror of reality. He does imbed many things from Gogol’s work directly into his account, but besides signalling that Nekrasov is one of Gogol’s followers, they function simply as typical representations of a particular milieu. Here too Dostoevskij insists that artistic prose in the tradition of Gogol must consciously make use of all its means. The details of daily life should be transformed by their context to acquire new levels of meaning. In “Mr. Procharčin” he shows how some of the standard tropes of the Naturalist tales, which are used mechanically in “Petersburg Corners”, can be given richer relevance to the plight of the poor clerk.

In Nekrasov's story the tropes of the landlady concerned about her lodgers' passports provides a comic touch:

“He’s a good man: with a passport. There’s no one in my place without a passport: I’m like that, even if you give me two rubles”. (1845:262)

But Nekrasov does not develop it further. "Mr. Procharčin" opens with the history of Procharčin's position as his landlady's "favorite", a history which stands in grotesque juxtaposition to her greed and self-seeking after his death. Dostoevskij uses the passport mo-
Debra Meyer

First of all, he was the landlady's favorite; secondly, his passport, in the landlady's care, turned out at the time to be inadvertently misplaced. (1972:1 247)

When Procharčin reappears:

Once the landlady found out that Semen Ivanovič was alive and well and that there was no point in looking for his passport, she immediately stopped grieving and calmed down. (1972:1 247)

In "Mr. Procharčin" the detail of the passport reinforces the almost inanimate status of the hero by giving the object greater importance than the man it represents (compare Gogol's use of metonymy). The figure of the landlady had been used as mere scenery by the Naturalists; Dostoevskij has her contribute to the poor clerk's dehumanization.

Both stories contain trunks. In "Petersburg Corners" the household serf has a wooden one at the head of his bed which contains waxed thread, an awl and a hammer (dračva, šilo i molotok) (1845:287) for fixing boots. Dostoevskij's Mr. Procharčin keeps his trunk under his bed. Upon his death it is opened to reveal two rags, one pair of socks, half a handkerchief, an old hat, some buttons, old shoe soles and boot vamp - in a word, this that and the other (šil'co, myl'co, beloe bel't'co, a saying whose literal translation is "an awl, some soap, white bleach"). (1972:1 259)

Procharčin's trunk, like Akakij's "legacy", contains the accoutrements of poverty. Procharčin guards it fanatically, and even talks of buying a fancy German lock for it. But the trunk turns out to be only a mask for his true passion, the money hoarded in his mattress, and his talk of the lock is designed to draw the lodgers' attention to his decoy. In a typical Dostoevskij touch, the German origin of the lock, analogous to Raskol'nikov's German top hat, indicates the ultimate source of Procharčin's diseased thinking to be soulless Western intellectualism. Dostoevskij places it in contrast to the folksiness of the Russian saying "šil'co, myl'co, beloe bel't'co" which suggests "the truth will out, no matter how you whitewash it", is the moral of Procharčin's tale. Thus the trunk which has the status of a prop in Nekrasov's story carries complex levels of key significance in "Mr. Procharčin."

6. Character composition

Perhaps the most successful part of Nekrasov's story is the character of the "green gentleman," a drunkard who has lost his job and begs for a living. In "Mr. Procharčin," Dostoevskij divides the characteristics of the green gentleman between two characters, Mr. Procharčin himself, and his friend Zimovejkin.

Through Mr. Procharčin Dostoevskij develops the implications of the Naturalist theme of joblessness; in Zimovejkin he analyzes the psychology of the Naturalist figure of the drunkard.

Zimovejkin's life story is much the same as the green gentleman's. The green gentleman had been a teacher at a provincial school but took to drink and was dismissed, receiving a pension "through influence." In "Mr. Procharčin," Zimovejkin tells his own story to the lodgers at Procharčin's:

He told <...> how he had formerly served in the provinces, how an inspector had come down on him, how he had appeared in St. Petersburg and fallen at the feet of Porfirij Grigorjevič, how they had placed him, through influence, in a certain office, but that, through fate's most cruel persecution, they had fired him from there too, then how the office itself had been abolished through reorganization; but they hadn't taken him into the newly-formed staff of clerks, as much for plain incapacity for business affairs as because of a capacity for something else quite unrelated to business [i.e. drink]. (1972:1 247)

Nekrasov calls the green gentleman a "boozer" (p'januşga), a less harsh form of the word p'janica, "drunkard". Dostoevskij makes full use of Nekrasov's tactful word, exaggerating it to grotesque proportions. He dubs Zimovejkin a "mooning boozier" (poprashajka-p'janoužka). In the context of the comic Gogolian sound repetition, the diminutive ending -žka, instead of carrying its usual affectionate connotation, becomes patronizing, a verbal emblem of the voice of the Other that degrades Zimovejkin. Dostoevskij here again points out the empty use writers of the Naturalist
school had made of a Gogolian device. His own use of it explains the essence of Gogol's device - the disparateness of the grotesque names from the people they designate. More important, the voice of the Other contained in the epithet "mooching boozzer" is the focal element in Dostoevskij's analysis of the psychology of the drunkard.

In Poor Folk and The Double, Dostoevskij had analyzed the poor man's oscillation between touchy pride and self-humiliation. Nekrasov's sketch of the green gentleman suggests something similar:

In the most funny and caricatured motions unavoidable for a man not firm on his feet, one noticed something measured, something like the sense of his own dignity, and, talking with you even about the merest trifles, he constantly held himself like a man ready to say outright that virtue is praiseworthy, and sin is vile. Because of these sharp contradictions, he was exceedingly funny, and aroused in the household serf a terrible desire to laugh at him. (1845:280-281)

Nekrasov's depiction is static and external; the green gentleman's brief interaction with the other characters implies no interpretation of Trostnikov's observations. Dostoevskij provides one in his characterization of Zimovejkin. In Nekrasov's story, the green gentleman is forced to dance for a glass of wine by the household serf. Zimovejkin, by contrast, arrives at Procharčin's lodgings and volunteers to perform a "character dance" - he doesn't need the lodgers to humiliate him, he will do it himself. Dostoevskij suggests that the narration of the physiological sketch is doubly painful because the drunkard is only too well aware of how society sees him; in fact, it is that awareness that causes him to punish himself by acting out the Other's view of him.

In contrast to Zimovejkin, Procharčin is introduced in the first sentence of the story as "non-drinking". In Nekrasov's story, "the green gentleman would go off God knows where, disappear for several days and return drunk, often beaten up, muddy and penniless" (1972: I 286); but when Mr. Procharčin is brought home unconscious, soaked, and frozen after his long disappearance, the cab driver specifically tells the lodgers "he ain't drunk, not even hooch, probably he's just fainted" (1972: I 248).

Unlike the green gentleman, and unlike Zimovejkin, Procharčin is not jobless, or about to lose his job; it is the possibility of joblessness that terrifies him. The green gentleman's job is given to a young man who fully justified the honor shown him; he didn't miss lessons, was respectful to his elders and, soon marrying, entirely refrained from the excitements inseparable from the bachelor life. (1845:288)

Procharčin's fellow-lodgers tease him by saying that he will be fired and replaced by this same kind of young man. They say that married clerks turn out more respectable than unmarried ones and are more suitable for promotion and that clerks must take lessons to acquire all the attributes of gentlemanliness and good breeding, politeness, respect for their elders. (1972: I 244-5)

Dostoevskij points to the connection between Procharčin and Nekrasov's green gentleman by giving his hero some of the same characteristics. Procharčin lies on his bed holding forth angrily to himself after an insult, just like the green gentleman, and he even uses some of the green gentleman's distinguishing words and phrases:

Green gent.: "Ooo, what a bigwig!... and you... you go work in a government office: five rubles a year and five slaps a day". (1845:283-284)

Procharčin: "... my last drop, you know, of blood, you hear, you pup, you bigwig... so the place is there; but I'm poor, and when they abolish it, you hear you bigwig... I, brother, will have to go begging... just a skip and a hop and you're out of a job". (1972: I 256)

Green gent.: "You, brother, don't joke with me! Who permitted you to joke with me?" (1845:282)

Procharčin: Semen Ivanovič immediately remarked that he didn't permit one to joke with him. (1972: I 252)

While there are hints in the text of "Mr.Procharčin" itself of the close relationship between Procharčin and
The landlady brings the men to her room to help:

In the middle of the room occurred a scene worthy of the most precise and artistic description possible. On the floor rolled a woman in the full bloom of Balsacian youth, with puffed-out cheeks red as beetroot, and in a gasping, piercing shriek, screamed "a...a...a...a...oj...saints!...a...oj...I'm dying! Dying! Dying... a...a...a...al". Like an overheated horse, a cloud of froth flowed from her mouth which fell in flakes on the floor and smeared over her face; her raving hands were bloody: she had been biting them in her delirium. She was surrounded by three women - two old and one middle-aged, all pregnant, who, at every turn of the hysterical woman, fearfully jumped away, and at each new outburst of her raving, screamed in unison: "al!" (1845:296)

The household serf subdued the woman with an imperious command, and the men return to their room where they drink and then quarrel. Trostnikov goes to sleep, ending his narration in anticlimax.

Dostoevskij reworks all Nekrasov's elements. Keeping vigil over the delirious Procharčin, the lodgers play cards, stop, quarrel, and have gone off to sleep, when "there rang out such a scream as would wake the dead" (1972:I 258). The lodgers rush over to find Procharčin dead, with Zimovejkin and Remnev fighting near his bed. The hero's death is, ironically, only incidental - "Mr.Procharčin stretched out his legs and went off about his business" (1972:I 259). Dostoevskij has made Nekrasov's ending (petty quarrelling followed by sleep) into a prelude to an "anticlimax" (Procharčin's death) which in turn introduces the real climax. Nekrasov's pseudo-climactic scene of the woman's hysteria is replaced in Dostoevskij's story by the revelation of Procharčin's secret:

Meanwhile the burned-down lard candle end illuminated a scene an observer would have found extremely curious. About a dozen lodgers were grouped around the bed in the most picturesque costumes, all uncombed, unshaven, unwashed, sleepy, just as they had been when they were drifting off to sleep. Some were completely pale, some had sweat on their brows, some were seized by tremors, others by fever. The landlady, quite stupefied, stood quietly with crossed arms attendant upon the mercies of Jaroslav Il'ič. From above, the landlady's favorite cat looked down from the stove with frightened curiosity; torn and broken screens were scattered all around; the open trunk displayed its unseemly interior;
Like a machine, he wrote and wrote... And what he wrote he barely understood, Whether to the good of the fatherland, Or pronouncing a death sentence - He only formed the letters... At times He's just come up to a neighbor Not to dispel his melancholy, Or spleen, but just for a pinch of snuff.

The young folk joked at his expense: "You probably have a little capital in your trunks, After all, you scoundrel, you never invite anyone - What do you need money for: you're all alone". "What do you mean? They say he has a daughter". "You don't say! Well, is she like you?" "Well, if so, it's no great credit to you". "And does she have saffron skin?" The old man keeps silent, or, raising his eye, From behind his quill whispers: "better than you". (1846:395-396)
scends explicitly from Akakij Akakievič: Majkov has cross-bred Puškin's miserly Baron from "The Covetous Knight" with Gogol's clerk from "The Overcoat". The lot, however, Majkov takes from another of Puškin's stories, "The Stationmaster". In "The Stationmaster" Puškin combines the traditional sentimental plot of the seduced and abandoned heroine with a parody of the Biblical tale of the Prodigal Son: the stationmaster's daughter runs off with an hussar to live happily ever after, but the father drinks himself to death. Puškin's story undercuts the easy tears of sentimentalism. But in Majkov's "Mašen'ka", Krupa's daughter Maša runs off with an hussar, is abandoned by him, and comes home, where she is forgiven by her father in the final lines of Majkov's poem:

"Forgive me!" "What, am I a beast or a Jew?"
"Forgive me!" "Enough! God will forgive you!
And you, will you forgive me, Maša?" (1846:443)

Majkov, "the new Puškin", tries to recast the old Puškin's story in the trappings of Naturalism, but then gets distracted by the story of his heroine, which merely undoes the work of Puškin's "Stationmaster". By removing Puškin's parody of the tale of the Prodigal Son, Majkov reproduces precisely the empty sentimentalism Puškin had renounced.

Dostoevskij also uses Puškin's "Stationmaster" and Gogol's "Overcoat" to make a new synthesis of sentimental and naturalist elements in Poor Folk, which was published at the same time as "Mašen'ka" in Nekrasov's Petersburg Collection. "Mr.Procharčin" contains Dostoevskij's critique of Majkov's attempt to do what he himself had already achieved so successfully. But Dostoevskij discards the sentimental tale of Maša's abduction, and addresses only the figure of the miser Krupa. Just as Dostoevskij saw a travesty of Gogol's style in Nekrasov's story, he finds a trivialization of Puškin's tragic theme in Majkov's poem.

Dostoevskij points to his commentary by appropriating several details from Majkov's work. Mr.Procharčin, like Krupa, lives at Peski (a seldom-mentioned remote part of Petersburg Dostoevskij had never been to), and is teased by his younger clerk colleagues with having "a little capital" hidden in his trunk. Both characters are eccentrics cut off from the world and their comrades. Krupa breaks his isolation only to mooch snuff — a petty form of scrimping; in "Mr.Procharčin" this detail tells more about the hero: Procharčin occasionally joins the other lodgers as if for tea, but actually on covert reconnaissance missions, to get information from the other clerks about his office world that so threatens his security.

Krupa hoards money in the name of his daughter, though there is some suggestion (never elaborated) that this may only be an excuse for miserliness. In Dostoevskij's story, this suggestion is taken up in order to analyze hoarding in more abstract terms. Procharčin gives a similar excuse for his stinginess: he has to support his sister-in-law. But she, like his precious trunk, is a fiction he has invented to mask his miserliness. The idea of the poor hero saving for a loved one harks back to Gogol's "Overcoat": Akakij suffers extreme deprivation to accumulate money to buy an overcoat which he likens to a "female companion". In Poor Folk Dostoevskij had provided a more touching motivation for scrimping by giving Puškin a real female companion, Varen'ka. In "Mr.Procharčin" he makes the same point on an existential level by replacing the "female companion" with the "sister-in-law", a decoy for Procharčin's true beloved, his hoard. The humanization effected in Poor Folk appears to be rejected in "Mr.Procharčin" because of its complex stylistic formulation, but in fact Dostoevskij is reducing the idea of "The Overcoat" to its barest principles. Akakij is obsessed with a mere object, but Procharčin is obsessed with a total abstraction, with money.

In "The Covetous Knight" Puškin treats the traditionally romantic theme of the miser in a "high" context. Dostoevskij transposes it to a "low" naturalist setting and brings the problem of the humiliation caused by poverty into the foreground, rephrasing Puškin's moral questions. For all the distance between Puškin's baron and Dostoevskij's inarticulate clerk, both undergo the same crisis of conscience which ultimately results in their deaths. Like the Baron, Procharčin lives in isolation from and at the expense of others. Procharčin's cheating the cab-driver is emblematic of the way he oppresses his fellow man, morally no less reprehensibly than the Baron who squeezes his fortune from the poor. Both Procharčin and the Baron guiltily fear the theft of their treasures, and are threatened by those their hoarding has humiliated and impoverished, the Baron literally by his son Albert; Procharčin more symbolically by his double, the jobless beggar Zimovejkjin. The Baron is directly responsible for his son's poverty, an idea that Dostoevskij generalizes by showing Procharčin to be equally morally responsible for the suffering of his fellows.
The sin of Procharčin's "Napoleonic" lies in his attempt to deny his kinship with others and to rise above the laws that bind all equally. Dostoevskij's interpretation of "The Covetous Knight" extends Puškin's analysis of the miser Baron to include all mankind. The moral of "Mr.Procharčin" thus articulates perfectly with the principles behind Dostoevskij's critique of Naturalist poetics.

Majkov fails to develop the idea of the miser clerk in "Mašen'ka". Dostoevskij shows the opportunity Majkov had missed. He at once broadens the range of Puškin's "high" theme and elevates the "low" figure of the clerk which Gogol's imitators had rendered merely comic-pathetic. Dostoevskij's effective use of the two opposing poetic modes reveals the superficiality of Majkov's attempt to combine them, and at the same time points the way to a new, more universal, synthesis.

"Mr.Procharčin" is not at all the gratuitously grotesque aberration it has often been taken for. It is a tour de force which achieves a highly complex set of goals. "Mr.Procharčin" discusses the central issues facing Russian literature at a crucial turning point in its history. The question of literary style is put in the foreground. In "Mr.Procharčin" style serves a triple function:
1) It conveys the psychological analysis of the poor hero and hence of poverty in general;
2) It parodies Nekrasov's and Majkov's, and hence the Natural School's, misuse of Gogol's and Puškin's works;
3) It refutes the Naturalist idea that literature can simply mirror society.

In exposing Nekrasov and Majkov as false inheritors to the great tradition of Puškin and Gogol', Dostoevskij reviews and recasts the major literary themes, styles, topoi and plots current in Russian literature from Puškin's work in the 1830's to the stories of the Naturalist school in the mid-1840's. Dostoevskij's critique of the Naturalist stories is based on the same principles as his rejection of Belinskij's atheism. For Dostoevskij questions of style are inextricable from the tenets of Christian socialism; in "Mr.Procharčin" he parodies Naturalist poetics as a travesty of the very ideal they espouse: brotherhood in Christ.

NOTES
1. Peter Hodgson provides an excellent discussion of these issues (1976:Part I).
2. R.L.Jackson does just this in his elegant analysis of the use of "mirroring" in Poor Folk (1966:24).
5. Hodgson (1976) interprets Dostoevskij's early work on this basis, but with somewhat different conclusions.
6. Because Butkov's stories are more sophisticated than the average Naturalist tales, V.Kulešov (1965:279) suggests that he may have been Dostoevskij's precursor and teacher. Dostoevskij's "A Weak Spirit", however, reads as a correction of "100 Rubles". Dostoevskij accounts for the hero's madness in the face of success by his guilt toward his benefactor. This puts Dostoevskij's relationship to Butkov in a perspective more appropriate to their relative talents.
7. Istromin's article (in N.I.Brodskij, ed., Tvorčestvenny put' Dostoevskogo [Leningrad 1924], 27) discusses "Mr.Procharčin" as an answer by Dostoevskij's former literary friends after the failure of The Double in autobiographical terms. In 1936 Afred Bem wrote "Mr.Procharčin remains to this day little explained and understood in the general system of Dostoevskij's creation" (1936:98). Of the books devoted to the young Dostoevskij since then—V.Kirpotin (1960) mentions the story once in 600 pages; Joseph Frank (1976:313-318) and Victor Terras (1969:26-27) regard the story as a puzzling failure.
9. Cf. V.I.Kulešov (1965:254). His summary of the typical plot resembles the "plot" of Nekrasov's "Petersburg Corners".
10. See Kulešov (1965:81-82). He calls Nekrasov's editing "intelligent" and "tactful".
15. Perhaps an entertaining bit of speculation may be permissible in a footnote. Interestingly, Nekrasov, under the pseudonym Perepel'skij, had written a vaudeville whose title has the same meaning, including the word šilo ("awl"): šilo v meške ne užaš', devijašku pod zamkom ne uprjašš ("You Can't Keep a Girl Under Lock and Key"). The vaudeville was one of the most popular performed at the Aleksandrinskij theater in 1841, a year Dostoevskij frequently went there. The play, allegedly
"Based on "The Girl Under Lock and Key", written by Narežnij in 1836, was in fact largely plagiarized. The Northern Bee, in its mock enthusiastic review of the vaudeville (N.180), in 1841 exposed Nekrasov as the real author, which Belinskij protested in an answering article in The Fatherland Notes. Dostoevskij, who had been a great fan of Narežnij's, may have had this incident in mind at a time when he bore increasing resentment towards Nekrasov and Belinskij.

16. See Al'fred Bem (1936:82-123), 88-90 particularly.

17. V. Teras (1969:26-27) also discusses Procharčin's relationship to Raskol'nikov. Much can be learned from a comparison of Zimovejkin/Procharčin with Marmeladov/Raskol'nikov in the light of their relationship to Nekrasov's green gentleman. Marmeladov bears a striking physical resemblance to Nekrasov's drunkard.


19. See Bem (1936:82-123) for a fuller discussion of this relationship.

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