Ekphrasis, Russian Style:

Visualizing Literary Icons, 1830-1930.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the conflicted relationship between ekphrasis and iconicity in the context of Russian literature. It continues an inquiry into the classical separation of word and image, touches upon the 19th-c. debates regarding the more appropriate means of reflecting reality within the Russian Realist aesthetics, and attempts to outline those aspects of visuality that tie Classical Realism and Modernism in Russian literature.

Since Russian culture differentiates between two types of images – secular paintings and religious icons – an analysis of ekphrasis within a literary narrative must account for the specific type of image that is being referenced. I argue that iconicity determines the object's role within a narrative and dictates the way in which it must be perceived both by characters within a narrative and by the readers. Although it owes its origins to ecclesiastical sphere, the notion of literary iconicity transcends both the strictly religious sense or Eastern Orthodoxy and Charles Sanders Peirce's definition of an icon. When a character is endowed with apparent characteristics typical of an Orthodox icon, the effect that this character produces on her surroundings are similar, if not identical, to those of a religious icon.

The tension between ekphrasis and iconicity is presented in Russian literature as an ideological conflict between either male domination and female defiance or between western rationalism and Russian mysticism. When considered through the prism of iconicity, female silence becomes a sign of psychological and spiritual strength, not of

submission to male authority. Paradoxically, male protagonists and/or narrators, trapped by their need for verbal expression, fail to recognize the heroines' iconic properties and therefore miss the opportunity for deliverance from their own misery caused by the feelings of wounded pride, isolation or a lack of direction.

Thus, iconicity becomes more than merely an echo of religious undertones that may or may not be present within a literary work, but a way of deepening the psychological dimension of a narrative and of offering a more challenging yet a more rewarding way of human engagement.

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Introduction

> Ekphrasis … is a literary mode that turns on the antagonism – the commonly *gendered* antagonism – between verbal and visual representation. Since this contest is fought on the field of language itself, it would be grossly unequal but for one thing: ekphrasis commonly reveals a profound ambivalence toward visual art, a fusion of *iconophilia* and *iconophobia*, of veneration and anxiety. To represent a painting or sculpted figure in words is to evoke its power – the power to fix, excite, amaze, entrance, disturb, or intimidate the viewer – even as language strives to keep that power under control.[1]

As these words by James Heffernan suggest, verbal descriptions of visual images found within a literary text can broaden the scope of a narrative and illuminate its cultural and ideological dimensions. Although literature and visual art[2] are most often considerd as distinct modes of artistic expression, they neither exist in complete isolation from each other, nor do they enjoy a particularly tranquil relationship.[3]

This dissertation explores the tension that exists between word and image in the Russian context. Specifically, it examines the ideological side of the conflict between verbal expression and visual perception in works of literary prose written in Russia between 1830 and 1930. The word "ideological," the way I am using it, refers to a general "manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group, or culture" rather than to any specific set of articulated political beliefs or "theories and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program."[4] The key concepts that will be examined here are ekphrasis[5] and iconic vision.

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[1] James Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 7. My emphasis.

[2] I limit the term "visual art" to primarily drawing, painting, sculpture, and bas-relief, leaving out film, architecture, and other plastic arts. This is done, on the one hand, to preserve continuity with other critical works on ekphrasis and, on the other, to reflect the types of works referenced in the narrative fiction that is discussed later in the dissertation.

[3] The metaphor "sister arts" that is often applied to literature and visual arts suggests a different approach to the problem of representation. It eliminates the question of conceptual gender differences and emphasizes the impossibility of separation of one from the other. Stephen Cheeke sums up this sort of antagonism as follows: "anyone who grew up in a household with sisters of proximate age the usefulness of the metaphor of the 'sister arts' will be clear. Envy, rivalry, emulation, quarrelling, imitation – the ordinary human trouble of kinship helps to make some sense of, even if it can never clarify, the awkward intimacy and reserve that we discover between poems and paintings. See Stephen Cheeke, *Writing for Art: The Aesthetics of Ekphrasis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 2-3.

My inquiry will primarily focus on four prose works: Alexander Pushkin's story "The Stationmanster" (1830), Fyodor Dostoevsky's novella "The Meek One" (1876), Dmitrii Mamin-Sibiriak's novel *Shooting Stars* (1899), and Veniamin Kaverin's novel *Artist Unknown* (1930). The work selection is motivated by both temporal and thematic considerations: each of these prose narratives was written during the hundred years that elapsed between the rise of Classical Russian Realism and the official introduction of the doctrine of Socialist Realism, and each of them features a verbose protagonist who struggles to maintain a relationship with a taciturn heroine.

The central question of my analysis is how the gendered antagonism that Heffernan speaks of, when taken literally, plays out in Russian literature. The iconophobia and iconophilia are considered in relation to both visual images and icon-like characters, and evidence is presented that the non-verbal manner of expression facilitated by the visual art is often favored to the more customary – verbal – way of engaging in the day-to-day communication. This tendency on the authors' part is paradoxical, for they, as writers, have to convey their ideas through words; nonetheless, within their narratives, both male protagonists and male narrators, while trying to produce ekphrases of their own, are defeated by the silence of the heroines whom they encounter. On a deeper level, it appears that in Russian literature the drive for ekphrastic expression clashes with the long-standing religious tradition of hesychasm.[6]

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[4] See "Ideology" in *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ideology>.

[5] Some authors choose to italicize the word "ekphrasis" in their writing, while others do not. For the sake of consistency, I will not use italics unless I use a direct quotation in which this term is italicized.

Hesychasm is customarily understood as a form of quiet contemplation that leads one to a spiritual and a higly personal revelation. As the Greek origin of the term suggests, “quietude” and “tranquility” are the essential elements of this practice, but in a more strict sense, however, hesychasm is a religious practice that is associated with “monastic prayer and contemplation” and that is designed specifically to help one “to achieve communion with God and the vision of the divine light.”[7] While this dissertation does not pursue the goal of analyzing religious practices, it will examine the idea of quiet contemplation as a way of understanding of and achieving communion with another being.

As it will be shown in the chapters that follow, excessive gregariousness often betray strong rationalist proclivities on the part of many male literary characters and are in a direct opposition to the spirituality that is associated with female characters. At the same time, some of the heroines’ characteristics, reticence being the chief of them, makes them icon-like and conceals the potential for facilitating a powerful transformation in the male characters. As such, these heroines – or their literary portraits – challenge the practice of verbal description and often overcome the gendered antagonism that Heffernan speaks of by demonstrating the futility of the ekphrastic effort.

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[6] For a discussion of the complicated nature and history of the term “hesychasm,” see John Meyendorff’s article “Is ‘Hesychasm’ the Right Word? Remarks on Religious Ideology in the Fourteenth Century,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7, (1983), pp. 447-457. For an analysis the role of hesychasm in relation to ekphrasis, see, for example, Ivan Drpić, “Art, Hesycahsm, and Visual Exegesis: Parisinus Graecus 1242 Revisited,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 62 (2008), 217-247.

[7] Drpić, 217.

The iconophilia and iconophobia are at the heart of this literary conflict: the male character is attracted to the icon-like heroine while at the same time strives to impose his authority on her. He attempts to verbally define and explain her character to himself and to others, or, in some cases, to manipulate her by means of verbal discourse. The male protagonist's ability to come to terms with the heroine's iconicity in the end determines his ability to find his own salvation from self-doubt and self-loathing or, on the other end of the spectrum, from egotism and narcissism.

As Ivan Drpić reminds us, since the time of the monk and icon painter Theophanes the Greek (c. 1340 – c. 1410) onwards, a frequent use of "ascetic physiognomies, the expressive use of highlights, especially on faces, a tendency toward linearism and reduced color schemes, and a renewed interest in individual psychology and *états d'âme* … have been seen as the defining elements of the new idiom" in the religious visual art and a direct influence of the contemplative religious practices.[8] At the same time, as W.J.T. Mitchell suggests in his book titled *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (1986), the ways in which the so-called "theoretical" ways of understanding of visual images and their connections with "social and cultural practices" of a certain group are "fundamental to our understanding not only of what images are but of what human nature is or might become."[9] When one begins to analyze images within the Russian context, it is imperative to include into the discussion the impact that Byzantium and particularly the Eastern Orthodox Church had on the development of images in Russia and, on a deeper level, on how the question of "what human nature is or might become" may be answered in this particular context. The practice of hesychasm is just one of the ways in which religion may have influenced the visual art. Mitchell explains that visual images have the capacity of transcending the narrow definitions of sign typology and become

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[8] Ibid., 17-8. Drpić summarizes two lines of argument regarding the relationship between hesychasm and the Orthodox iconography. While some scholars, such as E. Bakalova and T. Velmans see a direct connection between the Byzantine hesychastic and the artistic practices, H.G. Beck, J. Meyendorff and A. E. Tachiaos argue that this connection is tenuous if not inexistent. See Drpić, 218, fn. 9 and 10.

[9] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 9.

> something like an actor on the historical stage, a presence or character endowed with legendary status, a history that parallels and participates in the stories we tell ourselves about our own evolution from creatures "made in the image" of a creator, to creatures who make themselves and their world in their own image.[10]

This principle is equally applicable to both sacred and secular images, to religious icons and representational art. At the same time, the idea of transitioning from a stable status of a creation to a quest for self-affirmation, often found in literary discourse, may be examined in greater depth if we consider images and words as two intertwined forms of expression.

Although certainly not universal, the influence of the Eastern Orthodox Church on both artistic and quotidian human expression, particularly in Russia, has been profound. In his book *Russia and Europe* (1869), the Russian sociologist and philosopeher Nikolay Danilevsky observes that "religion constituted the most essential (almost exclusively) substance of the ancient Russian life." [религия составляла самое существенное, господствующее (почти исключительно) содержание древней русской жизни.][11] Yet as Victor Terras observed in 2002, although "Russian literature has been greatly discussed as an integral part of Russian national culture … it is unexpected to see how little attention many critics and historians have paid to the role of Russian Orthodoxy in the *creation* and *reception* of Russian literature."[12] This is not to say that literary scholars, art critics, and historians have been ignoring Russia's Orthodox background entirely; yet as Richard Pipes notes, especially among Western scholars, for a long time the role of the Russian religion received "little if any attention."[13] Pipes explains this lack of interest by the secularism of modern historians. "And yet, – he says, – even if historians are secular, the people with whom they deal were in the overwhelming majority religious: … For them, culture meant religion – religious belief, but especially religious rituals and festivals."[14]

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[10] Ibid.

Such a close connection between culture and religion, of course, does not immediately translate either into sincere piety or cultural self-awareness on the part of the people who produce art and literature and of the characters featured in these works. Indeed, it may be misleading to read too much religious subtext into a work of art of literary fiction. At the same time, these elements cannot be ignored entirely, because when considered in their culture-specific contexts, they shed light on the various ways of relating to the world that people develop depending on the external cultural and ideological forces that are at work in a given society. When it comes to trying to understand Russian culture through its literature, one ought to also recognize that, as Leonard Stanton puts it, that the icon itself, the "visionary capacity" that it promotes, and the "web of relationships" that come out of it, in effect, has shaped "the literary imagination of innumerable Orthodox writers … layman and monk alike,"[15] and many Russian writers fall into this category as well.

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[11] Qtd. in I.A. Esaulov, *Kategoriia Sobornosti v Russkoi Literature* (Petrozavodsk: Izdatel'stvo Petrozavodsckogo Universiteta, 1995), 5. Org. in N. Ia. Danilevskii, *Rossiia i Evropa* (Moskva: Kniga, 1991), 480.

[12] Victor Terras, "A Christian Revolution in Russian Literary Criticism," *The Slavic and Eastern European Journal* 46, no. 4 (Winter 2002), 769. My emphasis.

[13] Richard Pipes, *Russia Under Bolshevik Regime* (New York: Fodor's Travel Guides, 1995) 337. To emphasize the formative influence of any religion on a culture, Pipes continues: "in this respect, the inhabitants of what became the Soviet Union – Christians, Jews, and Muslim alike – may be said to have lived in the Middle Ages."

[14] Ibid., 337. My emphasis.

Any analysis of the competition between word and image to convey meaning within a literary narrative is in danger of being biased in favor of the verbal expression simply because words not only constitute the object of inquiry but also serve as a medium for conducting the discussion. Paradoxically, this self-conscious superiority on the part of verbal discourse is a necessary condition for creating literature because it allows writers to believe in their own ability to express meaning; otherwise, having been convinced of the visual images' exceptional role in depicting human experience, writers would have to give up their pens and pick up paintbrushes. This tension becomes even more appreciable when a narrative is interrupted in order to make way for a description of any kind, at those moments when literary discourse has to appeal to the readers' ability to not simply imagine, but to visualize. "We men of letters can use colors no worse than painters do," declares an early Christian writer Asterius of Amasia as he sets out to describe a painting of a martyred saint.[16] The self-confidence that Asterius' words demonstrate takes the reader response almost for granted while at the same time, perhaps unwillingly, recognizes the formidable potential of pictorial representation.

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[15] Leonard J. Stanton, *The Optina Pustyn Monastery in the Russian Literary Imagination: Iconic Vision in Works by Dostoevsky, Gogol, Tolstoy, and Others* (New York: P. Lang, 1995), 30.

[16] Qtd. in Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 22.

In part, the complexity of this antagonistic yet intimate relationship between words and images is due to the fact that both of these media appeal to our imaginative powers while giving us different sets of facts and clues to work with. Rivalry ensues when one mode of artistic expression encroaches on another's territory by attempting to convey by its own means what has already been done in the other mode: when a painting depicts a scene from literature or when a description of a still image is inserted into a narrative. The situation becomes further complicated when the cultural information that is encoded into a certain literary or plastic form begins to direct, constrain or expand any particular form's capacity to convey meaning.

To understand the cultural and ideological underpinnings of ekphrasis, iconography, and iconic vision as the ability to properly perceive and interpret an icon, a brief overview of the terms' development is necessary. From the point of view of literary expression, a writer's goal is to select and to use words in such a way that the readers, upon reading those words, could imagine not only the succession of events, but also the characters, their actions, and the settings that are delivered to them verbally. In the early days of Rhetorical Studies, the term ekphrasis was used to denote verbal descriptions and to differentiate them from other types of discourse. The term literally means, as its Greek origin suggests, an act of "speaking out" on behalf of a silent image or "telling in full."[17] In the 5th-4th c. B.C. Hermogenes, an ancient Athenian philosopher and a close friend of Socrates, explains in *Progymnasmata,* a collection of preliminary rhetorical exercises designed for young students of rhetoric, that ekphrasis "is descriptive speech … vivid … and bringing what is being shown before the eyes."[18] Hermogenes then explains that "[t]here are ecphrases of persons and actions and times and places and seasons and many other things," and that the two virtues of ekphrasis are "clarity (*saphênia*) and vividness (*enargeia*); for the expression should almost create seeing through the hearing."[19] Or, as Nicolaus the Sophist, the Christial philosopher of the fifth century, puts it, ekphrasis "tries to make the hearers into spectators."[20]

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[17] See James Heffernan, *Museum of Words*: *The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 191.

Even though the original meaning of ekphrasis included descriptions of people, battles, landscapes, etc., already in the third century A.D. the meaning of the term begins to narrow as it is applied primarily to descriptions of works of visual art.[21] In the more recent history, the connection between ekphrasis and plastic arts becomes more and more pronounced and at the same time disputed. The first recorded usage of the word ekphrasis in English occurred in 1715 in the *Oxford English Dictionary* where it is defined as "a plain declaration or interpretation of a thing."[22] In the twentieth century, the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* made an attempt to narrow the meaning of the term by stating that ekphrasis is "the rhetorical description of a work of art,"[23] but Richard A. Lanham, in his work titled *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms; A Guide for Students of English Literature* (1968), defines ekphrasis as "a self-contained description, often on a commonplace subject, which can be inserted at a fitting place in a discourse" thus breaking up the flow of a narrative and disturbing its temporal structure.[24]

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[18] George A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 86.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 166.

[21] See Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 191.

[22] Qtd. in Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 191.

[23] Ibid.

In recent decades, the term ekphrasis has been both gaining popularity in literary studies and at the same time resisting the continuing attempts at narrowing its application. The "modern definition of ekphrasis," as James A. Francis points out, is restricted to "the literary description of a work of visual art."[25] Writing in 1955, Leo Spitzer narrows the definition of ekphrasis to "the description of an *objet d'art* by the medium of the word."[26] Murray Krieger, on the other hand, observed at the end of the twentieth century that under Spitzer's definition, ekphrasis "clearly presupposes that one art, poetry, is defining its mission through its dependence on the mission of another art – painting, sculpture, or others."[27] Krieger then attempts to expand the definition to its original meaning in order to "trace the ekphrastic as it is seen occurring all along the spectrum of spatial and visual emulation is words."[28] James Heffernan, in his turn, believes that by elevating ekphrasis from the status of a classical genre to that of a literary principle, Krieger runs the risk of stretching ekphrasis "to the breaking point."[29] Instead, Heffernan insists that the term should be defined as "the verbal representation of visual representation."[30] Heffernan also limits it to descriptions of actual works of representational art to the exclusion of "natural objects or artifacts."[31]

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[24] Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms; A Guide for Students of English Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 39.

[25] See James Francis, "Metal Maidens, Achilles' Shield, and Pandora: The Beginnings of 'Ekphrasis,'" *American Journal of Philology* 130, no. 1 (Spring 2009), 1-23.

[26] Leo Spitzer, "The 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' or Content vs. Metagrammar," *Comparative Literature* 7, no. 3 (Summer, 1955), 218.

[27] Murray Krieger and Joan Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 6.

[28] Ibid, 9.

[29] Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 2.

Liz James and Ruth Webb make another attempt of returning to the original meaning of ekphrasis when they write:

> The modern definition of ekphrasis as first and foremost a "description of a work of art" … has no foundation is classical rhetorical theory and is not only inaccurate but misleading. In fact, works of art are not mentioned as a subject until Nikolaus Rhetor in the fifth century and even then they appear as an afterthought … Ekphrasis was not a form of "art criticism" intended to describe works of art in technical terms.[32]

Thus, while Heffernan's narrower definition strives for more technical precision, it unnecessarily diminishes the number of literary works that can be considered ekphrastic, which in its turn downplays the effect that an author may wish to produce on a reader by including descriptive rhetoric in his work. Partially counter-balancing Heffernan's act, John Hollander introduces the term "notional ekphrasis" that denotes "the verbal representation of a purely fictional work of art"[33] or, in other words, of an image that has not been actually created by an artist outside the context of a written narrative. Nonetheless, Hollander's notion excludes everything that is not a painting or a sculpture. In his turn, Leonid Heller takes the matter a little farther and demonstrates that, depending on the effect produced on the reader, one may talk of religious ekphrasis, as well as ekphrases of the philosophico-aesthetic, epistemological, semiotic, intertextual, poetic, textual, or tropological kind, to name just a few.[34]

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[30] Ibid., 3.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Liz James and Ruth Webb, "'To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places': Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium," *Art History* 14, no. 1 (March 1991), 6.

[33] John Hollander, *The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4.

All of these definitions assume that speaking or writing about a visual image is a worthwhile exercise, and each of them at least to some extent engages with Horace's famous, albeit somewhat cryptic, maxim *ut pictura poesis* [as is painting, so is poetry]. Even Gotthold Lessing, who in the eighteenth century set out of refute Horace's assertion and who argues that literary and plastic arts are not at all alike (for while the former is temporal in essence, the latter is spatial), uses in his argument detailed descriptions of the shield of Achilles, or creating more ekphrastic descriptions while analyzing one specific ekphrasis – something that he does out of necessity, for how else would his readers know which details of the shield he has in mind while arguing his various points?

While arguing for the superiority of literature as the kind of art that can convey a whole spectrum of human emotions and that can show the development of events in time, Lessing introduces the term a "pregnant moment" that serves as a redeeming feature of visual art. It refers to the immediately pre-climactic moment when "[t]he more we see, the more we must be able to imagine, and the more we imagine, the more we must think we see."[35] By endowing his painting or sculpture with enough precision and expressivity, the artist trusts that when the viewers properly see the "pregnant moment," they will be able to understand the events that take place immediately before and after it.

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[34] See Leonid Heller, "Voskreshenie poniatiia, ili slovo of ekfrasise," *Ekfrasis v russkoi literature: trudy Lozannskogo simpoziuma* (Moskva: MIK, 2002), 19. Heller defines religious ekphrasis as a "invitation/encouragement [приглашение-побуждение] towards a spiritual vision as a higher form of perception of this realm and a perception of a higher realm" and explains that religious ekphrasis is "a principle of sacralization of artistic elements" that serves as "a guarantee of a holistic perception." (Qtd. in N.E. Mednis, "'Religioznyi Ekfrasis' v Russkoi Literature," *Kritika i semiotika*, no. 10 (2006), 59). This may serve as a possible way of overcoming the ideological conflict between word and a secular image. This way of writing about visual images is especially fruitful in writing fiction, for it has little to do with religion per se, focusing on the readers' ability to not only see what is not obvious, but also to feel what is not expressed. Nevertheless, it does not resolve the stailmate between the word and the *iconic* image that, as we will see in the literary works examined later, resists being envoiced in any way.

Although Lessing's differentiation between the two sister arts may be problematic, his term "pregnant moment" has been picked up by other critics. Wendy Steiner takes us back to the problem of verbal description of visual images and states that ekphrasis in literature is similar to Lessing's concept of "pregnant moment" in visual art because it constitutes that one specific instance in a literary narrative "in which a poem aspires to the atemporal 'eternity' of the stopped-action painting, or laments its inability to achieve it."[36] Heffernan, however, counters Steiner's claim by stating that ekphrasis is "dynamic and obstetric; it typically delivers from the pregnant moment of visual art its embryonically narrative impulse, and thus makes explicit the story that visual art tells only by implication."[37] Heffernan insists that ekphrasis "evokes the power of the silent image even as it subjects that power to the rival authority of language,"[38] which is why iconophilia and iconophobia become inseparable from each other.

Despite the difference in opinions regarding what the word ekphrasis really means and how this literary form functions, critics tend to view ekphrasis not only as a convenient term for a verbal description, but as a concept that introduces intermediality into literary discourse in a problematic way. Werner Wolf defines intermediality as "any transgression of boundaries between conventionally distinct media of communication."[39] The problematic nature of such a transgression may not be unique to ekphrasis; yet the two media that ekphrasis pits against each other – word and image – may find themselves in an especially tumultuous relationship when the object of verbal representation is the type of image that by its nature resists verbal explication and whose essence is believed to open up to a viewer in the process of unmediated and silent contemplation. In other words, the problem is compounded when the object of ekphrasis is a religious icon or an iconic image that is similar in its meaning and function to a religious icon.

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[35] Gotthold Lessing, *Laocoon*, trans. by Ellen Frothingham (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1887), 17 and 92.

[36] Wendy Steiner, *Pictures of Romance: FormAagainst Context in Painting and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 13-14.

[37] Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 5.

[38] Ibid., 1.

The sharp distinction between the temporal and the spatial aspects of a work, whether literary or visual, has been formulated, reconsidered, but not rejected by modern western scholars; however, this distinction would have to be reconsidered yet again in the Russian context because Eastern Orthodox iconography uses the concepts of temporality and spatiality in a unique way. Scenes depicted in religious icons are a priori atemporal, or eternal. Such images cannot be taken in all at once because of the way they are constructed (by means of reverse perspective, word captions, etc.), and the process of a silent contemplation requires a beholder to spend time "reading" an image as it were, while at the same time being "read" by the image and transformed by the encounter with the spiritual realm and the personages that inhabit it.

Contrary to Lessing's assertions that visual images are restricted to spatial existence and narratives to temporal, iconic images transcend these boundaries altogether. Furthermore, ancient rhetors in their iconic ekphrases essayed to verbally produce the effect that was similar to that of the icons. The profound power that the ancient ekphrases were credited with can be attributed to *enargeia*, the "specific hypostatic act that distinguishes the exemplary image aesthetically."[40] Icons do not simply represent an object visually, but possess the power to affect a viewer the same way that a personage would. Cornelia Tsakiridou explains:

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[39] Werner Wolf, "Intermedial Iconicity in Fiction: Tema con Variazioni," *From Sign to Signing: Iconicity in Language and Literature* 3, ed. by Wolfgang G. Müller and Olga Fischer (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub., 2003), 339. For more on the notion of intermediality, see Erik Hedling and Ulla Britta Lagerroth, *Cultural Functions of Intermedial Exploration*. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 18, and Peter Wagner, *Icons, Texts, Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1996), 17-18.

> The adjective *enarges* means bright, shining, distinct, glistening, and with regard to the fleeting quality of light, swift in motion … Greek and Roman writers used the term to describe the vivid, life-like appearance of a person, object, or event in life, art or literature, and the impact of such a sight on the viewer or listener. In the first centuries of the Christian era, and its cognates were used extensively in rhetorical exercises associated with *ekphraseis* … to describe the manner in which speech visually realizes its object and it this respect resembles a painting.[41]

Citing Hermogenes again, ekphrasis can now be defined as "a type of verbal description that operates '*enargos*' or brings intense visual experience to the listening act."[42] The intensity of the experience is explained by the fact that verbal descriptions can "bring things to sight as if they were present in their sensuous, living form in front of the listener."[43] Ekphrasis is, then, is the type of writing that is "capable of recreating the actual presence of events and beings."[44]

How does this multifaceted notion function both either as a literary principle or a rhetorical device in the literary fiction that has been impacted by religious iconography?

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[40] Cornelia A. Tsakiridou, *Icons in time, persons in eternity: Orthodox theology and the aesthetics of the Christian image* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 49.

[41] Ibid., 49.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 50. See also Andrew D. Walker, "*Enargeia* and the Spectator in Greek Historiography," in *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 123 (1993), 353-377.

As Michel Quenot observes, “the icon is closely connected to the evolution of thought patterns throughout the history of Christianity,”[45] and in this regard Russia is no exception. Yet would it be possible to formulate these thought patterns based on verbal descriptions of literary icons?

In the Russian Orthodox Church a religious icon, a painted image of a venerated saint, is a physical object that facilitates a religious experience. Since for most of its history the vast majority of Russia’s population was illiterate, written scriptures were impenetrable for ordinary parishioners and, at times, even to some priests.[46] Unable to read scripture, from the early days of Christianization of Rus’ in the tenth century and for centuries onwards, the vast majority of the inhabitants of Russia received their knowledge of the universe primarily through church liturgy (by hearing) and church iconography (through vision).

Iconic images became especially prominent in this process because not only did they serve as visual texts during church services, but they were present in people’s everyday lives outside the confines of a church building: icons were portable and, as such, more accessible.[47] They, as Quenot notes, “provided spiritual orientation for Christian life and prayer.”[48] Visual images of sacred character by necessity became especially valuable means of transmitting the doctrine and building the faith of the largely illiterate population.[49]

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[45] Michel Quenot, *The Icon: Window on the Kingdom* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1991), 13.

[46] According to B.V Sapunov, the size of literate population of Russia for persons nine years and older at the end of the eighteenth century amounted to 3 to 7 percent (see Boris Mironov, “The Develppment of Literacy in Russia and the USSR from the Tenth to the Twentieth Centuries,” *History of Education Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (Summer 1991), 229-252).

[47] Notably, it is the sight of Hagia Sophia and the obvious splendor of the church ritual that impressed Prince Vladimir’s envoys to Constantinople and became instrumental (along with other considerations) in his conversion to Christianity.

[48] Quenot, 68.

By gradually overcoming the boundaries set by a religious ritual, the icon over time in some sense helped to shape the Russian worldview. Beholding an icon became a model of visual perception, a specific way of seeing the world and understanding human relationships and life events. For this reason, it is the iconic image that would become an indispensable tool for forming a person's outlook on the world – what in German is called *Weltanschauung* and in Russian *mirovozzrenie*. Interestingly enough, in this sense, the Russian word betrays the presence of a visual dominant in the developing of one's understanding of and in the shaping of one's attitude towards the outside world and life in general: it is in the process of gazing upon the world [*vozzret' na mir*], not reading or talking about it, that an ideology, the characteristic "manner or the content of thinking" of an individual or a group, is formed.[50]

A religion forms a person's *mirovozzrenie* not by merely setting out a catalogue of expectations that govern one's day-to-day existence and that direct a church ritual. It does so by explaining the origin of mankind and by setting out the possible scenarios for its future. Thus, when Richard Pipes states that for centuries, in the Russian mind the concept of culture was identical with "religious belief, but especially religious rituals and festivals," he implies that, ultimately, it is religion that determined the peoples' understanding of its past, present, and future. To facilitate that understanding, a very specific kind of images was necessary, the one that, as Egon Sendler notes, "points to a dimension which goes beyond the natural [and] pushes out toward the ineffable."[51] By visually presenting to the people such "ascension toward the Beyond is a communion with eternity,"[52] Byzantine icons became the expression of the peoples' understanding of time, of space, and of human nature.

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[49] The imbalance between the amount of church preaching and secular education was so severe that Vissarion Belinsky felt compelled to exclaim in his famous "Letter to N. Gogol" from July 3, 1947, "What [Russia] needs is not sermons (she has heard enough of them!) or prayers (she has repeated them too often!), but the awakening in the people of a sense of their human dignity lost for so many centuries amid the dirt and refuse." Qtd. in Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), xiii.

[50] For more on the visual dominant [*vizual'naia dominanta*], see Ivan Esaulov, "Illiuzionizm i ikonichnost' (k problem fluktuatsii 'vizual'noi dominanty' national'noi kul'tury v russkoi slovesnosti XX veka)," *Russian Literature* 45, no. 1 (January 1999), 23-34.

The very process of creation of icons intended for the use in a religious ritual was from early on governed by a specific set of rules, and one's familiarity with the context in and for which an icon was created would determine the depth of one's engagement with it. By extension, in order to comprehend properly the verbal descriptions of iconic images – ekphrases of icons – we must take into consideration the rules and the rituals that are part of the environment in which those images are found. To put it another way, to understand how ekphrasis functions in the literature that was produced by an Eastern Orthodox culture, one ought to first consider the iconographic principles that were developed within the artistic sphere of this culture.

In order to demonstrate the ascension to the Beyond, or in other words, to transcend the limits of the natural world, a special kind of aesthetic stylization was developed. It was designed to direct one's attention away from the immediate physical reality of one's temporal existence and turn it towards the eternal realm and to its exalted inhabitants: away from one's carnal self and towards the spiritual reality. Everything, from the board on which the image was to be painted to the color scheme and proportions was meant to convey a spiritual message. Although to an outsider icons may appear to be "disembodied, stylized, idealized images," the Byzantines saw them as "the exact likeness of their models," images that were "both the reproduction … and equivalent to … the models."[53] Tsakiridou explains that

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[51] Egon Sendler, *The Icon, Image of the Invisible: Elements of Theology, Aesthetics, and Technique* (Redondo Beach, Calif: Oakwood Publications, 1988), 2.

[52] Ibid.

> [w]hat appears abstract from a naturalistic standpoint is realistic by the standards of an iconography that seeks a particular kind of transcendent simplicity in form and composition. Icons are meant to recreate a spiritual realm, to paint a world in which temporal beings live eschatological lives.[54]

Here we must consider the concept of "likeness" and make an important distinction between religious icons as a form of visual art on the one hand and visual and linguistic icons on the other.[55] According to Charles Sanders Peirce's classification of signs, an icon is "a sign that stands for something merely because it resembles it."[56] In this case, "the dual relation between the sign and its object is degenerate," for a mere resemblance is the only thing that binds them together.[57] The connection between the iconic sign and the object of signification is in part conventional, in part naturally motivated. Umberto Eco explains that some of the iconic signs "refer to an established stylistic rule, while others appear to propose a new rule … In other cases the constitution of similitude, although ruled by operational conventions, seems to be more firmly linked to the basic mechanisms of perception than to explicit cultural habits."[58]

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[53] Gilbert Dagron, "Holy Images and Likeness," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991), 23.

[54] Tsakiridou, 207.

[55] Michel Quenot comments on the misleading nature of the term "icon" where religious images are concerned.

[56] Charles S. Peirce, *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1960), 3:211.

[57] Ibid.

In the linguistic sense, iconic signs are most often found in literary texts because, as Max Nänny notes, "it is in the nature of literature to exploit all linguistic and, hence, also all iconic possibilities for aesthetic purposes."[59] Literature is responsible for "an exceptional development of the iconic imitative resources of language."[60] Although initially linguistic icons were associated for the most part with onomatopoeic words, the sphere of literary iconicity has gradually expanded and began to include the overall structure of a literary text (concrete poetry, for example) and such formal devices as chiasmus, stanza-breaks, iteration, etc.[61] Nänny also points out that "[i]conic functions of textual elements … are no more than latent possibilities. They will only appear if the meaning of the textual passage is compatible with them."[62] Yet besides the requirement for the form and the substance to be compatible, "iconicity exists only as it is perceived,"[63] which means that the reader must be aware of its existence and ready to recognize it and to understand "the analogical structure behind the digital surface form."[64]

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[58] Qtd. in Mitchell, *Iconology* 57. Orig. in Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

[59] Max Nänny, "Iconicity in Literature," *Word & Image* 2, no. 3 (July – Sept. 1986), 199.

[60] Qtd. in Nänny, 199. Orig. in Leech, G.N. and M.H. Short, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (London: Longman, 1981), 234.

[61] See Nänny, 200-1.

[62] Nänny, 199.

[63] Ibid. See A.K. Zolkovskij, "How to Show Things with Words: On the Iconic Representation of Themes by Expression Plane Means," *Poetics*, 8 (1979), 410.

[64] Nänny, 200. Also see Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2007).

Visual icons also rely to a great extent on a viewer's ability to recognize the sign's similarity to the object. Peirce brings in diagrams of geometry as examples of such signs and stresses that "[i]cons are so completely substituted for their objects as hardly to be distinguished from them."[65] He then leaps into the sphere of visual art and declares that

> in contemplating a painting, there is a moment when we lose the consciousness that it is not the thing, the distinction of the real and the copy disappears, and it is for the moment a pure dream – not any particular existence, and yet not general. At that moment we are contemplating an *icon*.[66]

In other words, while contemplating an iconic sign, we visualize the idea represented by that sign. The viewers still need to be aware of the presence of iconicity for the latter to work: they know that the picture is a representation of something else. Still, in the case of visual images the connection between the sign and the object is a little more obvious because of the similarity of their outward features, the so-called natural connection, than between a linguistinc sign and what it represents.

Contradicting Peirce, W.J.T. Mitchell concludes that when it comes to iconology and visual art, "[t]he problem with the notion of icon is not just that it embraces too many sorts of things, but, more fundamentally, that the whole concept of 'sign' drawn from linguistics seems inappropriate to iconicity in general, and to pictorial symbols in particular."[67] This problem is exacerbated the instant an element of religious thought is introduced into the equation.

Although, to some extent, the depth of beholders' engagement with sacred images is determined by their familiarity with iconographic principles, that knowledge alone may be insufficient for the "communion with eternity" that Sendler speaks of. Quenot explains that "[n]either purely aesthetic, nor purely spiritual, the beauty of the icon is interior and has it origin in its archetype (model)."[68] In other words, the aesthetic and the spiritual aspects of the religious icon are augmented by the semiotic connection with the sacred object depicted in it. One of the conditions for discovering the message of the icon is the ability to recognize "an interior light" contained within it: a beholder recognizes the aesthetic value of an icon and sees the icon's aesthetic elements as conduits for transmitting a spiritual message.[69]

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[65] Peirce, 211.

[66] Peirce, 211. Emphasis in the original.

[67] Mitchell, *Iconology*, 58.

When it comes to ekphrastic writing, it is the *enargeia* of the iconic image that must be transmitted by verbal means. Tsakiridou explains *enargeia* is

> that quality in the description of a thing or incident that creates the impression of its actual presence and occurrence. It is readily perceptible and coincides with the act of reading or performing a text. Images that have *enargeia* behave as facts or realities rather than as the interior, mental objects that they actually are.[70]

In order to perceive *enargeia* and to discover "the very essence of the icon, wither directly through an icon or by ekphrastic mediation," some preparation is needed on the part of person perceiving it. As Quenot explains it, the person ought to possess "an interior light himself."[71] In this regard, visual perception of images is believed to be more effective. Expounding the statement in the Gospel of Luke that "the light of the body is the eye" (Luke 11:34), Françoise Lucbert explains that "[t]he eye is the light of the body because vision is a fragment of the divine light stolen from the gods by human beings before their fall on earth."[72] Similarly, Pavel Florenskii in his essay "Iconostasis" (1922) ponders the role of icons in the Russian Orthodox Church and in the process of acquiring spiritual knowledge, and he concludes that at the very basis of the icon lies not one's carnal vision, but a spiritual experience [в основе иконы лежит духовный опыт],[73] which is almost impossible to recreate through verbal expression. According to Florenskii, one cannot rely on verbal description at all while trying to understand the icon: "an abstract description is not enough for an iconic image, and therefore here too it is essential to *see* something with one's own spiritual eyes."[74]

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[68] Quenot, 13.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Tsakiridou, 50.

[71] Quenot, 13.

Although, according to Peirce, a mere resemblance suffices for establishing iconic relations between a linguistic or a visual sign and its object, something more is required of a religious icon.[75] On the one hand, religious icons are deliberately un-artistic and therefore do not fall into the narrow category of "plastic arts" that is used by Krieger.[76] Despite the fact that in the common idiom religious icons have fallen into a broad category of visual art, due to their spiritual purpose icons resist the definition of an art object: "An art becomes sacred only when a spiritual outlook or vision becomes manifestst in its forms, and when they in turn, convey an authentic reflection of the spiritual world."[77]

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[72] Lucbert Françoise, "The Pen and the Eye: The Politics of the Gazing Body," *Vision and Textuality*, ed. by Stephen Melville and Bill Readings (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 251.

[73] Pavel Florenskii, *Sochineniia v chetyrekh tomakh* (Moskva: Mysl', 1994), 2:451.

[74] Ibid., 2:452. Emphasis in the original: "отвлеченного описания недостаточно для иконописно-художественного образа, и потому и здесь необходимо нечто *видеть* собственными духовными глазами." The ability to see spiritually (or with one's own spiritual eyes) is in detail discussed by St. Augustine (see Miles, "Vision"). Florenskii was familiar with some of Augustine's writing, and further investigation is needed in order to determine the extent of Augustine's influence on Florenskii's understanding of Orthodox iconography.

[75] Egon Sendler points out the inadequacy of the expression "religious art" and suggests that the term "theological art" should be used instead (See Sendler, *The Icon*, 2).

[76] Also see Florenskii's essay "Reverse Perspective" in *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art* (London: Reaktion, 2002), 197-272 [Florenskii, P. A. *Sochineniia v chetyrekh tomakh* (Moskva: Mysl', 1994), 2(1):46-98].

On the other hand, because of their liturgical function and the subjects of their depiction, religious icons cannot be grouped with "natural objects or artifacts." Michel Quenot explains:

> If art imparts to us a conception of the world, it is primarily a language which is expressed visually. To comprehend it demands an understanding of both its vocabulary and syntax. More than just a work of art, the icon calls for an art form permitting the transition from the visible to the invisible. Its highly refined structures permit just that: to ignore them would be to deprive oneself of the elements essential for reading the image. To fully understand the icon, then, one must necessarily comprehend its organic unity: artistic, spiritual, theological.[78]

In his turn, Stanton explains that despite its resistance to being considered representational, the icon is "as its etymology indicates, an image in the Neoplatonic sense."[79] The icon finds itself "in a complex spatial, perspectival, epistemological and *personal* relationship to what lies beyond its palpable, sensible portion,"[80] and what the icon teaches is the following:

> The ontological axiom of this literary imagination is that the cosmos encompasses more than the created reality visible to the eye, audible to the ear, and describable in human language.
> Its epistemological axiom is that the transcendent dimension of the cosmos is knowable, though not by the senses of the created intelligence.

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[77] Quenot, 77. When speaking of iconography, the term "artistic" is especially ill-suited because of its semantic connections with the notion of artistry and, most importantly, artificiality. For more in-depth analyses of art, artistry, and artificiality see, for example, Leo Tolstoy's essay "What is Art?" (New York: Penguin, 1995), Viktor Shklovskii's essay "Art as Technique" in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), John Dewey's book *Art as experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934), and Kendall L. Walton's article "Categories of Art," *The Philosophical Review* 79, no. 3 (Jul., 1970), 334-367.

[78] Quenot, 13.

[79] Stanton, 30.

[80] Ibid.

> Its communicative axiom is that valued discourse requires a context into which are figured both the personal probity of the visionary and the general agreement by all parties in discourse that understanding requires a wholistic [sic.] union of body, mind, and spirit (which union is conventionally signaled by the term 'heart').[81]

What makes the iconic image different from other kinds of drawn or painted images [живопись], is that it never sets mimesis as its objective. It is neither a photograph of nor a mirror to reality. If a simile is required, then the icon is more like a window into the higher realm in which exalted personages dwell: "[t]he raison d'être of icons is to serve God as well as humanity. The icon is a window through which the People of God, the Church, can contemplate the Kingdom."[82] Moreover, as Konstantin Barsht sums it up, the Orthodox icon is "a window on to Truth, which guarantees Good and the path to which is Beauty."[83]

The window-like qualities of the icon appear to resolve the problem that W.J.T. Mitchell sees in the contemporary study of images. He writes:

> images are now regarded as the sort of sign that presents a deceptive appearance of naturalness and transparence concealing an opaque, distorting, arbitrary, mechanism of representation, a process of ideological mystification.[84]

Instead, Mitchell writes, these images should be "providing a transparent window on the world."[85] Incidentally, providing a transparent window onto a world is precisely the role of the religious icon. Yet the difficulty in understanding the icon lies in the fact that it depicts not the tangible, material kind of our everyday existence, but the spiritual reality that is accessible to believers.

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[81] Ibid. My emphasis.

[82] From a lecture given by Ms. Fortunatova-Theokretov, qtd. in Quenot, 70.

[83] Konstantin, Barsht, "Defining the Face: Observations on Dostoevskii's creative processes," *Russian Literature, Modernism, and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 27.

[84] Mitchell, *Iconology*, 8.

[85] Mitchell, *Iconology*, 8.

Another important issue in this discussion is the way the icon treats time and space. The "Beyond" that it depicts is, clearly, not the material reality in which most ordinary humans find themselves at the present. Cornelia Tsakiridou explains the temporal and spatial elements of the icon by saying that it is "a type of Orthodox image that embodies and realizes deified existence aesthetically. Images of this type bring what they present to a state of *temporal* realization, as if in showing it they are bringing it into existence and keeping it alive and *present in time*."[86] Thus, the beholder understands that, although the realization is temporal, the object and the "deified existence" that it represents are eternal.

Moreover, tapping into the beholder's own spiritual faculties, the key function of the iconic image is not so much to represent as to remind the believer of the originals. As Pavel Florenskii explains, citing Church Fathers, the icon is not a straightforward (mimetic) depiction, but a reminder of the depicted saint [напоминание о первообразах].[87] Clemena Antonova does note that "the importance of the icon for Florenskii lies exactly in its ability to provide a model of vision at a higher level of existence"[88]; yet Florenskii is not alone in taking this approach to the icon. Echoing him in the twenty-first century, Oleg Bychkov stresses that as a crucial part of Orthodox worship, "the icon is the only way we can '*see*' the divine."[89]

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[86] Tsakiridou, 4. My emphasis.

[87] Florenskii, 2:448. Florenskii refers here to St. John of Damascus, St. Nikephoros of Constantinople, and Theodore the Studite.

[88] Clemena Antonova, "Visuality among Cubism, Iconography, and Theosophy: Pavel Florenskii's Theory of Iconic Space," *Journal of Icon Studies* (February 2012), 1.

Thus, the icon facilitates a form of communication that, to an Orthodox believer, is not possible in any other way but through a spiritual experience. While, clearly, the icon is a physical object made of wood and paint, the special way in which the image is produced by using these materials allows the beholder to see beyond the lines and the colors on a flat surface. These "disembodied, stylized, idealized images" as Dagron calls them are only a means towards a true vision.

Pavel Florenskii, for example, thus explains the act (or the experience) of looking at an icon of Bogoroditsa:

> Here, I look at an icon and say to myself, "*This – is She Herself*," not a depiction of her, but She Herself who, through a medium, with the help of iconographic art, is contemplated. As if through a window, I see the Mother of the Lord Herself, and pray to Her, face to face, and not at all to the picture. And there is not picture in my mind at all: there is a board with paint, and then there is the Mother of the Lord Herself. A window is a window, and the board of an icon is a board, paints, and oil varnish … An iconographer … drew up a veil, and She, Who is behind the veil, stands as objective reality not only to me, but equally to him, and by him she is found but not created.
>
> Се – *Сама Она* – не изображение Ее, а Она Сама, через посредство, при помощи иконописного искусства созерцаемая. Как чрез окно, вижу я Богоматерь, Самую Богоматерь, и Ей Самой молюсь, лицом к лицу, ни никак не изображению. Да в моем сознании и нет никакого изображения: есть доска с красками, и есть Сама Матерь Господа. Окно есть окно, и доска иконы – доска, краски, олифа. А за окном созерцается Сама Божия Матерь; а за окном – видение Пречистой. Иконописец показал мне Её, да; но не создал: он отверз завесу, а Та, Кто за завесой, – предстоит объективною реальностью не только мне, но равно – и ему, им обретается, но не сочиняется им.[90]

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[89] Oleg Bychkov, "Image and Meaning: Iconicity in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition," *Image Makers and Images Breakers*, ed. by J.A. Harris (New York: Legas Press, 2003), 86. My emphasis.

[90] Florenskii, 2:447. Emphasis in the original. My translation.

Thus, the religious icon is not a picture in the most ordinary sense of the word, it is not even the visual icon that Peirce speaks of. It does not merely represent an object (be it animate or inanimate), but allows the beholder to see the saints and, which is extremely important, to be seen by them aswell. It is "a locus of encounter with holy persons and realities, and an affirmation of their continuing presence in the life of the faithful."[91] Incidentally, Tsakiridou observes, the latter point is "standard in most *ekphraseis* and epigrams"[92] in the ancient world; however, as we will see in the subsequent chapters, this is the property that is lost in the descriptions produced by the male characters.

So, on the one hand, we have Heffernan's definition of ekphrasis as a genre that "explicitly represents representation itself" and an adamant assertion that [w]hat ekphrasis represents in words … must itself be representational."[93] On the other, we have the view of the icon as not a representation, but a window onto exalted saints dwelling in a spiritual realm. Is it possible to truly reconcile these terms and speak of religious ekphrases that, by attempting to convey the *enargeia* of the image, can recreate the enlightening (or revelatory) experience of the icon?

The idea of encounter with holy persons makes the icon a saving aperture. The icon "does not exist by itself," for it is "a means to lead [a beholder] to others: to Christ, the Trinity, the Theotokos and the Saints. For the Orthodox, the icon is a true sacramental of a *personal presence*."[94] This presence is experienced spiritually and, to a large extent, through silent contemplation. The gendered conflict between the word and the image is not resolved, but exacerbated by "the silence of the frescoes and icons" that is a crucial element of the icon.[95] This silence, however, is informative. Tsakiridou writes:

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[91] Tsakiridou, 209.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 4.

[94] Quenot, 79. Emphasis in the original.

> When in a picture we meet figures which stand in contained rupture, which speak through their silence, or move toward the viewer as if to open themselves to view (and yet not completely), we know right away that we are in the presence of something that commands its own reality. In that moment, it is hard to speak of an aesthetic of absence or similitude. It makes little sense to interpret or analyze the image because it speaks for itself.[96]

If the image speaks for itself, then, logically, ekphrasis – the words produced by a viewer on behalf of an image – is superfluous and, in severe cases, misleading. Heffernan writes that "[e]kphrasis speaks not only about works of art but also *to and for them*."[97] He then surmises that

> In so doing, it [ekphrasis] stages – within the theater of language itself – a revolution of the image against the word, and particularly the word of Lessing, who decreed that the duty of pictures was to be silent and beautiful (like women), leaving expression to poetry. In talking back to and looking back at the male viewer, the images envoiced by ekphrasis challenge at once the controlling authority of the male gaze and the power of the male word.[98]

Thus, if we are to agree with Heffernan, images acquire their voice through ekphrasis and at the same time overpower the speaker's own authorial voice. Indeed, this is what we would see under ideal conditions, in ekphrasis "done right." However, another scenario is also possible – the speaker's authorial voice misrepresenting the image and expressing his own view of it and, in effect, telling (incorrectly) the image what it represents.

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[95] Quenot, 47. Quenot also notes that sensual and carnal elements, such as colors in paintings and sounds of music during church worship, prevalent in the Catholic West, are foreign to the icon.

[96] Tsakiridou, 5.

[97] Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 7. My emphasis.

[98] Ibid., 7.

Krieger explains, contradicting Heffernan and referring us back to Peirce, that the ekphrastic impulse finds it source "in the semiotic desire for the natural sign, the desire, that is, to have the world captured in the word, the word that belongs to it, or, better yet, the word to which *it* belongs."[99] The problematic nature of this logocentric desire, or the desire "to see the world in the word,"[100] is compounded, in the context of Russian culture, by the fact that the icon, albeit silently, nonetheless addresses and edifies the beholder or, in other words, has its own authority. In order to truly comprehend the icon, the beholder must refrain from speaking on its behalf, thus resisting the urge to impose his own understanding onto the image.

Although ancient ekphrases of icons did strive to convey the *enargeia* of the sacred image and despite the fact that Hermogenes defined ekphrasis as "a type of verbal description that operates 'enargos' or brings intense visual experience to the listening act,"[101] we may conclude from Tsakiridou's, Quenot's, and Florenskii's observations that one's direct experience of the icon is infinitely more effective and enlightening because it is more direct and real than any other experience that may be facilitated by hearing or reading a verbal description of the same image. The silence of the icon, which is its inherent element, stands in opposition to the very nature and mission of ekphrasis, whether the latter is considered as a trope or a literary principle, whether the speaker expresses his own view or attempts to envoice the image.

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[99] Krieger, 11.

[100] Ibid. Krieger also notes here that the crucial role in formulating this logocentric desire belongs to Jacques Derrida.

[101] Tsakiridou, 49.

Krieger insists that "besides representational friction and the turning of fixed forms into narrative, ekphrasis entails prosopopoeia, or the envoicing a silent object,"[102] but the big question that begs to be asked is whether the silent object has the need to be envoiced in order to be properly understood. And even if it does, is there any way of knowing that what the speaker says on behalf of the image is accurate?

In this regard, when considered in the Orthodox context, the ekphrastic drive to "speak out" on behalf of a silent image or to "tell in full" is extremely problematic. Ekphrasis, by its very nature, implies that the narrative impulse is necessarily present in visual art and that this impulse must be heeded. Whether by describing the image to another party or by attempting to speak on behalf of the depicted personage in a soliloquy, the speaker inevitably runs the risk of imposing his own authority onto the object of depiction. When in the process of "telling in full" he projects his own thoughts/wishes/desires onto the image, the power struggle between word and image spills onto the pages of a fictional narrative. In this regard, when used in the context of Russian literature, Heffernan's formulation of the gendered antagonism and his use of the terms "iconophilia" and "iconophobia" are more astute than perhaps he himself realizes. As it has been mentioned before, in the linguistic (and the most commonly used) sense, an icon is "a sign that stands for something merely because it resembles it."[103] Peirce further emphasizes that "[i]cons are so completely substituted for their objects as hardly to be distinguished from them."[104] Yet in the religious sense, iconic images are not mere pictures that resemble – however closely – the original. They are a means for a believer to see the exalted individual *directly*; they function as a window, not as a photograph.

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[102] Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 6.

[103] Peirce, 211.

[104] Ibid.

Aside from the rhetorical goals of ekphrasis and the spiritual function of icons, it is imperative to consider the possible objects of iconic representation. In the Orthodox church, icons often depict Christ himself and his exalted saints. Yet the scope of iconic depiction is much wider. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will not limit the use of the term ekphrasis only to descriptions of secular paintings or painted icons, neither will I limit it to compact narrative segments that can be inserted into a literary text without disturbing its structure. In keeping with its original meaning, I will consider ekphrasis as a verbal description of a visual image – any image. Such an expansion is made necessary by the fact that in Byzantine theology in general, and in the Russian Orthodox iteration of it in particular, iconic images are not limited to manmade pictures. In the words of Valerii Lepakhin,

> When considering Byzantine theology, even of the earliest period, one cannot fail to observe that the word 'icon' was used by theologians in a much broader sense than is the custom today. These early theologians called the entire cosmos God's icon – it was God's creation. During the celebration of the liturgy the Bishop or Priest was referred to as Christ's icon. The Gospels too were referred to as an icon; the Gospels represented the icon of Christ in written form … Therefore icons were not just visual or decorative; they were also verbal and of a literary nature."[105]

Such a wide application of the notion of icon survived well into the twentieth century. As St. Iustin Popović, an Eastern Orthodox theologian, explains: "Earth is nothing else but the most beautiful iconostasis of God. This world, all of these worlds, this Universe, all of these countless universes are a magnificent temple of God, and the people are an iconostasis of this temple."[106] Popović's statement is hardly revolutionary, for it refers us directly to the book of Genesis where the creation of the entire humankind was started with the words: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."[107] On the other hand, Tsakiridou reminds us that painted icons "also invite a comparison to persons because like human beings they are capable of self-presentation and enunciation."[108]

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[105] Valerii Lepakhin, "Basic Types of Correlation between Text and Icon, Between Verbal and Visual Icons," *Literature & Theology* 20, no. 1 (March 2006), 20.

While descriptions of painted iconic images deserve a special attention because it is here that the competition between the word and the image is most apparent, a consideration of descriptions of human characters that act icon-like within a narrative can be especially fruitful in developing an understanding of the ideological conflict that underpins the narrative. For this reason, iconic likeness is the phenomenon in the Russian literature that naturally expands the notion of ekphrasis to include all descriptions: those of recognized saints, of living sinners, and of the literary characters that struggle with their contradictory desires and traits.

In the four prose works that I will consider in the chapters that follow the logocentric impulse is juxtaposed to iconic reticence. Painted icons and silent icon-like characters, in effect, offer an alternative way of receiving knowledge about the world. Russian visuality is closely linked to Russia's religious tradition, and from the early days of Kievan Rus' until the late 19th c. this trait expressed itself in a specific form – iconicity. Valerii Lepakhin offers a narrow definition of iconicity as an "ontological, antinomous unity of phenomena belonging to the divine and the created world, due to which the invisible becomes visible, and the human connects with the divine." [онтологическое, антиномичное единство явлений Божественного и тварного мира, благодаря которому невидимое становится видимым, а человеческое причастным Божественному.][109] While iconicity is the ability of an image to represent a spiritual object, I call a literary character's ability to perceive this quality in an image and to gain access to the spiritual reality that the image represents "iconic vision."

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[106] Qtd. in V.V. Lepakhin, "Chelovek – ikona Bozhiia."

[107] Gen. 1:26.

[108] Tsakiridou, 4.

Iconic vision should not be confused with the kind of recognition that is facilitated by mimetic representation. Norman Bryson argues that because a painting "is an art in constant touch with signifying forces outside it,"[110] it turns a viewer not merely into a reader of an image, but into a historically constructed interpreter of it. When an artist's goal is mimesis, a viewer's task is limited to perceptualism, or recognition of three-dimensional objects of material reality that are depicted two-dimensionally. Religious iconic art, however, widely uses the method of reverse perspective in order to eschew mimesis, thus deliberately minimizing the temptation to stop one's experience of an image at the superficial level of formal recognition. It strives to express spiritual values and to foster in the beholders not perceptualism, but the type of vision that allows one to see what is deliberately unstated and to be spiritually changed in the process. This ontological paradox can be surmounted only through careful attempts to look past the outward appearance and into the spiritual essence of what is represented.

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[109] Qtd. in Esaulov, "Illuzionizm i ikonichnost,'" 33. Orig. in V. Lepahkin, "Letopis' kak ikona vsemirnoi istorii (po 'Povesti vremennykh let')," *Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia* 171), 30-42.

[110] Qtd. in Heffernan, *Cultivating Picturacy*, 1.

The notion of iconic vision is also different from the term "picturacy" that James Heffernan offers in reference to "an ability to interpret pictures."[111] Heffernan writes that "[w]hile semiotics gives us a powerful alternative to the notions that pictures are windows on reality, picturacy … entails the capacity to see that pictures may resist decoding quite as much as they invite it."[112] Icons, the windows that they are, do not call for an ability to either interpret or to decode a visual sign, but for a willingness on the beholder's part to be transformed by the visual experience.

The concept of iconic vision not only applies to real-life encounters of icons, but also features in literature as a character's ability to see beyond the immediate physical reality that he finds himself in. As will be shown in the subsequent chapters, a literary character's ability to see an image iconically (whether a picture or a person) and understand what the image tells him instead of insisting on his own interpretation of the image often serves as a predictor of his ability to function within the society that he finds himself in.

Within the works that will be discussed in the chapters that follow, the juxtaposition of the word and the image allows authors to not only examine a conflict between men and women, but also to consider the ideological conflict between Western rationalism and Eastern spirituality.[113] On the one hand, the logocentric impulse is associated with the desire to reason, to explain, and to understand the events of life and to dispense with its mysteries. On the other, the apophatic and kenotic traditions of the Russian Orthodox Church insist on preserving the element of mystery in one's experience of reality and run contrary to the rationalist impulse. When examining the word-image conflict within Russian literature, it is worthwhile to keep the following questions in mind:

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[111] Heffernan, *Cultivating picturacy*, 1.

[112] Ibid., 7.

[113] Many discussions of the contrast between western vs. eastern and rationlist vs. spiritual tendencies in the Russian context succumb to the temptation of trying to outline the "proper" way of development for Russia. Starting with Metropolitan Hilarion's "Sermon on Law and Grace" (1037-1051), continued in the correspondence between Ivan the Terrible (1530-84) and his political opponent Andrei Kurbsky (1528-83), into the eighteenth century and the reign on Peter the Great and Katherine the Great, all throughout the nineteenth century with its Slavophiles and Westernizers, into the twentieth century with Nikolai Berdiaev (1874 – 1948) and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918 – 2008), and until the present day, the debates have

1. How does ekphrasis of the icon function in a specific literary text?
2. How does the author represent an iconic heroine?
3. How does the need for verbal expression in a literary work affect the narrator's ability to account for his experience with an iconic heroine?
4. How do male characters and/or narrators overcome the tension between iconophilia and iconophobia in relation to a silent heroine?
5. How do the iconographic principles and ekphrastic practices shape the flow of the narrative and define the relationships between literary characters?

Each of the literary works that are analyzed in this dissertation considers these questions under a slightly different angle. In Alexander Pushkin's short prose work "The Stationmaster" (1830), the narrator presents a story of one family in which the father struggles to understand the motives that lead his daughter to elope with an officer and, after being found in St. Petersburg, to refuse to return to her old home. Only the third-person narrator, the father, and the officer are given voice in this story. The heroine,

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been heated and, predictably, somewhat fruitless. See, for example, Nicholas Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the teaching of the Slavophiles; a study of romantic ideology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), Boris Groys, "Russia and the West: The Quest for Russian National Identity," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 43, no. 3 (May, 1992), 185-198, and Robin Aizlewood, "Revisiting Russian Identity in Russian Thought: From Chaadaev to the Early Twentieth Century," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 78, no. 1 (Jan., 2000), 20-43.

despite her alledged gregariousness, is given no opportunity for direct discourse on the pages of the story. The stationmaster who relates his sad tale to the narrator attempts to fit his daughter's decisions into the formula that is prescribed by a set of German pictures that hang on a wall in the post station. The heroine's behavior, however, is utterly incomprehensible to the father, and neither he in his conversation with the narrator, nor the sentimental narrator himself can confidently say whether it is the heroine that fails to adhere to the earlier artistic model or it is the model that proves to be inadequate when the heroine is faced with life-altering decisions.

In "The Meek One" (1876), Fyodor Dostoevsky presents to the readers a study of one man's desperate attempts to make sense of his wife's suicide. The narrator gives an account of the few months of his life during which he meets, courts, and marries a young girl. He yearns for someone to respect and admire him, and even though his wife is apparently ready to show him the deference that he could count on in marriage, he wants to make sure that her magnanimity towards him is deep and genuine. His mistreatment of the heroine and her own attempts to make sense of her position in his home, of both his visible disdain and his hidden admiration for her drive her to suicide. Yet her icon-like presence in his life had the potential of transforming him from a self-centered misanthrope into a devoted husband, which the hero appears never to realize.

In the novel *Shooting Stars* (1899), Dmitrii Mamin-Sibiriak introduces a male character who believes that the beauty of human form is a reflection of beauty of a human spirit. The novel's protagonist is a middle-aged Russian sculptor who falls in love with a mute English girl of unusual beauty. The author gives very little information by way of ekphrasis, yet the hero's desire to experience spiritual transformation that the presence of the mute beauty can produce is one of the central themes of the novel.

Finally, in Vniamin Kaverin's novel *Artist Unknown* (1831), the eponymous artist attempts to prove that honesty and nobility of character are the traits essential for the building of a better society. His wife, like Dostoevsky's the meek woman, commits a suicide because she cannot live a lie, and his son is adopted by the artist's antagonist. Yet unlike the narrator in Dostoevsky's tale, the artist is able to achieve the degree of selflessness that allows him to create the honest art that he has been talking about for the duration of the novel.

These four very different narratives establish that there are three possible outcomes of the gendered conflict between iconophilia and iconophobia. The first is a triumph of the silent image (or the failure of ekphrastic exercise). In his writing, St. Augustine differentiates between a "glimpse" and a "gaze" as different types of seeing that connect one with the divine and that one's vision has the power of two-way connection between the person and the object of seeing.[114] For this reason, the beholder succumbs to the transformative power of the image and, in return, gains a greater and a clearer understanding of both what is seen and what is unseen.

Fyodor Dostoevsky considers the problem of this type of visual interaction. He writes that although in secular visual art precision (mimesis) is necessary, it alone is not enough, and even when it comes to secular painting (not the icon), the viewer "has the right to demand that [the artist] should see nature not the way a photographic lens sees it, but as a human being" [зритель и вправе требовать от него, чтобы он *видел* природу не так, как видит её фотографический объектив, а как человек].[115] He insists that a faithful representation of the outward appearance is insufficient and he reminds his readers that "[i]n the olden times, people would say that he must look with the eyes of the flesh and, on top of that, with the eyes of the soul, or with the spiritual eyes." [смотреть глазами телесными и, сверх того, глазами души, или оком духовным.][116]

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[114] See Margaret Miles, "Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Saint Augustine's *De trinitate* and *Confessions*," *The Journal of Religion* 63, no. 2 (April 1983), 136. Also, Dagron's paper "Holy Images and Likeness."

[115] Dostoevskii, *PSS*, 19:154. My translation.

Vyacheslav Ivanov also writes that Dostoevsky coined a term *proniknovenie* to talk about the kind of "intuitive seeing through" or "spiritual penetration" that the more sensitive characters engage in.[117] Ivanov explains that *proniknovenie* is a state of mind that allows a subject to transcend himself and to recognize another person's existence (Ego) as not merely an object of his thought, but as another subject that exists independently of his perception.[118] He explains:

> The spiritual penetration finds its expression in the unconditional acceptance with our full will and thought of the other-existence – in "Thou art." If this acceptance of the other-existence is complete; if, with and in this acceptance, the whole substance of my own existence is rendered null and void … then the other-existence ceases to be an alien "Thou"; instead, the "Thou"" becomes another description of my "Ego." "Thou art" then no longer means "Thou art recognized by me as existing," but "I experience thy existence as my own, and in thy existence I again find myself existing. *Es, ergo sum.*
>
> Символ такого проникновения заключается в абсолютном утверждении, всею волею и всем разумением, чужого бытия: "ты еси." При условии этой полноты утверждения чужого бытия, полноты, как бы исчерпывающей все содержание моего собственного бытия, чужое бытие перестает быть для меня чужим, "ты" становится для меня другим обозначением моего субъекта. "Ты еси" - значит не "ты познаешься мною, как сущий", а "твое бытие переживается мною, как мое," или: "твоим бытием я познаю себя сущим."*Es, ergo sum.* [119]

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[116] Ibid.

[117] Ivanov, 26.

[118] See Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life*, 26 [*Borozdy i mezhy* 34].

[119] Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life*, 27 [*Borozdy i mezhy* 34].

Caryl Emerson points out that Ivanov's discussion of Dostoevsky's concept of *proniknovenie* was instrumental in Mikhail Bakhtin's formulating the idea of "penetrative word," which is the type of discourse that allows one character within a narrative to interfere with another character's interior dialogue and to respond to the thoughts that were not verbalized by the interlocutor.[120] While Bakhtin's idea is very interesting and certainly opens up an important dimension of Dostoevsky's work, his focus on one's verbal expression of another's unstated thoughts tends to downplay the visual and often completely silent aspect of communication and camouflages the conflict between ekphrasis and iconic representation. Very few of Dostoevsky's characters show the ability to penetrate spiritually, *proniknut'*, into another character's inner world. Nonetheless, Dostoevsky's depiction of failure to do so only strengthens his point.

Another possible outcome of the conflict between the word and the image is for speech to overcome its limitations and, by conveying the *enargeia* of the image, to successfully imitate the effect that is usually produced by the icon. This type of interaction is not seen in the works that I analyze here; however, a fruitful discussion may ensue when one attempts to examine the effect that a literary work produces on the reader, especially when comparing printed and film versions of the same works. Such metaliterary analysis can open up an insight into the iconic role of literature.

The third possible outcome of the gendered antagonism is a stalemate, or no outcome at all. When two parties continue to speak different languages, or, to be more precise, when one continues to speak on his own and on another's behalf while the other continues in silence, a total cognitive and psychological impasse ensues. Pushkin's story

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[120] See Svetlana Slavkskaya Grenier, *Representing the Marginal Woman in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature: Personalism, Feminism, and Polyphony* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 6.

"The Stationmaster" gives us an example of a narative that falls into this category. In this story, the protagonist's worldview is shaped by (or reflected in) the "German pictures" that hang on a wall in his house. These are drawings of the religious kind, but not icons, and the stationmaster appears unable to exercise any kind of spiritual penetration despite the numerous textual clues indicating to the readers that it is his gregariousness that causes his blindness. The pathos of the stationmaster's failure to see clearly increases towards the end of the story when the reader finds out the outcome of the heroine's actions: she possesses the resolve that is necessary for social mobility, yet her strength remains hidden behind her silence and is impenetrable to her father. The conflict is unresolved, because the heroine and the protagonist lose their last chance to communicate due to the stationmaster's death.

The ideological impasse is also the outcome we witness in Dostoevsky's story "The Meek One." Here the narrator's logocentric desire to define the heroine is balanced by the silent treatment that he gives her. Finally, he makes a desperate and ineffectual attempt to treat her as an iconic figure to which he would literally pray. The silent heroine becomes more icon-like as the narrative progresses, reaching her apogee at the end of the novella; yet, again, she and the narrator miss their chance to reach a full spiritual understanding.

In Mamin-Sibiriak's novel *Shooting Stars* the protagonist creates the "wrong" kind of art. He is a sculptor whose skill, acquired in Europe, allows him to render a perfect outward shell, but he is incapable of conveying the spiritual substance of his objects. His is going through a midlife crisis, and the feeling of aimlessness that he struggles with is only aggravated when his friend accuses him of shallowness in artistic creation and when he fails to execute his own latest idea for a sculpture. The protagonist first obsesses with aesthetics, then feels despair, and then gives up and retreats to a quiet life of a landowner. Mamin-Sibiriak shows that female muteness and an air of mystery are not sufficient to produce the effect of iconicity; nevertheless, he makes the value of iconic perception – the ability to see beyond the surface – apparent in the narrative.

Finally, in Kaverin's novel *Artist Unknown* the protagonist performs a painful kenotic act of turning away from everything he has hoped to retain – his wife, his son, his disciples – and obtains the vision that he needs to create his masterpiece. He himself becomes completely silent in the process, until finally his artistic authority completely dissolves and only his last painting remains as a testament of his extraordinary vision. Here too iconic silence overpowers logocentric desire in a profound way.

Chapter One

Pushkin, "The Stationmaster":
A Story of a Misguided Glance

> Смысл блудной притчи как раз не в
> похождениях младшего сына, а в слепоте
> старшего - то есть, по земным понятиям, в
> слепоте отца…
>
> *Яков Кротов, "К Евангелию"*

While Alexander Pushkin's status of the greatest Russian poet in the history of Russian literature is hardly disputable, what is also noteworthy is that besides being an excellent writer, Pushkin was also a talented artist and an art connoisseur.[1] Although Pushkin never set foot outside of Russia, he was very familiar with Western European art, and to this day among the Russian classical writers Pushkin is considered "unique precisely for his European outlook."[2] His younger contemporary, Ksenofont Polevoi, noted once that Pushkin "loved the arts and had an original view on them,"[3] and perhaps for this reason Pushkin's literary drafts of both prose and poetic works are peppered with the poet's own quill pen drawings. On this account, the critic A.A. Vishnevskii writes:

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[1] In his "Pushkin Speech," Fyodor Dostoevsky famously declared, citing another Russian classic, Nikolai Gogol: "Pushkin is an extraordinary phenomenon and, perhaps, the only incarnation of the Russian spirit, said Gogol. I will add from myself: and a prophetic one. Yes, in his arrival there lies for all of us, Russians, something indisputably prophetic." ["Пушкин есть явление чрезвычайное и, может быть, единственное явление русского духа," - сказал Гоголь. Прибавлю от себя: и пророческое. Да, в появлении его заключается для всех нас, русских, нечто бесспорно пророческое.] (Dost. 26:136). For other evaluations of Puskin's cignificance in the Russian culture, see, for example, Brett Cooke, *Pushkin and The Creative Process* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida. 1998), ix; J. Thomas Shaw. *Pushkin's poetics of the unexpected: the nonrhymed lines in the rhymed poetry and the rhymed lines in the nonrhymed poetry*. (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers. 1993), p. 17.

[2] See Koka, 11; Bethea and Davydov, 8.

> Pushkin is an inimitable graphic artist, equally great in this area to his work in the other artistic spheres that were open to his intellect and talent … In the instantly outlined or through-out, carefully drawn lines of Pushkinian sketches one can detect striking artistry, a power of keen observation, a derisive, at times grotesque view, decorative delicacy of scenic and objective details, and the harmony of intricate designs that cover entire pages.
>
> Пушкин – неподражаемый рисовальщик, равновеликий в этой области своим созданиям в других творческих сферах, открытых его уму и таланту … В мгновенно прочерченных или обдуманно, старательно проведённых линиях пушкинских рисунков сказываются поразительный артистизм, точная наблюдательность, насмешливый, подчас карикатурный взгляд, декоративная тонкость пейзажных и предметных деталей, орнаментальная гармония целых фигурных листов.[4]

Although it is difficult to determine whether it is the visual image or the sound of a word that spurred Pushkin's imagination with greater vigor, one can note that Pushkin's ability to observe and to visually depict with precision is also reflected in Pushkin's writing. Already during his lifetime, he was often praised for his remarkable attention to detail. The critic N.I. Nadezhdin, upon reading Pushkin's ingenious novel *Evgenii Onegin* (*Evgenii Onegin*, 1823-1830), exclaimed on the pages of the *Herald of Europe* (*Vestnik Evropy*) in 1830 that Pushkin's "description of Moscow … is truly Hogarthian! This is precisely where Pushkin's talent lies!"[5] – thus comparing the Russian poet to the English painter and printmaker who was also a pictorial satirist and a social critic. The validity of

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[3] Koka, 5-6.

[4] Aleksandr Pushkin and A.A. Vishnevskii, *A.S. Pushkin ob iskusstve* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1990), 1:216.

[5] S. Solov'ev, "O nekotorykh osobennostiakh izobrazitel'nosti Pushkina," *V mire Pushkina*, ed. S. Mashinskii (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1974), 350.

Nadezhdin's observation regarding Pushkin's style in *Eugene Onegin* was confirmed by literary critics' commentaries regarding Pushkin's other works.[6]

Pushkin, famous for his blasphemous verses, exquisite love poetry, and later semi-historical prose works, is no longer readily identified as a social critic similar to William Hogarth. As an artist and a print-maker, William Hogarth (1697-1764) soon discovered that he could disseminate his work much faster if he would make etchings of his paintings. This endeavor proved to be not only profitable, but also fame promoting. The feature that distinguished Hogarth's art at the time is the realistic quality of his portraits and the satirical tone of his political illustrations. Hogarth considered himself to be a "dramatic writer," and he wrote about his own work: "my picture is my stage, and men and women my players."[7] For this reason, Hogarth wished that "those scenes where the human species are actors [would] be criticized by the same criterion" as actors on stage.[8] What is most important for the development of narrative theory (both in its pictorial and literary itirations) is that Hogarth repeatedly used indexes as a form of invitation to his viewers/readers to "participate actively in the picture."[9]

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[6] For more on comparisons between Pushkin and Hogarth, see Iu. D. Levin, "Uil'iam Khogart i russkaia literature," *Russkaia literatura i zarubezhnoe iskusstvo* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1986), 35-61. For a contemporary study of similarities between Pushkin's and Hogarth's styles, see Alexandra Smith, *Montaging Pushkin: Pushkind and visions of modernity in Russian Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2006). Smith specifically pays attention to the "theatrical" mode of expression of both Pushkin and Hogarth, which "revolves around the relationship between the modern metropolis and the practice of urban spectatorship. Both Pushkin and Hogarth shared a great love for the theatre. They mocked the theatrical in the routine of the middle class and aristocracy" (137).

[7] Qtd. in Franz H. Mautner, "Lichtenberg as an Interpreter of Hogarth," *Modern Language Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (March 1952): 71. From the autobiographical sketch, published by Ireland and Nichols in Hogarth's Works (Edinburgh, 1883), 111, 30 f.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth: His Life, Art, and Times* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 488.

Albeit a hundred years later, Alexander Pushkin too set himself apart from his predecessors and contemporaries by inviting his readers to "participate actively" in the reading process. First, in the late 1820's Pushkin displayed the versatility of his talent by taking up psychological and moral issues in his narrative poems *The Gypsies* (*Tsygany*, 1824) and *Poltava* (1829) and by assuming an ironic, even mocking tone in such poems as "Count Nulin" ("Graf Nulin," 1825) and "The Little House in Kolomna" ("Domik v Kolomne," 1830). Then, in the autumn of 1830, while confined on his Boldino, Pushkin wrote his first work of prose fiction, *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin* (*Povesti pokoinogo Ivana Petrovicha Belkina*). The cycle consists of five short stories: "The Shot" ("Vystrel"), "The Blizzard" ("Metel'"), "The Undertaker" ("Grobovshchik"), "The Stationmaster" ("Stantsionnyi smotritel'"), and "The Squire's Daughter" ("Baryshnia-Krestianka"). It took Pushkin a mere two months to write these five pieces and to add to them an introduction that he playfully attributed to a fictional editor A.P. who, in his turn, claimed to have received the collection from a neighbor of the cycle's fictional author, Belkin. The collection was published in 1831, and shortly after it was released, an anonymous reviewer in the newspaper *The Russian Invalid* (*Russkii Invalid*) shared the following observation regarding the fourth story of the cycle: "The stationmaster who drank himself to death and his charming, lively daughter Dunia are portraits sketched with a quick and experienced pencil" [спившийся с кругу станционный смотритель и милая резвушка, дочь его Дуня, суть портреты, начертанные карандашом бойким и опытным.][10]

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[10] Qtd. in E.O. Larionova, *Pushkin v prizhiznennoi kritike. 1831-1833* (St. Peterburg: Gosudarstvennyi pushkinskii teatral'nyi tsentr, 2003), 127.

Classified as a tragedy by Richard Gregg, "The Stationmaster" at least on the surface appears to be a sad tale of filial disobedience.[11] Its protagonist, the stationmaster Samson Vyrin, is an aging man of the lowest noble rank who lives with his teenage daughter, Dunia, at a post station somewhere in the Russian countryside. One day, a dashing hussar, Minskii, stops at the station en route to St. Petersburg. Minskii's arrival on the scene marks the first turning point in the story's plot. Until the hussar arrives "wearing a Circassian hat and military coat, and wrapped in a scarf" [в черкесской шапке, в военной шинели, окутанный шалью][12] and enters the station demanding fresh horses, life at the post station has been fairly stable: the stationmaster, with his daughter's help, was doing his job, and every day was just like the one before. When Minskii's request is denied, he has nothing left to do but to wait. In the meantime, he sees Dunia and is immediately impressed by her beauty and mild manners. By the time his carriage is finally ready, Minskii decides that he does not wish to leave the post station so soon. He pretends to suddenly fall ill and thus stays at the station for a few days. When he recovers from his simulated malaise, he goes to St. Petersburg and, as Samson finds out a little too late, takes Dunia with him. Samson attempts to find and bring her back, but he fails. He then goes back to the post station and dies from grief and alcoholism.

The anonymous reviewer's suggestion in *The Russian Invalid* that the story presents portraits of literary characters is, in essence, an invitation to consider "The Stationmaster" as an extended ekphrasis. As such, it would render all the characters equally silent characters standing in need of being envoiced by a narrator. I suggest that we examine this story not solely as a collection of literary portraits whose message, conveyed by the narrator, is straightforward and unambiguous, but as an attempt on the author's part to involve his readers into a conversation. If the purpose of ekphrasis is to give voice to a silent image, then what we encounter in "The Stationmaster" is a female character whose silent resistance to being defined propels the narrative towards a new literary form, the form that soon thereafter will be called a novel. In effect, "The Stationmaster" is a failed attempt at ekphrasis that marks the beginning of iconicity in Russian fictional narrative.

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[11] Richard Gregg, "A Scapegoat for All Seasons: The Unity and the Shape of *The Tales of Belkin*," *Slavic Review* 30, no. 4 (1971), 756.

[12] Aleksandr Pushkin, *Sobranie sochinenii v 10ti tomakh* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1960), 5:90.

As Edmund Heier explains, "[s]ince the countenance is that part of man's appearance by which he reveals himself to others and most clearly shows his character traits, the face receives particular attention in the portrait," and for that reason "[t]he essence of portraiture is to point out the major features which characterize a personality."[13] When it comes to the concept of "literary portrait," however, one has trouble defining what it is or how it ought to be executed.[14]For example, in the early days of Rhetoric as a discipline a literary portrait "aimed at delineating character" within a narrative, as it did in Homer's works; yet over time it evolved into a distinct literary genre, as it did in the seventeenth-century France where literary portraits evolved into a "full-length biography."[15] To make the term "literary portrait" a little wieldier, Heier suggests defining it as

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[13] Edmund Heier, "'The Literary Portrait' as a Device of Characterization," *Neophilologist* 60, no. 3, (July 1976), 321-2.

[14] Ibid., 321.

[15] Ibid. As examplese of large-scale literary portrait that resulted in full-legth biographies Heier cites G. de Scudéry's *Portraits du grand Cardinal* (1664), Mlle. de Scudery's *Le Grand Cyrus* (1649-1653), Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* (1884), James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Saint-Beuve's *Portraits littéraires* (1832-1839), and Gorky's *Literaturnye portrety* (1890).

> a device of characterization within a literary work the function of which is to delineate character via external appearance. It is a portrait drawn in words – one in which the writer consciously introduces his character by way of exterior description in order to suggest or reveal inner qualities.[16]

If Heier is correct, then we as readers can trust that authors would never intentionally include in their descriptions of characters any superfluous or accidental traits and that, one ought to conclude, every physical trait is an index of some other, not physical but psychological trait. This conclusion is plausible, albeit somewhat debatable. Heier further explains: "The presentation of the bodily appearance of a character, particularly if it is accompanied by an interpretation, becomes then the application of physiognomy, the art of revealing character traits via the physical features."[17] This clearly points us towards the physiological sketches as a new genre of nascent Realism in Russia.[18] However, Pushkin's "Stationmaster" is written barely on the cusp of Realism and, along with the other four stories in the cycle, may be considered a precursor of the new movement in the Russian literature, but not a full-fledged representative of it. The main reason for this reservation is that the kind of portraits Pushkin presents in the "Stationmaster," despite their vividness, do not at all fit the genre of a physiological sketch because they can hardly be considered physiological in the first place.

Pushkin, or his nameless narrator, begins his narrative with ruminations on the sad fate of all stationmasters who never get rest either night or day and who must suffer

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For more on literary portraits in Russian literature, see V.V. Perkhin, ed. *Russkii literaturnyi portret i retsenziia v XX veke* (Sankt-Peterburg: SPbGU, 2001).

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] For an overview of the development of the Russian physiological sketch, see Joachim T. Baer, "The 'Physiological Sketch' in Russian Literature" in *Mnemozina: Studia litteraria russica in honorem Vsevolod Setchkarev* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1974), 1-12. Also, Kenneth E. Harper, "Criticism of the Natural School in the 1840's" in *American Slavic and East European Review* 15, no. 3 (Oct., 1956), 400-414.

abuse from tired and impatient travelers. The narrator arrives at Samson's station on one summer day, after having been soaked in the rain and now wishing for only two things: to dry his clothes and to drink some hot tea. In the opening lines of the story, he poses a general question: "What is a postmaster?"[Что такое станционный смотритель?][19] and answers it with the same degree of generality: "A true martyr of the fourteenth class, protected by his rank from beatings only, and even that not always." [Сущий мученик четырнадцатого класса, ограждённый своим чином токмо от побоев, и то не всегда.][20]

The stationmaster that the narrator is about to introduce to his readers is a faithful representative of the whole class of people who are "unaggressive, servile by nature, disposed to be sociable, modest in their claims to honor and not too avaricious" [мирные, от природы услужливые, склонные к общежитию, скромные в притязаниях на почести и не слишком сребролюбивые].[21] Peter Steiner, however, points out that Samson Vyrin's position is not at all simple, and it reflects on his relationships with his daughter: "The stationmaster, Samson Vyrin, is simultaneously both the lowest official on the ladder of Russian bureaucracy – defenseless against the abuse of any passerby – and, at the same time, the supreme master of his own household – the poststation. Granted, he has only a single subordinate, his own daughter Dunia, but he has true dictatorial power over her."[22]

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[19] Pushkin, *SS*, 5:86.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 5:87.

[22] Peter Steiner, "Chekhov's 'The Bride' and the Parable of the Prodigal Son" in *Under Construction: Links for the Site of Literary Theory. Essays in Honour of Hendrik van Gorp* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), 138.

When speaking about Samson Vyrin in particular, the narrator shares a visual memory of the man: "In my mind's eye I see the master himself, a man of approximately fifty years of age, healthy and vivacious, and his long green coat witht three medals on faded ribbons." [Вижу, как теперь, самого хозяина, человека лет пятидесяти, свежего и бодрого, и его длинный зелёный сертук с тремя медалями на полинялых лентах.][23] When the postmaster's daughter, Dunia, makes her appearance, the narrator gives even less information about her: "a girl of about fourteen years of age came out from behind a partition and ran to the hall way. Her beauty startled me." [вышла из-за перегородки девочка лет четырнадцати и побежала в сени. Красота её меня поразила.][24] Very shortly afterwards, the narrator adds that Dunia is a "little coquette" [маленькая кокетка][25] with "large blue eyes" [большие голубые глаза].[26] Very little, if anything can be concluded about these characters' occupations and stations in life based solely on these descriptions.

The portraits that the reviewer sees in the story "The Postmaster" are shaped by the narrator's accounts of the character's actions presented to the readers as the story progresses. In fact, the narrator does provide a few more details about the characters' appearance, but only after these characters leave the confined space of the post station and go through a transition in their personal lives. Upon his second visit to the post station, the narrator notices a significant change in the postmaster's appearance:

> This indeed was Samson Vyrin; yet how he has aged! While he was getting ready to copy my travel document, I looked at his gray hair, at the deep wrinkles of the face that has not been shaved in a long while, at the

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[23] Pushkin, 5:89.

[24] Ibid., 5:88.

[25] Ibid., 5:89.

[26] Ibid.

> hunched back, and I could not stop being amazed at how three or four years could transform a vivacious man into a weak old man.
>
> Это был точно Самсон Вырин; но как он постарел! Покамест собирался он переписать мою подорожную, я смотрел на его седину, на глубокие морщины давно небритого лица, на сгорбленную спину – и не мог надивиться, как три или четыре года могли превратить бодрого мужчину в хилого старика.[27]

The narrator, who begins his story with a broad question of "what is a postmaster?" and giving the impression that what follows is a physiological sketch, is shocked to see that Samson Vyrin, instead of representing a type, is in fact an individual person. Similarly, Samson is given a chance to see that his daughter too is an individual, not a type, when he sees her in her St. Petersburg apartment: "Dunia, clothed with all the luxury of the latest fashion, was sitting on an arm of his chair … Poor station master! Never has his daughter appeared to him so beautiful!" [Дуня, одетая со всею роскошью моды, сидела на ручке его кресел … Бедный смотритель! Никогда дочь его не казалась ему столь прекрасною].[28] Nevertheless, either because the narrator's retelling of the postmaster's words is incomplete or because the postmaster did not care to notice any more details, again, this description cannot be considered a literary portrait in the sense that Heier offers. Dunia becomes a type in Samson's imagination only when he tries to predict her future and, hurt by the fact that she does not wish to come back to the post station, concludes that once Minskii, the man with him she left, grows tired of her, she will have no other choice but walk the streets.

Although the lack of descriptive detail in the literary portraits may be unsatisfying, it is imperative to further examine the function of visuality within the story in order to fully appreciate the complexity of this short prose work. The narrator, who retells the story from Samson's words, for most of the narrative gives the impression that he shares in the stationmaster's grief at Dunia's departure. Although at the time when the narrator begins the story he already knows of Samson's loss, he refrains from explicitly giving out the sad ending right away, thus keeping the readers in suspense. The story is divided into three time periods, by the number of the narrator's visits to the station. During the first visit he gets acquainted with Samson and Dunia. During the second he finds out from Samson that Dunia has gone off to St. Petersburg with Minskii. During the third period he comes back to find out that the stationmaster has passed away and that his house, now occupied by strangers, no longer serves as a post station. Also in the final part of the story we find out about Dunia's apparent social and personal success, but the brevity and the tone of this section makes it feel almost like an afterthought: it is as if the narrator set out to write the story after his second visit to the station, but having finished it, he stopped there one more time and was presented with some facts that indicated to him just how much Samson's imagined finale of Dunia's story was different from what actually happened to her.

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[27] Ibid., 5:89-90.

[28] Ibid., 5:95.

The ending of the story is especially surprising because early on the readers are given what, at least on the surface, appears to be the key to understanding this work – a description of four images noticed by the narrator on the wall of the post station. While Samson is making a necessary record in a book, the narrator

> began perusing the pictures that adorned his humble yet neat abode. They depicted the story of the prodigal son: in the first the honorable old man in a sleeping cap and a powdering-gown bids farewell to a restless youth who hastily accepts his blessing and a bag of money. The next depicted in bright colors the young man's lewd behavior: he is sitting at table, surrounded by false friends and shameless women. In the next, having squandered his money, in rags and a triangular hat, the yong man

> tends swine and shares a meal with them. Deep sorrow and remorse are reflected in his face. Finally, the last picture showed his return to his father. The kind old man in the same cap and the powedring-gown runs out to greet him. The prodigal son stands on his knees; in the background a cook kills a fatted calf, and the older brother asks the servants about the reason for such joy. Under each picture I read appropriate German verses.
>
> занялся рассмотрением картинок, украшавших его смиренную, но опрятную обитель. Они изображали историю блудного сына: в первой почтенный старик в колпаке и шлафорке отпускает беспокойного юношу, который поспешно принимает его благословение и мешок с деньгами. В другой яркими чертами изображено развратное поведение молодого человека: он сидит за столом, окруженный ложными друзьями и бесстыдными женщинами. Далее, промотавшийся юноша, в рубище и в треугольной шляпе, пасет свиней и разделяет с ними трапезу; в его лице изображены глубокая печаль и раскаяние. Наконец представлено возвращение его к отцу; добрый старик в том же колпаке и шлафорке выбегает к нему навстречу: блудный сын стоит на коленах; в перспективе повар убивает упитанного тельца, и старший брат вопрошает слуг о причине таковой радости. Под каждой картинкой прочёл я приличные немецкие стихи.[29]

Because of the German inscriptions, critics customarily refer to these images as "the German pictures." At this point in the narrative, the presence of the German pictures seems to be incidental, for they, at least for now, have nothing to do with the plot. Nevertheless, through the narrator, the author provides a fairly lengthy and detailed description of these images, and the fact that the story's author (whether the late Belkin or Pushkin himself) has his narrator take note of and describe the German pictures in some detail very early on signals to the readers that these images should be kept in mind as the story progresses. After all, the pictures may function as a foreshadowing device. Or at least it may be the authorial intent that the reader should think so for the time being.

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[29] Ibid., 5:88.

If we do consider "The Stationmaster" as an example of an extensive ekphrasis, then we should take into account Aelius Theon's advice that he shared with his students in *Progymnasmata* and that requires that in ekphrasis "one should not recollect all useless details."[30] Here the German pictures are precisely one such non-useless detail, and, in the words of Shadi Bartsch, this is the case when "the reader is aware that the paintings must foreshadow *something*,"[31] although he is not quite sure what it is just yet.

According to M. S. Al'tman, the German pictures "are not simply an artistic accessory, but they express the very idea of the story."[32]In other words, the parable of the Prodigal Son, depicted in these pictures, is at the basis of the plot line and the moral message of the story. There may be some truth to his statement; however, critics are still debating about not only how these pictures express that very idea, but also what this idea is exactly. Mikhail Gershenzon, for example, accuses the pictures of playing a fatal role in the life of the protagonist. In his estimation, the stationmaster "perished not from a real misfortune, but *because* of these German pictures."[33] Convinced that they present a "universal truth," Samson becomes a victim of social mores [ходячая мораль].[34] Samson's convictions are not supported by the facts of contemporary reality that he is left to reckon with; yet his convictions are so strong that, as Lina Steiner observes, when towards the end of the story Samson sees a happy Dunia in the apartment that Minskii put her up in, he experiences an "aesthetic shock that shatters the mind of the poor stationmaster."[35] This "aesthetic shock" is a result of cognitive dissonance or the obvious imbalance between the picture of degradation that Samson has conjured up in his mind based on the trajectory that the German pictures suggest and the scene of tranquility and good fortune that he witnesses with his own eyes in Dunia's new home.

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[30] Kennedy, 47.

[31] Shadi Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel: The Reader and the Role of Description in Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 58. Emphasis in the original.

[32] Al'tman, M.S. "Bludnaia doch' (Pushkin i Dostoevskii)." *Slavia* 14 (1937), 412.

[33] Mikhail Gershenzon, *Izbrannoe: mudrost' Pushkina* (Moskva: MBA, 2007) 88. My emphasis.

[34] Ibid., 89.

On a more somber note, David Bethea and Sergei Davydov consider Samson's death a form of punishment that Pushkin inflicts upon the stationmaster for being "flat and nondeveloping, too ready to translate literary models into life."[36] By contrast, Daniil Granin pities Samson and declares him "a symbol of children's unfair treatment of their fathers, of that misfortune that befalls everyone" [символ несправедливого отношени детей о отцам, той беды, которая настигает каждого.][37]

It appears that the Biblical story of the Prodigal Son is at the very foundation of the tragedy in "The Stationmaster," but it is a story that is either misinterpreted or misapplied to the Russian reality of the early nineteenth century. While it may be worthwhile to identify the origin of Samson's approach to interpreting art and life, his failure to arrive at a proper understanding of either one of these elements of human existence can shed light on what Pushkin tells us about the proper way of both perceiving visual art and of reading and writing literature. In "The Stationmaster" the protagonist measures life against what appears to be an outdated artistic model. Moreover, the narrator himself imposes an antiquated rhetorical model of sentimental narrative onto an emerging new genre of literature. In effect, Pushkin shows that the stasis represented by the German pictures and conveyed to the readers by means of ekphrastic discourse is at odds with the dynamism of Dunia's actions and indicative of the changes that are taking place in literature of the time.

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[35] Lina Steiner, "Pushkin's Parable of the Prodigal Daughter: The Evolution of the Prose Tale from Aestheticism to Historicism." *Comparative Literature* 56:2 (2004),142.

[36] Bethea and Davydov, 13.

[37] Daniil Granin, *Sviashchennyi dar* (Sankt-Peterburg: Aleteiia, 2007), 65.

The narrator's memory of his first visit to the post station is very static. After describing the German pictures on the wall, he concludes his introduction by summarizing other material details of the setting and presenting it as a visual image that remained in his mind:

> All this has remained in my memory to this day, together with the pots of balsam, the motley curtain of the bed, and other surrounding objects. I can still see the master of the house himself as if he were right before me: a man about fifty years of age, still fresh and agile, in a long green coat with three medals on faded ribbons.
>
> Всё это доныне сохранилось в моей памяти, также как и горшки с бальзамином, и кровать с пёстрой занавескою, и прочие предметы, меня в то время окружавшие. Вижу, как теперь, самого хозяина, человека лет пятидесяти, свежего и бодрого, и его длинный зелёный сертук с тремя медалями на полинялых лентах.[38]

By grouping these elements together – the pictures, the flower pots, the bed, the stationmaster, his daughter, etc. – and stating that he still "sees" them, the narrator offers a visual sequence that gives the readers an opportunity to construct in their mind's eye the setting and the characters of the tale. This is the essence of ekphrasis as a form of descriptive speech that brings "what is being shown before the eyes."[39] In the words of Hermogenes, in ekphrasis, "expression should almost create seeing through the hearing."[40] Even though the readers are probably not hearing the text but reading it, this principle is still applicable, because it is the quality of descriptive detail and not the oral way of delivery that brings about the necessary effect.

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[38] Ibid., 95 [5:88-9].

[39] Kennedy, 86.

[40] Ibid.

Ekphrasis becomes an important device in the story because it provides the narrator with a means of putting the readers on the same level of understanding of the setting and the events that he finds himself on despite the fact that the readers, it is natural to assume, have never visited this specific post station and therefore cannot rely on their own memory of the place and of its inhabitants. At the same time, the use of ekphrasis raises the question of accuracy of both the protagonist's and the narrator's attitudes towards the heroine. These two male personages share their impressions freely, thus dominating the story and projecting their impressions onto Dunia who, like a silent painting, is left without any opportunity for a direct discourse.

Moreover, the very tone of the narrative is significant because it conveys the narrator's sentimental view and suggests the angle at which Dunia should be perceived. Again, in *Progymnasmata* we find Aelius Theon's suggestion that in ekphrasis the author "should make the style reflect the subject" and Hermogenes' reminder that "the word choice ought to correspond to the subject. If the subject is flowery, let the style be so too; if the subject is dry, let the style be similar."[41] In "The Stationmaster" the narrator assumes a sentimental tone throughout the narrative, which, we are led to believe, is a reflection of the narrator's own disposition; however, since he learns about Samson's sad fate for the most part from Samson himself, the readers begin to associate this sentimentality with Samson as well. Yet at the end of the story the readers realize that these two sentimental male characters fail to appreciate the extent of Dunia's pragmatism in the face of reality.

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[41] Ibid., 47 and 86.

Although the whole conflict of the tale is centered on Dunia's perceived filial disobedience, the author tells us nothing about her thoughts or desires – at least he does not do it directly. The readers have to do a great deal of surmising, imagining, and guessing in order to comprehend fully both Dunia's character and the motivation behind her actions. In order to understand exactly "what a fine wench she was" [Что за девка-то была],[42] we need to consider her character from two angles: first, how she is included into the tale's ekphrasis created by the narrator and, second, how she resists being an object of ekphrasis or a silent figure who must be, to use Heffernan's term again, envoiced by a speaker.

Dunia's appearance on the scene is very brief and is foregrounded by Samson's shouting:

> "Hey, Dunia!" – yelled the postmaster. "Light the samovar and fetch some cream." Having heard these words, a girl of about fourteen years of age came out from behind a partition and ran to the hall way. Her beauty startled me.
>
> "Is this your daughter?" I asked the postmaster.
>
> "Aye, sir," he answered with an air of satisfied vanity. "And what a clever, nimble girl she is, just like her late mother."
>
> "Эй, Дуня! – закричал смотритель, – поставь самовар да сходи за сливками." При сих словах вышла из-за перегородки девочка лет четырнадцати и побежала в сени. Красота её меня поразила. "Это твоя дочка?" – спросил я смотрителя. "Дочка-с, – отвечал он с видом довольного самолюбия, – да такая разумная, такая проворная, вся в покойницу мать."[43]

This is the first mention of Dunia's presence in the tale and the first evidence of the narrator's attempt to include her into his ekphrasis. Since we have no stage directions for the scene, we cannot know precisely with what tone of the voice the stationmaster called out to Dunia: whether he yelled at her in an authoritarian fashion or simply called out to her in a loud voice because she was not present immediately next to him. Still, we can already recognize that the two qualities that Dunia possesses and that will shape her future are her beauty and obedience.

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[42] Pushkin, 5:90.

[43] Ibid., 5:88.

Her beauty, while an appropriate subject for ekphrasis, is mentioned, but not elaborated upon. Neither the narrator himself now, nor Samson later can render in words the visible aspect of Dunia's presence, despite the fact that both men at one point or another admits being impressed by it. The narrator does make an earnest attempt to create an ekphrasis of Dunia and even follows, from the purely technical standpoint, the principle expressed by Aphthonius the Sophist that "[i]n making an ekphrasis of persons one should go from first things to last, that is from head to feet."[44] The narrator does start with Dunia's head and at least tells us that she was pretty and that she had big blue eyes, but he goes no further. Aelius Theon explains that even though "there is ekphrasis of persons and events and places and periods of time," one ought to keep in mind that "ekphrasis is, for the most part, about lifeless things and those without choice."[45] Clearly, Dunia is not a lifeless thing but a living human being. In Samson's mind, however, she is not in a position to make choices, and that, ultimately, would render her lifeless.

We have already witnessed Samson yelling and ordering Dunia to make tea as if she is a servant girl. Later, during the narrator's second visit to the station, Samson begins sharing his sad tail by saying,

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[44] Kennedy, 117.

[45] Kennedy, 45 and 46. Here Aelius Theon specifically juxtaposes ekphrasis to topos, which "is concerned with matters of moral choice" and to which authors "add [their] own moral judgment."

> Oh, Dunia, Dunia! What a wench she was! In the past, everyone passing through the station would praise her, no one would criticize her. Ladies would give her presents: one would give her a kerchief, another – earrings. Gentlemen would deliberately stop by, as if to dine or sup, but in reality they would come only to *look* at her a little longer. Sometimes, no matter how angry a gentleman is, he would calm down in her presence and would talk to me respectfully. Would you believe it, sir, couriers and government emissaries would talk to her for half an hour on end.
>
> Ах, Дуня, Дуня! Что за девка-то была! Бывало, кто ни проедет, всякий похвалит, никто не осудит. Барыни дарили ее, та платочком, та сережками. Господа проезжие нарочно останавливались, будто бы пообедать, аль отужинать, а в самом деле только чтоб на нее подолее *поглядеть*. Бывало, барин, какой бы сердитый ни был, при ней утихает и милостиво со мною разговаривает. Поверите ль, сударь: курьеры, фельдъегеря с нею по получасу заговаривались.[46]

Despite Samson's low yet noble rank, Pushkin's choice of the word "девка," a "wench," for Dunia is more fitting for a peasant or a servant girl – the status that Dunia, apparently, occupies at the post station despite or perhaps because of her father's very low rank and the kind of civil service that he has to perform at the station. The "air of satisfaction and pride" that Samson displays during the narrator's first visit can certainly be indicative of his paternal affection for Dunia; however, when the narrator encounters Samson four years later, not only Samson's outward appearance has altered, but the attitude with which he speaks of his daughter has changed.

Having not seen the stationmaster for four years, the narrator finds him aged, gray haired, hunched over, and sickly, and quickly guesses that this change must be due to some serious misfortune that befell Samson's little household. When the narrator asks Samson about Dunia, the stationmaster at first tries to avoid answering the question. Gradually, and with the help of two glasses of punch, the stationmaster begins to open up.

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[46] Ibid., 5:90. My emphasis.

He tells the narrator of Minskii's visit, of the officer's sickness, of the doctor's checking on the patient, of Dunia's departure, and of his own efforts to bring her back.

As Samson recounts the events surrounding Dunia's departure, the tone of his voice changes from sentimental to more and more bitter, until he concludes:

> Anything could happen. She was not the first, and she will not be the last who was drawn in by a passing scapegrace. He would keep her for a time and throw her out. Many of them are in Petersburg, such young fools. Today they are in silk and velvet, and tomorrow you can see them roaming the streets along with tavern beggars. When I think sometimes that Dunia, too, may be perishing as well, I sin against my will and wish her in the grave…
>
> Всяко случается. Не ее первую, не ее последнюю сманил проезжий повеса, а там подержал, да и бросил. Много их в Петербурге, молоденьких дур, сегодня в атласе да бархате, а завтра, поглядишь, метут улицу вместе с голью кабацкою. Как подумаешь порою, что и Дуня, может быть, тут же пропадает, так поневоле согрешишь да пожелаешь ей могилы...[47]

Despairing to ever see his daughter back again, at this moment Samson appears to be very much unlike the father in the parable of the Prodigal son with whom he wishes to identify himself.[48]The father in the parable waited for a long time for his son to come back, and "when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him," and then ordered his servants to "[b]ring forth the best robe, and put it on [the son]; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet," for his son "was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."[49] The despair that Samson feels and the ill fate that he foretells for Dunia are a sign of his failure to live up to the model that is depicted in the German pictures. It is hard to tell exactly why Samson feels this way: does he wish for a better lot for Dunia (in which case, apparently, death is better than shame) or does he feel betrayed by her? Is it charity or egoism that motivates him? Is his love truly unconditional, as that of the proverbial father? Dunia is beautiful and pleasant, indeed, and one could see why a father would loathe to part with such a daughter. But what is the exact reason for Samson's desire to have her near? Is it simply because she is his daughter and he loves her? Or is it because her mere presence softened the hearts of the travelers who otherwise would be unkind to *him*?

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[47] Ibid., 5:95.

[48] For more on Samson's failure to live up to the Biblical ideal, see Lina Steiner, "Pushkin's Parable of the Prodigal Daughter," 142, and Bethea and Davydov, "Pushkin's Saturnine Cupid."

[49] See Luke 15.

Samson views life through the prism of the German pictures and considers himself at the unfortunate father whose child went astray.[50] Just like the father in the Biblical parable, he is willing to accept his prodigal daughter when she comes back. Or so he thinks until he imagines the misery that Dunia might have to face in St. Petersburg. Unfortunately for Samson, this realization comes to him long after he pushes his own daughter to get into Minskii's carriage as the officer is getting ready to leave the post station. Samson regrets his actions after the fact, but Dunia's silent response to his encouragement is hardly surprising. When he orders Dunia to bring tea for a guest, she runs off and does as she is told. She is just as obedient and obliging in other instances. She makes lemonade and serves it to Minskii during his feigned sickness, and her getting into Minskii's carriage is just another, albeit perhaps the most notable, act of obedience to her father.

Looking back at the events of that day, Samson remembers that the officer first bid farewell to him, but seeing that Dunia was getting ready to walk to church, he offers her a ride. She hesitates, but Samson encourages her to accept Minskii's offer:

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[50] See, for example, Lina Steiner, "Pushkin's Parable of the Prodigal Daughter: The Evolution of the Prose Tale from Aestheticism to Historicism," *ComparativeLiterature* 56, no. 2 (Spring, 2004), 130-146.

> Dunia stood in bewilderment… "What are you afraid of?" – said the father. "His Honor is no wolf and he won't eat you. Ride with him to church." Dunia sat in the carriage near the hussar, the servant jumped up next to the driver, the driver whistled, and the horses broke into gallop.
>
> Дуня стояла в недоумении… "Чего же ты боишься? – сказал ей отец, – ведь его высокоблагородие не волк и тебя не съест: прокатись-ка до церкви." Дуня села в кибитку подле гусара, слуга вскочил на облучок, ямщик свистнул, и лошади поскакали.[51]

The hussar invited. The father encouraged. The girl complied. At this point in the narrative, most modern-day readers would probably expect to find out that Dunia ends up traveling with Minskii much farther than to the local church, but this is not the case with the stationmaster. When it is too late to catch up to Minskii's carriage, Samson, realizing what he had done, begins to worry about his daughter:

> The poor station master could not understand how he himself could allow his Dunia to go off with the hussar, how he was blinded, and what happened to his reason at that moment.
>
> Бедный смотритель не понимал, каким образом мог он сам позволить своей Дуне ехать вместе с гусаром, как нашло на него ослепление, и что тогда было с его разумом.[52]

The stationmaster laments the blindness that came over him and that caused him to misunderstand the full meaning of what he and Minskii have done. The reader also realizes that the key moment in the story – Dunia's decision to get into Minskii's carriage – may have taken place at an earlier time, and not at the moment just described.

After searching for his daughter in vain, Samson finds out from the carriage driver that "the entire way Dunia was crying, although, it appeared as though she was going of her own free will" [всю дорогу Дуня плакала, хотя, казалось, ехала по своей охоте].[53] The key words, "of her own free will," is something Samson is not prepared for. Moreover, both Samson and the readers are left to wonder at what point Minskii made the decision to invite Dunia to come with him: was it when she served him lemonade during his feigned sickness, just prior to his departure, or when Dunia was already sitting in his carriage? Most importantly, how much thought did Dunia put into this endeavor: was she complicit with Minskii or was this decision as spontaneous for her as it was for him?

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[51] Pushkin, *PSS*, 5:92.

[52] Ibid., 5:92.

Earlier in the story the narrator says that he intends "to talk to the dear readers" [намерен я теперь побеседовать с любезными читателями].[54] This conversation – a two-way exchange of ideas – implies that the readers cannot expect the author to give them all the answers. In other words, the author expects his readers to engage with the text, to interpret it. Similarly, the root of Samson's tragedy lies in his assumption that Dunia cannot have any desires of her own, that she is unable to make her own decisions or, to put it another way, she cannot interpret the words and the actions of those around her. In effect, he thinks that she cannot create her own narrative. Thus, as a silent object of admiration, she would have fit perfectly in an ekphrastic work. Both Samson, and through him the narrator would have "given her voice" – something that they could do from their position of authority. Yet if ekphrasis indeed is "for the most part, about lifeless things and those without choice," then Dunia in the end proves to be an unfit candidate.

Dunia is silent not because she has nothing to say, but because in the world where she lives – the post station – she cannot have her own voice, and although silent, she is not at all "nondeveloping." When life outside the confines of the post station beckons Dunia, or, to be more precise, when the hussar offers her a ride in his carriage, she stands "in bewilderment" [в недоумении][55] for a moment, but once she accepts the invitation, she does not look back.

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[53] Ibid., 5:93.

[54] Ibid., 5:87.

In addition to the rule stating "[i]n making an ekphrasis of persons one should go from first things to last, that is, from head to feet," Aphthonius the Sophist offers another guideline, according to which, "in describing things, [one ought to] say what preceded them, what is in them, and what is wont to result, and describe occasions and places from what surrounds them and what is in them."[56] In this sense, again, Samson and the narrator treat Dunia as a fitting object for ekphrasis because, like an inanimate object, she says nothing throughout the entire tale and it is her pretty looks that make the first striking impression on everyone who meets her. We are told that some guests stop at the post station specifically in order to talk to her, but at the same time the readers do not witness a single conversation with her. Travelers do talk to her, but the readers never hear Dunia speak to anyone. Even the narrator, as observant and caring as he appears to be, tells his readers of the kiss that he solicited from Dunia, but nothing of the things that she said in the conversation that they had during his first visit to the station. The tale offers us not a single phrase uttered by Dunia, aside from a sigh that she lets out upon seeing her father in her St. Petersburg apartment.

What precedes Dunia, quite logically, is her mother who used to be as clever and sensible as Dunia is now. Unfortunately, her mother has passed away as, obviously, Dunia someday will. Thus, it is the pattern set out by the life of her own mother that

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[55] Ibid., 5:92.

[56] Kennedy, 117.

Dunia is most likely to follow, not the model set forth by the German pictures. Furthermore, "what is in" Dunia is conveyed by Samson's description of her as "a fine lass" or "a wench"[девка] and by his mention of her popularity his guests. "What is wont to result," at least in Samson's mind, is already outlined in the German pictures.[57] Samson, by identifying himself with the father in the parable, sees Dunia as the prodigal daughter and projects her future in accordance with the Biblical narrative.[58] Samson also tells us "what is wont to result" when, following the realization of his own mistake and the impossibility of recovering his daughter, he wishes her in the grave because it is highly unlikely that she will make her way back to the station. Finally, the narrator, with Samson's help, tells the readers in much detail of the "occasions and places" that "surround" Dunia – the narrator's encounter with her, Minskii's arrival, the departure, and, especially, Dunia's return to the post station after Samson's passing. Thus, whether by her own actions, the narrator's artistic inclinations, or Samson's lack of sensitivity, Dunia becomes an ekphrastic object, around which of the tale is constructed, all the while resisting this status by not following the path that Samson projects for her.

In her comprehensive book *The True Story of the Novel*, Margaret Doody states that when ekphrasis is placed within a literary narrative, it

> immediately introduces our own duty to interpret – a strong source of novelistic anxiety. We begin to share or imitate the characters' anxieties, for we cannot be sure of our own ground. Thus, the pleasure that we may take in a beautifully worded and evocative *ekphrasis* is simultaneously undercut by our apprehension of our won potential inadequacy in rising to significant interpretation.[59]

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[57] See Bethea and Davydov, 12.

[58] See also Lina Steiner, "Pushkin's Parable of the Prodigal Daughter."

[59] Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 388.

The narrator attempts to produce an ekphrasis of Dunia based on his own experience and on Samson's account – such is his task as Pushkin's mouthpiece. Dunia resists being "envoiced," being defined by male authority, and ultimately, being drawn into the "gendered antagonism" that Heffernan speaks of. This, however, does not deter Samson from insisting on Dunia's status of a subordinate with no mind and no will of her own. If ignorance ever was bliss, this is an example of it. Samson does not experience the novelistic anxiety because he feels no need to interpret. He feels secure in the old and familiar forms of the parable and the sentimental tale.

Thus, the key word in Doody's statement is "novelistic" because with *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin* and specifically with "The Stationmaster" Pushkin introduces his readers to a new genre of literary prose and to a new way of reading literature. By leaving the end of the story ambiguous, Pushkin gives his readers an opportunity for interpretation. The narrator enters into a conversation with the protagonist because "From their conversations (that traveling gentlemen are remiss to disregard) one could glean many curious and instructive things." [Из их разговоров (коими некстати пренебрегают господа проезжающие) можно почерпнуть много любопытного и поучительного.][60] By recording the story, the narrator invites his readers into this conversation. Ultimately, he leaves the story open-ended so that the readers could at the very least experience ambivalence as regards to what they have just learned, but also so they could have an opportunity to interpret the events of the story, to attempt to consider them from Dunia's point of view, and to at least attempt to conjecture what happens to

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[60] Pushkin, 5:87.

Dunia when, having cried on his grave, she arises from the ground, gets inside her carriage, and rides back to St. Petersburg.

At the same time, Dunia does what she can to break down the rhetorical structure built around her. The conflict that the readers see unfold in "The Stationmaster" is not a simple reflection of generational and gender differences between a father and a daughter, but a case study for ekphrastic breakdown. The protagonist of the tale, Samson Vyrin, shows a complete lack of any such anxiety because he *is* part of ekphrasis and to him, there is no need to interpret anything. It is the protagonist's resistance to the need to interpret that, ultimately, causes Samson's psychological destruction.

As Doody sums it up, "[t]he *ekphrasis* of the visual artistic image has a special place in marking the order of creativity. It reminds us of the visible world, and thus of the sensible universe, but it also speaks of stasis, and artifice – of things out of nature."[61] In "The Stationmaster," the narrator who creates ekphrasis and includes into it both the protagonist and the heroine, shows that the world of the post station is, essentially, the world of stasis. The heroine escapes this world by asserting her own free will and by beginning to create her own novelistic narrative.

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[61] Doody, 387.

Chapter Two

Dostoevsky, “The Meek One”: A Girl as an Icon

Часом опоздано, годом не наверстаешь.

Русская пословица

As George Steiner reminds us in his work *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: An Essay in the Old Criticism*, “Dostoevsky is an example of a novelist who must be read with a constant commitment of our visual imagination.”[1] Or, as another critic puts it, “Dostoevsky’s spirit is essentially visual… Eye and not ear is the central organ.”[2] Thus, Dostoevsky’s readers may do well to pay attention to not simply the words that the author uses, but to the visual images that he creates by means of these words. At the same time, Dostoevsky himself laments the fact that our understanding of life is confined to merely the visible aspect of human existence. In the essay titled “Two Suicides” (“Dva samoubiistva”), Dostoevsky writes:

> But of course we can never exhaust a whole phenomenon and never reach its end, or its beginning. We know only the daily flow of the things we see, and this only on the surface; but the ends and the beginnings are things that, for human beings, still lie in the realm of the fantastic.
>
> Но, разумеется, никогда нам не исчерпать всего явления, не добраться до конца и начала его. Нам знакомо одно лишь насущное

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[1] George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: an Essay in the Old Criticism* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1996), 159.

[2] Ionut Anastasiu, “Visual and Audible in Dostoevsky’s and Tolstoy’s Work,” *Cogito* 3, no. 1 (March 2011), 72.

> видимо-текущее, да и то понаглядке, а концы и начала – это все еще пока для человека фантастическое.[3]

Dostoevsky makes an attempt to tap into the beginnings and the ends of events in his story “The Meek One,” the work that he calls “fantastical”[4] precisely because of the impossibility of gaining access to the inner world of another human being and of fully knowing another person’s motivations. At the same time, this attempt seems necessary not only for the protagonist of the story who is trying to comprehend the cause of his wife’s suicide, but for Dostoevsky himself who wrote “The Meek One” after being inspired (or, rather, disturbed) by accounts of suicides committed by two young women.

Dostoevsky initially mentions the two suicides in October 1876, in his *Diary of a Writer*. The first suicide had been committed in the summer of that year by the daughter of a famous Russian emigrant, a girl in her early twenties, who “was born abroad, Russian by origin but scarcely Russian at all by education.” [родившаяся за границей, русская по крови, но почти уже совсем не русская по воспитанию.][5] The details of this suicide are shocking despite their simplicity. Dostoevsky writes: “‘She soaked a piece of cotton wool in chloroform, bound this to her face and lay down on the bed …’ And so she died.” [Она намочила вату хлороформом, обвязала себе этим лицо и легла на кровать... Так и умерла.][6] Before she died, however, she wrote a note:

> I am setting off on a long journey. If the suicide should not succeed, then let everyone gather to celebrate my resurrection with glasses of Cliquot. *If I do succeed*, I ask only that you not bury me until you have determined that

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[3] Dostoyevsky, Fyodor, and K. A. Lantz. *A Writer's Diary* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 651. [Dostoevskii, F. M. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 30-i tomakh* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972), 23:145]

[4] Ibid., 677. [24:5]

[5] Ibid., 651. [23:145]

[6] Ibid., 652. [23:145]

> I am completely dead, because it is most unpleasant to awaken in a coffin underground. *That would not be* chic *at all!*
>
> Предпринимаю длинное путешествие. Если самоубийство не удастся, то пусть соберутся все отпраздновать мое воскресение из мертвых бокалами Клика. А если удастся, то я прошу только, чтоб схоронили меня, вполне убедясь, что я мертвая, потому что совсем неприятно проснуться в гробу под землею. Очень даже не шикарно выйдет![7]

Dostoevsky is especially bothered by the senseless nature of this suicide and by the lack of any moral justification for it:

> In this nasty vulgar *chic* I think I hear a challenge – indignation, perhaps, or anger – but about what? Persons who are simply vulgar end their lives by suicide only for material, obvious, external reasons; but it is apparent that she could not have such reasons.
>
> В этом гадком, грубом шике, по-моему, слышится вызов может быть негодование, злоба, – но на что же? Просто грубые натуры истребляют себя самоубийством лишь от материальной, видимой, внешней причины, а по тону записки видно, что у нее не могло быть такой причины.[8]

At the same time, he feels that the young woman's decision to take her own life was an act of courage (however misguided), a way of rebelling against the apparent clarity and straightforwardness of the principles that were taught to her in her father's house:

> Here we have a soul of one who has rebelled against the "linearity" of things, of one who could not tolerate this linearity, which was passed on to her from childhood in her father's house. The most hideous thing of all is that she died, of course, without any apparent doubt. Most probably, there was no conscious doubt in her soul, no "questions." It is most likely of all that she believed everything she had been taught since childhood, without question. And so she simply died from "chilly gloom and tedium," in animal, so to say, and unaccountable suffering; it was as if she could not get enough air and she began to suffocate. Her soul instinctively could not tolerate linearity and instinctively demanded something more complex…

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[7] Ibid., 652. [23:145]

[8] Ibid.

> Тут слышится душа именно возмутившаяся против “прямолинейности” явлений, не вынесшая этой прямолинейности, сообщившейся ей в доме отца еще с детства. И безобразнее всего то, что ведь она, конечно, умерла без всякого отчетливого сомнения. Сознательного сомнения, так называемых вопросов, вероятнее всего, не было в душе ее; всему она, чему научена была с детства, верила прямо, на слово, и это вернее всего. Значит, просто умерла от “холодного мрака и скуки,” с страданием, так сказать, животным и безотчетным, просто стало душно жить, вроде того, как бы воздуху недостало. Душа не вынесла прямолинейности безотчетно и безотчетно потребовала чего-нибудь более сложного…[9]

Dostoevsky contrasts this unquestioning, boredom-induced suicide with another, “meek” suicide that took place in St. Petersburg on September thirtieth, 1876. From the account published in the newspaper *New Time* (*Новое время*), we learn that on that day a young seamstress by the name of Maria Borisova sat down in her rented room in a St. Petersburg apartment to drink tea. She had complained earlier that day that she had a headache and was not feeling well. A stranger in a big city, she had left all of her relatives and friends in Moscow when she came to the northern capital a few months earlier in search of employment. Though she found a job as a seamstress, her income was meager, the money was running out, and she was worried about her future. On that day, Maria Borisova found herself alone in the room, because her landlady had just left the apartment to go to the market; yet “no sooner than she [the landlady] reached the bottom of the staircase, pieces of glass started falling in the courtyard”[едва успела спуститься с лестницы, как на двор полетели обломки стёкол][10] and then she saw the girl herself fall to land on the ground. The newspaper reporter later wrote that

> Tenants in a building facing the opposite way saw that Borisova had shattered glass in two window panes and with her legs forward, she climbed out of the window and onto the roof, crossed herself, and with an

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[9] Ibid., 652-3. [23:145-6]

[10] Dostoevskii, 24:381. My translation.

> icon in her hands threw herself down; the icon was an image of the Mother of God, a blessing from her parents.
>
> Жильцы противоположного флигеля видели, как Борисова разбила два стекла в раме и ногами вперед вылезла на крышу, перекрестилась и с образом в руках бросилась вниз. Образ этот был лик Божией Матери – благословение её родителей.[11]

In "Two Suicides" Dostoevsky cites the reason that the newspaper reporter gives for Borisova's suicide: "because she was absolutely unable to find enough work to make a living" [потому что никак не могла приискать себе для пропитания работы].[12] Although in this case the young woman had an obvious reason for extreme discouragement, she exhibited an astonishing lack of defiance. As Dostoevsky notes in his essay:

> This icon in the hands is a strange and unprecedented feature in suicides! This, now, is a meek and a humble suicide. Here, apparently, there was no grumbling or reproach: it was simply a matter of being unable to live any longer – "God did not wish it" – and so she died having said her prayers.
>
> Этот образ в руках - странная и неслыханная еще в самоубийстве черта! Это уж какое-то кроткое, смиренное самоубийство. Тут даже, видимо, не было никакого ропота или попрека: просто - стало нельзя жить. "Бог не захотел" и - умерла, помолившись.[13]

Dostoevsky adds that "[t]his meek soul who destroyed herself torments one's mind despite oneself" [Эта кроткая, истребившая себя душа невольно мучает мысль.][14] As a result of this torment he writes the story that initially was titled "A Girl with an Icon" ("Девушка с образом"), but that later became "The Meek One," and the icon that was mentioned in the account of Borisova's suicide appears to be crucial for our understanding of "The Meek One." Nonetheless, the mental torment that Dostoevsky experiences when thinking about the two suicides is caused not simply by the meekness of Borisova's act, but by the contrast in attitudes towards life that the two young women showed. He writes: "But how different these two creatures are – just as if they had come from two different planets! And how different the two deaths are!" [Но какие, однако же, два разные создания, точно обе с двух разных планет! И какие две разные смерти!][15] Finally, he poses the question that strikes at the heart of the matter while making the motives behind the actions of the two girls almost entirely irrelevant: "And which, I ask, of these two souls bore more torment on this earth – if such an idle question is proper and permissible?" [А которая из этих душ больше мучилась на земле, если только приличен и позволителен такой праздный вопрос?][16]

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, 653. [*PSS* 23:146]

[13] Ibid., 653. [23:146]

[14] Ibid.

Whether this question is indeed permissible is a topic for another paper. What is worth noting, however, is that by asking this question Dostoevsky inadvertently suggests that we take a close look primarily at the two souls, setting aside for a moment any material considerations that each of the two women may have been facing. Both of these souls find their expression in the heroine of Dostoevsky's story "The Meek One." Grasping the concept of two souls with different capabilities to endure torment is key to understanding the way the narrator of "The Meek One" perceives and, ultimately, misunderstands the heroine. The narrator of the story is the eponymous heroine's husband. Shocked by his wife's death, he attempts to reconstruct all the events that lead up to her suicide and oscillates between worshipping her and accusing her of being unoriginal. Despite the story's simple title, the heroine (who, incidentally, has no name) combines the attributes that are exhibited by both the daughter of the Russian emigrant and by Maria Borisova. The story's narrator, however, insists on seeing her as a one-dimensional character, incapable of deep feeling. By doing so, he in the end confines himself not only to a solitary existence, but also to being forever unable to "exhaust the whole phenomenon" that the appearance of the meek one signifies in his life.

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

When changing the story's title from "A Girl with an Icon" to "The Meek One," brevity was hardly Dostoevsky's only motive. As the author's idea for the story evolved, so did his understanding of his characters. By switching from the more descriptive "A Girl with an Icon" to the simple and understated "The Meek One," he draws the readers' attention to the heroine's internal qualities as opposed to her outward appearance or actions. This single adjective in the feminine form seems to point towards the essence of the heroine and sets her apart from her environment. Yet there is an inherent contradiction in the idea of a meek suicide and a question arises regarding both Dostoevsky's definition of meekness and the narrator's view of it. To find out whether the heroine is indeed meek or not, I suggest that we look not for a girl *with* an icon as the original title suggests but for a girl *as* an icon because this is what she ultimately becomes. Although in each of these instances the person in question is the same, by changing our focus we can examine the value not only of the icon to the heroine, but also of the heroine's iconic presence to the narrator. At the same time, by considering the heroine's icon-like qualities, we can begin to understand the nature of both the narrator's iconophobia and iconophilia. Linked like two sides of the same coin, both the icon and the heroine point towards the metaphysical reality that the story's narrator yearns for, but in the face of which he proves to be blind. Two notions are essential in our analysis: ekphrasis and inverse perspective. Though rarely seen together, these terms provide a framework for elucidating both character relationships within the story and the author's expectations for his readers.

By his own admission, Dostoevsky reworks the newspaper account into "neither a story nor just notes," but a "fantastic story" that he himself considers "realistic to the highest degree" [в высшей степени реальным].[17] The dichotomy of "realistic" and "fantastic" suggests that each of these categories has value, but it takes work on the readers' part to figure out where and how they come together to convey meaning. This is especially true when it comes to ekphrastic writing, or writing about a visual image, where so much depends on the reader's imagination. Dostoevsky recognizes this and from the very beginning invokes his readers' ability to imagine. He writes in the Preface to the story:

> Imagine a husband whose only a few hours earlier has killed herself by jumping out a window; her body now lies on the table before him. He is in a state of bewilderment and still has not managed to collect his thoughts. He paces through the apartment, trying to make sense of what has happened, to "focus his thoughts."
>
> Представьте себе мужа, у которого лежит на столе жена, самоубийца, несколько часов перед тем выбросившаяся из окошка. Он в смятении и еще не успел собрать своих мыслей. Он ходит по своим комнатам и старается осмыслить случившееся, "собрать свои мысли в точку."[18]

Dostoevsky explains that he has tried to make the narrative that follows sound as if it was recorded by a stenographer in real time: rough and unedited, thus reflecting the true psychological order of the narrator's thoughts. Having set a mise-en-scène, the author steps out of the picture, and from that moment on we get all of our information from a first person narrator who has been a participant in the majority of the events that he describes. Since he is still trying to gather his thoughts, he comes across as an honest but unreliable narrator. In fact, he can be seen as an oblivious narrator. What he tells us about his wife and their relationship shows us what sort of a person she was and what role she played in his life, but he, of all people, continues to be confused and blind on both accounts. The narrator does talk a great deal and even addresses an audience apologetically: "Gentlemen, I'm certainly not a literary man, and you'll see that for yourselves; but never mind: I'll tell you what happened as I understand it myself." [Господа, я далеко не литератор, и вы это видите, да и пусть, а расскажу, как сам понимаю. В том-то и весь ужас мой, что я всё понимаю!][19] Yet it should be kept in mind that he is alone in the room, the whole story is a solipsistic soliloquy, and, in the words of James Phelan, the author of the story "arranges [his] descriptions so that *we* can understand more than [the first-person narrator] is aware he is communicating."[20]

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[17] Ibid., 677. [24:5]

[18] Ibid., 677. [24:5]

The most readily apparent reason for considering "The Meek One" as an example of ekphrastic writing has to do with the fact that an icon served as an impetus for writing it.[21] Although James Heffernan's definition of ekphrasis as a "verbal representation of visual representation"[22] runs the risk of expanding the meaning of ekphrasis to the point of it losing its distinctive qualities, this concept of representation is especially useful when it comes to analyzing a literary work that is imbued with Christian aesthetics. While the narrator's description of the icon falls under the category of writing about visual art, his portrayal of the heroine is ekphrastic not only because it conforms to the original definition of ekphrasis as a form of *progymnasmata*, but also because Christianity considers each human being to be an instantiation of a divine prototype.

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[19] Ibid., 678. [24:6]

[20] James Phelan, *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996), 66. My emphasis.

[21] For a detailed discussion of the connection that existed between early Christian icons and their ekphrases, wee Cornelia A. Tsakiridou's *Icons in time, persons in eternity: Orthodox theology and the aesthetics of the Christian image* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013).

[22] James Heffernan, "Ekphrasis and Representation," *New Literary History* 22, no. 2 (Spring, 1991), 299.

In "The Meek One" Dostoevsky presents to his readers on the one hand an icon that is an artistic representation of the divine prototype, and on the other a heroine who is a corporeal representation of a divine prototype. These two concepts are intertwined in the text in a way that makes it difficult to imagine one without the other. Moreover, the Russian word for 'icon,' *ikona*, derives from the Greek *eikona* that means image or portrait, and the Russian word for 'image' – *obraz* – can refer to both a living person and a venerated religious image. As Konstantin Barsht explains, "Dostoevsky considered a person's face to be the true expression of the spiritual significance of its owner, a genuine reflection of the image and likeness of the Creator of the universe."[23] Thus, the most important part of a human body as a corporeal representation of a divine prototype is the face, in which Dostoevsky sought "human facial image [человеческий лик] … its quality of single and unrepeatable individuality; the unity, in other words, of the internal (the 'idea') and the external (the face) in man – the unity of the facial image [лик].[24] More than the mirror of the soul, "[a] man's face is the image of his personality, his spirit, his human worth."[25] For this reason, the icon that the heroine is holding in her arms when she commits suicide and that Sophie Ollivier describes as "a witness, a companion, a sheet-anchor … a way of neutralizing, of sublimating the taking of life condemned by the

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[23] Barsht, 46.

[24] Ibid., 23.

[25] Qtd, in Barsht, 23.

Church,"[26] becomes more than either a necessary item of religious worship or a symbol of defiance. Its role extends beyond ritual as it turns our attention towards the human being himself.

The heroine of the story is an orphan who lives with two abusive aunts. Wishing to escape from her aunts' house, the she pawns her belongings to obtain money so she can advertise in a newspaper her services as a governess. The narrator, a pawnbroker who lends her the money, confesses that initially he paid little attention to her. He was "struck by the things she brought" [поразили её вещи][27] before he ever singled her out in the crowd of customers. Her physical appearance is rather ordinary. He describes her as "delicate and blonde, a little taller than average" [тоненькая, белокуренькая, средне-высокого роста],[28] unconfrontational, and for the most part silent. Her age is somewhat difficult to determine: "she seemed terribly young, so young she might have been fourteen. Whereas in actual fact she was only a few months short of sixteen." [ужасно молода, так молода, что точно четырнадцать лет. А меж тем ей тогда уж было без трех месяцев шестнадцать.][29] Convinced of his own professionalism and self-importance, he treats her the same way he treats other clients: "Strict, strict, strict." [Строго, строго и строго.][30] In other words, emotional neutrality and a strickt adherence to the terms of financial agreements were the rules by which he runs his pawnshop. Only once his allows himself to make careless remark that insults the heroine.

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[26] Sophie Ollivier, "Icons in Dostoevsky's Works," *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. by George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 62-3.

[27] Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, 679. [Dostoevskii, *PSS*, 24:6-7]

[28] Ibid., 679. [24:6].

[29] Ibid., 679. [24:7]

[30] Ibid.

To this, as always, she says nothing in response; however, to his own surprise, on that occasion the pawnbroker notices a sudden change in her eyes: "Heavens, how she flushed! She had big, blue, wistful eyes, but there was fire in them then! She had big, blue, wistful eyes, but there was fire in them then! She didn't say a word, though. Just took up her 'remnants' and left." [Батюшки, как вспыхнула! Глаза у ней голубые, большие, задумчивые, но - как загорелись! Но ни слова не выронила, взяла свои "остатки" и - вышла.][31] This flaring up of her face betrays some unknown strength of character that is concealed behind the heroine's plain appearance and taciturn demeanor.[32]

At the time when it happens the narrator only describes the change in the heroine's countenance, but offers no interpretation of it. Konstantin Barsht writes that if Dostoevsky's characters "demonstrate the ability to 'read people by their faces, this is an important indication of their spiritual development and moral qualities."[33] The narrator conveys this information while still trying to collect his thoughts and to make sense of it all, although clarity does not come easily to him. He does remember, however, that it is at the moment when the meek one came that he "*particularly* noticed her for the first time and thought something of this sort about her – I mean something quite particular." [заметил ее в первый раз особенно и подумал что-то о ней в этом роде, то есть именно что-то в особенном роде].[34] Much later, when recounting the events that preceded the suicide, the pawnbroker believes that he knows the answer to the question posed in the title of one of the chapters "Who Was I and Who Was She." [Кто был я и кто была она.][35] He is convinced that the girl that he married is young, impressionable, and, when influenced by the wrong ideas, is capable of "*rebellion*" [*бунт*].[36]

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[31] Ibid.

[32] The word *вспыхнула* that Ronald Meyer translates as "flared up" refers to a character's face suddenly turning red. Dostoevsky uses this word on several occasions, and it can signal indignation as well as embarrassment. For example, in "The Gambler" the general whom the narrator believes to be in love with Polina blushes [вспыхнул] when she enters the room: "it seems to me that his love for Polina is boundless. When she came in, he flared up like the glow of a fire." [мне кажется, что он беспредельно влюблён в Полину. Когда она вошла, он вспыхнул, как зарево.] (Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Gambler*. Translated by Hugh Aplin (London: Hesperuc Classics, 2006), 5). [Dostoevskii, *PSS*, 5:210]. By contrast, in *Crime and Punishment* Katerina Ivanovna's face flares up in indignation when someone insults Sonia: "Katerina Ivanovna's face flushed and immediately she noted loudly … that the one who sent it [the plate] over is, of course, a 'drunk ass.'"[Катерина Ивановна вспыхнула и тотчас же громко заметила … что переславший (тарелку), конечно, 'пьяный осел.'] [*PSS*, 6:297]. Similarly, Liza in *The Possessed* flares up: "Whether you paid with your life or mine – this is what I wanted to ask. Or have you completely lost the ability to understand? – Lisa flared up." [Своею или моею жизнью заплатили, вот что я хотела спросить. Или вы совсем теперь понимать перестали? - вспыхнула Лиза.] [*PSS*, 10:131]. The heroine's blushing in "The Meek One" is difficult to interpret, for it can be a sign of both of these emotions. The narrator does not offer any interpretation at this time. He only describes the heroine's reaction.

[33] Barsht, 31.

At the same time, the heroine's large eyes and taciturn behavior make her more like another person who is submission personified – the Mother of God [Богородица] who is depicted on the icon that the meek one pawns in an act of desperation. The heroine's features remind one of what can be seen on an Eastern Orthodox icon that "is meant to be neither 'touching' nor sentimental," and therefore difficult to interpret.[37] At the same time, the mentioning of her eyes draws the readers' attention to her face, thus making her icon-like, because in iconography the face is "the visual center of the body [that] dominates everything else."[38]

Sophie Ollivier observes that when Dostoevsky's characters find themselves "[f]ace to face with the icons [they] reveal their inmost selves," and the attitude that the characters have toward the icons determines "the effect which the icons will have on them."[39] The pawnbroker's attitude towards icons as well as the icon-like heroine is polysemantic. This is not the first time that Dostoevsky has placed his heroine in the company of a skeptical protagonist, or an icon-like woman next to a typical underground man. Ollivier notes that in an earlier story written by Dostoevsky, "The Landlady" ("Хозяйка," 1847), the silent heroine Katerina "[w]ith her attentive and sorrowful eyes" becomes "an iconic image"[40] for the male protagonist, a solitary dreamer who, according to A.L. Bem, "has not understood himself, has not created his philosophy of the underground and is therefore helpless in the face of reality."[41] Because of this lack of self-knowledge, he is unable to understand the heroine either. Similarly, Konstantin Mochulsky observes that Sofia in Dostoevsky's novel *A Raw Youth* (1875) is "the image of a humble and suffering mother, almost an icon"[42] who is attached to Versilov, a male character with a split personality whose disrespect for icons matches his emotional abusiveness towards Sofia. To this group we can add another Sofia, a female character in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1878 – 1880), the woman who had the misfortune of being married to Feodor Karamazov. Whereas her husband mocks her for her religious faith, one of the most valuable childhood memories that her son Alyosha has is that of her praying fervently in front of an icon. Thus, the heroine of "The Meek One" is not alone either in her iconicity or in being misunderstood by the male protagonist. What does make her stand out from her counterparts is the extent of her transformation in the course of the story.

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[34] Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary* 679. [*PSS*, 24:7]. Emphasis in the original.

[35] Ibid., 678. [24:6]

[36] Ibid., 680. [24:7]. Emphasis in the original.

[37] Quenot, 87.

[38] Ibid., 93.

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[39] Ibid., 51.

[40] Ibid., 58.

[41] Ollivier, 58. Qtd. from A.L. Bem, 'Dramatizatsiia breda (*Khoziaika* Dostoevskogo),' *O Dostoevskom* 1 (Prague, 1929), 78.

[42] Qtd. in Ollivier, 61. From Konstantin Mochulskii, *Dostoevskii: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Paris, 1947), 429.

Having pawned the "remnants," the heroine comes back to the pawn shop with an icon, and it is here that a more pronounced connection between her and Orthodox iconography is made. She brings her most valued possession, an icon of the Bogoroditsa with child, "an ancient, family household icon in a silver, gilded frame, worth, maybe, six rubles." [домашний, семейный, старинный, риза серебряная золоченая - стоит - ну, рублей шесть стоит.][43] At this time the pawnbroker's claims to rationality, which he makes especially vociferously later in the story, are already beginning to unravel. Seeing monetary value in the frame alone, the pawnbroker suggests that the heroine should keep the image. He quickly estimates that the metal plating on the icon is worth six roubles. Inexplicably, he offers ten. She insists on taking only five. He then suggests that the girl should leave the metal plating at the shop and take the image itself home. She refuses. He feels very uncomfortable when he takes the image with the frame. During their exchange, although she is clearly in a weaker financial and social position, she sounds much more assertive than does the pawnbroker:

> "Wouldn't it be better to remove the frame and take back the icon?" I said. "It's an icon, after all, and somehow it seems not quite the thing to do …"
> "Is this against the rules to take an icon?"
> "No, it's not against the rules, but still, you yourself, perhaps…"
> "Well, take off the frame."
> "I'll tell you what," I said, after a little thought, "We'll keep it in the frame; I'll put it over there in the icon case with my others, under the lamp … and I'll just give you ten rubles for it."
> "I don't need ten. Just give me five, and I'll certainly redeem it."

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[43] Dostoevsky, 681. [*PSS*, 24:8]

> Говорю ей: лучше бы ризу снять, а образ унесите; а то образ все-таки как-то того.
>
> – А разве вам запрещено?
>
> – Нет, не то что запрещено, а так, может быть, вам самим...
>
> – Ну, снимите.
>
> – Знаете что, я не буду снимать, а поставлю вон туда в киот … и просто-запросто возьмите десять рублей.
>
> – Мне не надо десяти, дайте мне пять, я непременно выкуплю.[44]

Finally, with reluctance, he takes the icon and puts it into his personal icon case, a *kiot*. The pawnbroker's inability to verbalize the reason why it is inappropriate to pawn the image along with the frame, is amplified at the very end of the story when following his wife's suicide he cannot identify the source for the moral maxim that comes to his mind: "'Love one another.' Who said that? Whose commandment is that?" ["Люди, любите друг друга" – кто это сказал? чей это завет?][45] There are rudiments of religious upbringing that hide deep in his brain that have been quashed by his feeling of wounded pride and his desire for revenge, very similar to what the Underground Man deals with in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (*Записки из подполья*, 1864).

Barsht remarks that Dostoevsky's characters "systematically hang portraits of each other on the walls of their flats, and the semantic context of their locations is no less important than the domestic environment of the hero himself."[46] Although, from a technical standpoint, in "The Meek One" we are dealing with an icon, not a portrait, the principle remains the same. It has probably been a struggle for the heroine to bring her icon to the pawnshop, which is why she saves it till the very end. Surely, she has been hoping that she would not have to pawn her parents' blessing. Having pawned everything else and not having been able to buy any of her items back, it is unlikely that she will be able to reclaim her icon either. On the surface, the transfer of the icon from the heroine's possession to the pawnbroker's can be considered as a foreshadowing of what happens to the heroine later. Once her icon is in the pawnbroker's possession, it seems that the only option left for the heroine is to follow her icon, and this is exactly what happens. At the end of their conversation, the meek one casts "a swift and penetrating glance" [быстрым и проникнутым взглядом][47] at the pawnbroker, which again he attributes to her youthful sincerity and naiveté. Having soon found out that she has exhausted her material resources, he proposes to her a few days later. After carefully considering his proposal for a few minutes (that is all she was allotted), she accepts his invitation and moves to his apartment after the wedding. Thus, the heroine follows her icon to the pawnshop.

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[44] Ibid., 681-2. [24:8-9]

[45] Ibid., 717. [24:35]

[46] Barsht, 27.

Strictly speaking, the meek one had not pawned the image along with the frame, which means that should she change her mind later, she can claim it back and leave the frame at the shop. Nevertheless, it was her decision to leave the icon at the pawnshop, and, similarly, it was her conscious decision to accept the narrator's offer of marriage. The pawnbroker is all the time convinced that she will accept his proposal, and indeed, "I scarcely need to tell you that she said yes right there by the gate." [Разумеется, она тут же у ворот сказала мне "да"].[48] Yet he has to admit that "she stood there by the gate and thought for a long time before she said 'Yes.'" [она тут же у ворот долго думала, прежде чем сказала "да."][49] She knows that just as she does not have to leave the image at the pawnshop, she does not have to marry the pawnbroker. Her circumstances are dismal, and one can easily argue that it is not much of a choice when a young girl has to marry either a cerebral and self-centered pawnbroker or a two times self-made widower, a merchant who "had already driven two wives to their graves with his beatings, and now he was looking for a third" [Он уж двух жён усахарил и искал третью, вот и наглядел её].[50] She may seem desperate in those circumstances, and she certainly does to the narrator.

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[47] Dostoevsky, 683. [24:9]

[48] Ibid., 686. [24:12]

[49] Ibid. 686. [24:12]

Nevertheless, Dostoevsky shows that the heroine thinks through the issue before making a decision, regardless of how limited her options are. Only after her death, when the narrator looks back at their meeting by the gate, does he realize to his horror that at that moment the heroine was seriously weighing her options in her mind: a life of suffering next to the pawnbroker or a sure death by the merchant's hand and wondering which option is better. The author gives her a chance to exercise judgment and to make a conscious decision. He further reinforces this idea by having a servant, Lukerya, thank the pawnbroker for marrying the girl but asking him not to talk about it: "God will reward you, sir, for taking our dear miss! Only don't tell her that; she's such a proud one." [Бог вам заплатит, сударь, что нашу барышню милую берете, только вы ей это не говорите, она гордая.][51] Whereas the narrator's knowledge of the heroine's character is based on his conversations with her during her visits to the pawnshop, Lukerya has had time to observe and interact with the heroine over a longer period of time and to get a better idea of what the lady is like. Just as he has failed to understand the nature of her earlier "*rebellion*" at the pawnshop, he disregards the gravity of Lukerya's warning and prematurely rejoices in his perceived triumph over her: "'A proud one, indeed! 'I like those proud ones,' I thought. Proud women are especially beautiful when … well, when you have no more doubts about your power over them, isn't it so?" [Ну, гордая! Я, дескать, сам люблю горденьких. Гордые особенно хороши, когда... ну, когда уж не сомневаешься в своем над ними могуществе, а?][52]

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[50] Ibid., 684. [24:10]

[51] Ibid., 686. [24:12]

The heroine's acceptance of the pawnbroker's proposal is a turning point in the story. The question that it now poses is whether the heroine is indeed meek as the title suggests or proud as Lukerya says. Is it possible that she combines both traits? Or is she struggling with two conflicting impulses, thus essentially tearing her soul in two?

The narrator confesses that he marries the heroine with an "idea" in mind:

> But I at once threw cold water on all this rapture of hers. That was just my plan, you see. When she was elated, I would respond with silence – a benevolent silence, of course … but still she would quickly see that we were two very different people and that I was an enigma."
>
> Но я всё это упоение тут же обдал сразу холодной водой. Вот в том-то и была моя идея. На восторги я отвечал молчанием, благосклонным, конечно... но всё же она быстро увидала, что мы разница и что я - загадка.[53]

He then elaborates to his audience what his plan was at the time:

> "Severe, proud, needing no one's moral consolation, suffering in silence." That is how it was; I didn't lie, really I didn't! "One day she will see for herself that it was a matter of my nobility" – only she wasn't able to see it then – "and when she eventually realizes it, she will have ten times more esteem for me and will fall to her knees, her hands folded in ardent prayer." That was the plan.
>
> "Суров, горд и в нравственных утешениях ни в чьих не нуждается, страдает молча." Так оно и было, не лгал, не лгал! "Увидит потом сама, что тут было великодушие, но только она не сумела заметить, -

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[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid., 688. [24:13]

> и как догадается об этом когда-нибудь, то оценит вдесятеро и падет в прах, сложа в мольбе руки.” Вот план.[54]

He is convinced that the magnanimity in young people is worthless because it does not come as a result of life experience: “the nobility of youth is very charming but isn’t worth a penny. And why not? Because it is acquired cheaply and is not obtained through experience. It’s all ‘the first impressions of existence.’” [Великодушие молодежи прелестно, но - гроша не стоит. Почему не стоит? Потому что дешево ей достается, получилось не живши, всё это, так сказать, ‘первые впечатления бытия.][55] For this reason, he wants to put the girl in a position where she has to suffer confusion and humiliation, which would cause her to abandon her abstract ideas and to develop instead the kind of genuine charity towards him that comes from the heart, not from abstract ideas of someone else. Never mind that she will have to develop these feelings towards the very person who causes her to suffer in the first place.

His plan fails, however. Early in their marriage, the heroine’s response to her husband’s stern lectures regarding the value of money is rather passive: “She would open her big eyes, listen to me, and not say a word.” [Раскрывала большие глаза, слушала, смотрела и умолкала.][56] Trying to mold the heroine into someone who will adore him for his past and present suffering, the pawnbroker acts “with pride, and barely [says] a word of it.” [действовал гордостью, говорил почти молча.][57] In fact, he is quite proud of his uncommon communication skills as he notes with self-satisfaction, "I am an expert at speaking while barely saying a word" [А я мастер молча говорить].[58]

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[54] Ibid., 692-3. [24:16-7]

[55] Ibid., 688. [24:14]

[56] Ibid., 688. [24:13]

[57] Ibid., 688. [24:14]

To the heroine, the silent suffering and the proud severity that are meant to be perceived as a façade hiding deeper nobility of character are more irritating than puzzling. The pawnbroker tries to bring his wife into his business, but at the same time he insists that his money gives him unquestionable authority in his affairs: "the right to regard life through *my* eyes" [право смотреть на жизнь *моими* глазами].[59] His goal is to save thirty thousand rubles in three years, and in order to do this he must not only live frugally, but also resist any temptation to be generous with his customers. No sooner than he starts talking about his own view on things, a subtle reversal takes place. During their first confrontation after the wedding, the pawnbroker addresses his wife "mildly but firmly and reasonably" [заговорил кротко, но твердо и резонно][60]; however, her reaction shocks him:

> Suddenly she jumped to her feet, all a-tremble, and – can you believe it? – suddenly started stamping her feet at me. She was a wild beast; she was having a fit; she was a wild beast having a fit. I was numb in amazement: I had never expected antics like this.
>
> Она вдруг вскочила, вдруг вся затряслась и - что бы вы думали - вдруг затопала на меня ногами; это был зверь, это был припадок, это был зверь в припадке. Я оцепенел от изумления: такой выходки я никогда не ожидал.[61]

Had not Lukerya warned him? Had not he already witnessed once her "*rebellion*"?

The pawnbroker, who has been trying to force his wife to believe that his pride conceals his own meekness, is at this moment presented with the proof that the young lady indeed is proud. At the same time, her "penetrating glance" allows her to see that the pawnbroker's stern demeanor hides not his meekness, but his vengeful malice. The pawnbroker is shocked because despite his comments about "the proud ones" being "particularly nice," he fails to recognize that his wife is not a one-dimensional character. Clearly, the narrator is not aware of the fact that the heroine has not one prototype, but two, and that these prototypes can be viewed as complete opposites of each other. As Barsht explains, Dostoevsky knows that "[t]he greatest difficulty [is] that man is constantly changing and at any moment of his existence is not identical to himself, is not 'like himself'."[62] The pawnbroker, however, is constantly focused on himself and tends to typecast characters around him. He simply cannot fathom that someone whom he defines as one thing would suddenly turn out to be something completely different.

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[58] Ibid., 688-9. [24:14]

[59] Ibid., 693. [24:17]. Emphasis in the original.

[60] Ibid., 693. [24:17]

[61] Ibid., 693. [24:17]

To the narrator's credit, at the time when he is telling his story, he looks back and identifies the precise moment when the scales begin to fall from his eyes. It happens when following a prolonged period of alienation between him and his wife, the heroine suddenly starts singing to herself and in his presence. Her singing puts him in a state of rapture [восторг].[63] Not knowing what to do with himself, he rushes out of the apartment. He remembers: "The poor, cracked, broken note began to ring in my soul once more. I could scarcely catch my breath. The shroud was falling from my eyes!" [Надтреснутая, бедненькая, порвавшаяся нотка вдруг опять зазвенела в душе моей. Мне дух захватывало. Падала, падала с глаз пелена!"][64] It is not clear whether he recognizes that the scales were falling at that particular moment or if this realization comes to him later, when he thinks back on the events of that day after the suicide has taken place. He wanders around the streets for some time, but then he runs home and makes a very unexpected and frenzied confession of adoration for his wife:

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[62] Barsht, 25.

[63] Pushkin, 707. [24:27]

[64] Ibid.

> Yes, I fell down at her feet. She leaped up quickly, but with extraordinary strength I grasped both her hands to hold her back.
>
> And I understood the dull depth of my despair, I understood it completely! But – can you believe it? – my soul was so overflowing with rapture that I thought I would die. I kissed her feet in happiness, in ecstasy. Yes, in immeasurable, boundless happiness – and this with complete awareness of the hopelessness of my despair!
>
> Да, я свалился ей в ноги. Она быстро вскочила, но я с чрезвычайною силою удержал ее за обе руки.
>
> И я понимал вполне мое отчаяние, о, понимал! Но, верите ли, восторг кипел в моем сердце до того неудержимо, что я думал, что я умру. Я целовал ее ноги в упоении и в счастье. Да, в счастье, безмерном и бесконечном, и это при понимании-то всего безвыходного моего отчаяния![65]

Earlier the pawnbroker claimed that he married the meek one in order to mold her character and to make her earn his trust in her magnanimity; however, his reaction to her singing indicates that he suddenly begins to see her as a way to his own salvation. He realizes that the world that exists within her is larger and more complex than he ever thought, that her sense of inner freedom can be battered but not destroyed, and that her magnanimity is not subject to his manipulations. His wounded pride and his desire for revenge against society at this moment could have been quenched in him through the realization that his wife is simply and unquestionably a better person than he is.

On her part, she continues to treat him magnanimously. When the pawnbroker falls on his knees and embarrasses her, instead of asking him to stop torturing her, she asks him to stop tormenting himself. Yet he "paid no heed to her pleas, or scarcely any heed" [не смотрел на просьбы или мало смотрел].[66]

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[65] Ibid., 707. [24:28]

This idolizing declaration of love and submission is probably the last thing that the heroine expects from her austere husband, and this is probably what leads her to commit suicide, because she married him in order to suffer, not to be worshipped. The heroine, who has already pawned her cherished icon of the Bogoroditsa and soon afterwards followed it into the discomforting space of the pawnbroker's apartment, finds herself in a situation where suddenly and against her will she is turned into an idol. As Ollivier observes, in Dostoevsky's works, only female characters pray before icons, and by doing so "they become very much like its divine archetype. Women do not act and do not change the world. They represent the iconic image of redemption in a world threatened by idols."[67] The narrator feels that if anyone is going to save him from his misery, it is his wife and no one else. He now focuses all of his attention on her, but his act of worshipping her underscores the impossibility of his salvation:

> I wept, I tried to say something, but could not. She felt terribly ashamed that I was kissing her feet and pulled them away, but I at once began kissing the spot on the floor where her feet had been … She was about to go into hysterics, I could see; her hands were trembling. But I wasn't thinking about that and kept mumbling that I loved her, that I would not get up: "Let me kiss the hem of your dress … let me worship you this way for the rest of my life …"
>
> Я плакал, говорил что-то, но не мог говорить … Ей было страшно стыдно, что я целую ее ноги, и она отнимала их, но я тут же целовал то место на полу, где стояла ее нога … Наступала истерика, я это видел, руки ее вздрагивали, - я об этом не думал и всё бормотал ей, что я ее люблю, что я не встану, "дай мне целовать твое платье … так всю жизнь на тебя молиться …"[68]

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[66] Ibid., 711. [24:30]

[67] Ollivier, 64.

[68] Dostoevsky, 708. [24:28]

The pawnbroker sees the shock on his wife's face and recognizes that it is he who caused both the shock and the nervous breakdown mentioned earlier: "I don't know – I don't remember, but suddenly she broke into shudders and sobs; a terrible fit of hysterics began. I had frightened her." [Не знаю, не помню, – и вдруг она зарыдала и затряслась; наступил страшный припадок истерики. Я испугал её.][69] Somewhere in his mind he recognizes that the sudden switch from one extreme to another, from tyranny to servitude, is quite unexpected, but he is not at all bothered by it. Moreover, he continues to plead with her to let him subjugate himself to her:

> But the most important thing for me was not that, it was my urge – which grew ever stronger – to lie down again at her feet, to kiss them, to kiss the ground on which her feet stood, to worship her. "There is nothing, nothing more than I ask of you," I kept repeating. "Don't say anything, don't pay any attention to me, just let me sit in the corner and look at you. Turn me into your thing, your lapdog…" She wept.
>
> Но главное для меня было не в том, а в том, что мне всё более и неудержимее хотелось опять лежать у её ног, и опять целовать, целовать землю, на которой стоят ее ноги, и молиться ей и – "больше я ничего, ничего не спрошу у тебя, – повторял я поминутно, – не отвечай мне ничего, не замечай меня вовсе, и только дай из угла смотреть на тебя, обрати меня в свою вещь, в собачонку..." Она плакала.[70]

Despite the frantic nature of his behavior, he claims that he saw and understood everything: "I could see, after all, that I was putting a great burden on her, don't think that I was so stupid and such an egotist that I didn't see that. I could see it all, right down to the last detail; I saw it and knew it better than anyone: all my despair stood out for all to see!" [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; всё мое отчаяние стояло на виду!][71] Then he adds, "Why do you say that I looked and saw nothing?" [Зачем вы говорите, что я смотрел и ничего не видел?][72] Yet, nobody is saying anything to him, because he is still talking to an imaginary audience, and when all is said and done, he becomes his own accuser when he concludes his rant by saying, "Oh, what misunderstanding, what blindness on my part!" [О недоразумение, о слепота моя!][73]

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., 709. [24:28]

Barsht explains that "[t]he highest expression of love in Dostoevskii is to gaze lovingly into the face of a person, to seek spiritual communion with his or her *lik*."[74] While the pawnbroker declares his love for the heroine, his love is disfigured by his extreme self-abasement. Barsht states that in the 1870s, which is when "The Meek One" was written, Dostoevsky focused less on physiognomical detail and instead provided literary portraits that presented the spiritual essence of a character. Some of the crucial oppositions within Dostoevsky's literary works were "[t]he face versus the physiognomy, the presence versus the absence of the face, and also the possibility versus impossibility of seeing a person's face."[75] In "The Meek One," the narrator sees and describes the heroine's face, but his assumption that she is naïve and proud prevents him from looking deeper and perceiving her face as a reflection of a divine prototype (her *lik*),behind the physiognomy.

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[71] Ibid., 711. [24:30]

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., 712. [24:71]

[74] Barsht, 27. Emphasis in the original.

[75] Ibid., 33.

Just as an icon that functions as "a window onto Truth, which guarantees Good and the path to which is Beauty,"[76] an icon-like person, too, would inspire one to turn to God and to contemplate His Kingdom. Dostoevsky illustrates this principle by employing the principle of inverse perspective, one of the basic pictorial principles of Eastern Orthodox iconography.[77] As Quenot explains, "[t]he vanishing point of reversed perspective is situated not behind the picture but rather in front of it. It cannot be found within the picture because it converges in front of the icon, toward the viewer."[78] Simultaneously, "the focus point actually moves out away from the icon toward the beholder, and the icon figures come forth to 'meet' him."[79] This way of organizing pictorial space both widens the visible scope and turns the beholder's gaze towards himself. Thus, when beholding an icon, a person simultaneously sees the world opening up and expanding before him while at the same time recognizing that he is within and part of this larger world. He both sees "the kingdom of God" and recognizes that it is "within" him.[80] The pawnbroker, however, is so focused on his own emotional pain that he is unable to perceive the larger world around him and he fails to see that by consenting to marry him and by moving into his apartment, the heroine acts very much like, in Quenot's words, one of the "icon figures [who] come forth to 'meet' him."

By marrying the pawnbroker, the meek one chooses suffering over the certainty of death at the hand of her other suitor, the merchant; yet despite her saintliness, she cannot save him. What she can do, however, is to point him towards the divine prototype who is capable of saving, while at the same time helping him to see his own intrinsic worth. The pawnbroker, on the other hand, goes from one extreme to the other: from focusing solely on himself to clinging onto his wife as his only source if not of salvation then of at least of validation of his existence. Instead of following Christ's invitation to look for the Kingdom in himself, the pawnbroker is living out the mistake that Isaiah describes in the Old Testament when the covenant people turns away from true faith, "maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god."[81] Isaiah attributes this behavior to the people's spiritual blindness: "They have not known nor understood: for … they cannot see."[82]

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[76] Ibid., 27.

[77] For more on the use of reverse perspective in Dostoevsky's works, see Shanti Elliott's article "Icon and Mask in Dostoevsky's Artistic Philosophy" (*The Dostoevsky Journal: An Independent Review* 1, no. 1 (2000), 55-68, and Janet Tucker's book *Profane Challenge and Orthodox Response in Dostoevsky's 'Crime and Punishment'* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008).

[78] Quenot, 106.

[79] Ibid., 106.

[80] See Luke 17:21.

The pawnbroker's state is especially tragic because he never gets to the essence of his spiritual quest. He mentions early in his narrative that in his apartment he has a personal *kiot* with a burning icon lamp. As a side note he mentions: "ever since I opened my pawnshop I've kept an icon lamp burning" [у меня всегда, как открыл кассу, лампадка горела].[83] This outward expression of religious faith is commendable, but its sincerity is called into question once he tells his readers precisely when he lit the icon lamp – the day when he opened his business. The readers are left to wonder whether the burning icon lamp is a symbol of his faith or a sort of insurance against a financial misfortune.

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[81] Isaiah 44:17-18.

[82] Isaiah 44:17-18.

[83] Dostoevsky, 682 [24:8].

The ambiguity of the pawnbroker's attitude towards icons is further reinforced when later in the story he admits that he cannot pray to an icon. It happens the first time right after his wife's nervous breakdown. He stays up all night to watch and take care of her, and several times during the night he tries to pray but fails: "I knelt to pray to God, but jumped up again" [Я становился молиться Богу, но вскакивал опять.][84] The second instance is described earlier in the text, but it takes place after the suicide. The pawnbroker, still shocked by the recent events, says: "I spent five minutes on my knees in prayer. I wanted to pray for an hour, but I kept thinking and thinking, and all my thoughts were painful. My head aches – so how can I pray? It would only be a sin!" [Молился на коленях пять минут, а хотел молиться час, но всё думаю, думаю, и всё больные мысли, и больная голова, – чего ж тут молиться – один грех!][85] His inability to pray to God is contrasted by his desire to worship his wife that was expressed earlier and that is repeated again when his wife is lying in bed unconscious: "I got down on my knees but did not dare kiss her feet while she slept (without her permission!)" [Я становился на колени, но не смел целовать ее ног у спящей (без ее-то воли!).][86]

The brief and calamitous marriage of the pawnbroker and the meek heroine results in the woman's suicide, and the author titles the last two chapters of the story "I Understand All Too Well" and "Only Five Minutes Too Late." Because of the narrator's repeated references to his own blindness, both of these statements may raise suspicion on the readers' part. The narrator of the story attributes his wife's decision to commit suicide to "[a]n impulse, a passing fancy" [внезапность и фантазия][87]; however, the author gives his readers an opportunity to evaluate the validity of the narrator's conviction by showing from various viewing points the heroine's actions during the last few moments of her life.

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[84] Ibid., 709 [24:29].

[85] Ibid., 701. [24:22]

[86] Ibid., 709. [24:29]

Though we already know that we receive our information from an oblivious narrator and therefore must pay careful attention to the details that he provides us, we need to do even more work when considering the story's culmination. Speaking of Dostoevsky's other work, Antony Johae suggests that "[i]f we are fully to appreciate the significance of [an event], it will need to be visualized in more detail than has been directly represented [in the text]."[88] To put it another way, in order to get a complete mental image of a scene, we need to examine the events from within the narrative, to insert ourselves into the narrative as it were, and to try to become witnesses on the ground so we can notice things that are present in the scene even if they are not directly mentioned by the narrator.

When the suicide takes place, the pawnbroker is absent. By the time he arrives at the scene, his wife is already lying on the ground with a crowd gathering around her. The narrator later pieces together what happened based on the information that he receives from two sources: his servant Lukerya and eyewitnesses in the courtyard. Had he returned sooner and actually entered the apartment, he probably would have seen what Lukerya saw: the icon taken out of the *kiot* and placed on the table as if the Meek One has been praying before it [барыня как будто сейчас только перед ним молилась], his wife standing on a window sill. Lukerya recalls:

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[87] Ibid., 716. [24:34]

[88] Antony Johae, "Towards an Iconography of Dostoevsky's 'Crime and Punishment,'" *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. by George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), 174.

> and I saw that she'd climbed up on the windowsill and was standing upright in the open window her back to me, holding the icon. My heart just sank inside me, and I shouted, "Ma'am, ma'am!" She heard me and made a move as if to turn toward me, but didn't. She took a step, pressed the icon to her bosom, and leapt out the window!
>
> и вдруг вижу, она стала на окно и уж вся стоит, во весь рост, в отворённом окне, ко мне спиной, в руках образ держит. Сердце у меня тут же упало, кричу: "Барыня, барыня!" Она услышала, двинулась было повернуться ко мне, да не повернулась, а шагнула, образ прижала к груди и - и бросилась из окошка![89]

By taking the icon out of the icon case mounted on the wall, the heroine reduces the distance between herself and the sacred image. She then places it on the table, and if Lukerya is correct and the heroine did pray in front of the icon just moments before Lukerya enters the room, then we should assume that the heroine knelt down in front of the icon, thus further reducing the distance between her own face and the *lik* depicted in the icon, which in turn would create an even more intimate bond between herself and the icon.

After kneeling in front of the icon, the heroine gets up, takes the icon into her hands, and proceeds in an upward motion. First she pensively stands by the window, leaning against the wall. Then, as soon as she steps up onto the windowsill, she becomes visible to people located in the courtyard and the other wing of the building. If the readers mentally – and very quickly – leave Lukerya in the room and position themselves outside the apartment, in the courtyard, the scene becomes even more striking. Those who in a few seconds will rush to the spot where the heroine would land are probably standing outside when they suddenly hear a window open, possibly Lukerya yelling, and then see that up above them a young woman is standing, framed by the window casement. Windows, doorframes, and mirrors are commonly used as ekphrastic devices that set what is inside apart from the outside world.[90] Such is the case here as well. The heroine assumes her ultimately iconic state when she stands within the frame of the window that, like an icon, will soon open, at least to her, into the metaphysical realm. The icon of the Bogoroditsa[91] that she is holding in her hands becomes an image within an image. The heroine becomes one with the icon and in effect becomes an icon herself. The people located on a lower plane, in the courtyard, are looking up at the heroine on a higher plane and at this moment resemble worshippers standing before and looking up at an icon in an icon case. If an icon is a meeting place between two realms, at this moment the heroine stands exactly on a threshold before she, as Lukerya puts it, "steps out" [шагнула] of the physical reality into the spiritual.

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[89] Dostoevsky, 713. [24:33]

The moment when the heroine becomes an icon is significant in two ways. On the one hand, this is when her meekness, initially asserted in the title of the story, becomes most apparent. Prior to this event, the narrator's opinion of the heroine as a proud young woman conflicted with the author's vision of her. Yet by visually manifesting her iconicity, the author makes the heroine almost a saintly figure who submits her own will to the Divine power. She not so much kills herself as merely walks off into the unknown world in which she believes and where she hopes to find peace. On the other hand, it becomes apparent just how mistaken the narrator was on her account. His attempts at first to mold her and later to worship her are equally futile because neither of these endeavors can facilitate the spiritual healing that he yearns for. As an iconic personage, the heroine could bring him closer to the source of healing and salvation – to God – but she cannot force him to see her as such. In the end, his absence at the moment when the suicide takes place underscores the impossibility of his salvation.

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[90] For example, Gogol's story "Rome," Kaverin's novel *Artist Unknown* and Tarkovsky's film *Mirror*, despite apparent stylistic differences, are full of such examples.

[91] Dostoevsky uses the word "obraz," not "obrazok," which suggests that its size was considerable and therefore very visible to the people in the courtyard.

According to the Russian Orthodox tradition, prior to a burial the arms of the deceased person are folded on her chest, and an icon is placed into the person's hands. Ollivier notes that the heroine holds the icon in her hands as "a way of neutralizing, of sublimating the taking of life condemned by the Church,"[92] because while suicides are buried outside a cemetery and without icons, the heroine "seems to have anticipated this moment so that, even though she has committed suicide, she is buried with her icon."[93] Her final step, then, appears to be an act of subtle defiance against the Orthodox ritual and social norms; yet at the same time it can be seen as a way of overcoming the religious tradition designed for this world and asserting the hope that the heavenly law will be able to accommodate even her because of her trust in the power of the icon.

Dostoevsky's initial idea of titling his story "A Girl with an Icon" reflects the author's impressions from the unusual suicide about which he read in a newspaper. Yet it appears that what he produced in the end is a narrative that presents a person who goes through the complex psychological process of giving up her own pride and beginning to trust in the higher power that is capable of overlooking her disobedience and granting her the peace that she is searching for. Meekness comes as a result of an inner struggle. Just like Maria Borisova, the meek one dies because "it was simply a matter of being unable to live any longer" [просто – стало нельзя жить].[94] In the narrator's mind, however, she remains an example of a proud woman lacking any sort of originality, similar to the daughter of the Russian emigrant who poisoned herself with chloroform. He insists: "It is lack of originality, and only that, that has been the ruin of women. And so, I repeat: what if you do point to that table out there? Is it something original that's lying on the table? Oh-h-h!" [Женщин погубила одна лишь неоригинальность. И что ж, повторяю, что вы мне указываете там на столе? Да разве это оригинально, что там на столе? О-о!][95]

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[92] Ollivier, 62-3.

[93] Ibid., 63.

[94] Dostoevsky, 653. [23:146]

Dostoevsky's narrator suspects that his wife is "[o]ne of the new generation" [нового направления][96] but because she still has "a good deal of innocence" [много невинного],[97] she is not fully invested in political questions. She presents two conflicting ideas: one springs from her traditional religious upbringing and the other is inflicted upon her by contemporary materialism. It is important to notice that while Lukerya states that prior to the suicide "her icon … had been removed from the icon case and was standing before her on the table; the mistress, it seemed, had just been praying before it" [образ её … вынут, стоит перед нею на столе, а барыня как будто сейчас только перед ним молилась],[98] we do not know for sure whether she indeed prayed. Dostoevsky leaves this ambiguity in the text, and the reader has to decide whether to accept the narrator's interpretation of the heroine's actions or to look deeper into her character in order to understand what it is that moved her to commit suicide. While the narrator insists that his wife is a proud woman, the author, starting with the very title of the story, invites the readers to try to understand in what way the heroine showed her meekness, before and especially after her suicide. The suicide becomes the riddle that the narrator, who is prone to position himself as a riddle, is incapable of solving.

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[95] Ibid., [24:16]

[96] Ibid., 653. [4:9]

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid., 712. [24:32]

When the pawnbroker laments being five minutes too late, arguing, though not convincingly even to himself, that his wife killed herself on a whim, he honestly believes that he would have been able to prevent the suicide. However, what he actually misses is a chance to see his wife in her ultimately iconic state. By the time he gets on the scene, the window is empty. All he sees is a dying body on the ground. In the few hours that ensue, he experiences disbelief, denial, defiance, and despair. Following the suicide, the pawnbroker "realizes that he loved her,"[99] but it is hard to determine whether he understands that it is he who "wanted to destroy the divine principle in her" by attempting to mold her according to his own concept of magnanimity.[100] Here his newly discovered iconophilia clashes with the attitude of iconophobia that he has been exhibiting all along. When the pawnbroker reflects on the last few moments of his wife's life, he is gradually, and this time permanently, overcome by blindness. New scales develop where the old ones used to be. He thinks back on the moment when he stood in front of his dying wife, unaware of who else is present at the scene:

> Lukerya was there, but I didn't see her. She tells me she spoke to me. I only remember some fellow shouting to me that "there wasn't but a cupful of blood came out of her mouth, you could hold it in your hand!" And he showed me the blood there on the paving stone. I think I touched the blood and smeared the end of my finger with it; I recall looking at my finger while he kept on: "You could hold it in your hand!"
>
> Лукерья тут была, а я не видал. Говорит, что говорила со мной. Помню только того мещанина: он всё кричал мне, что "с горстку крови изо рта вышло, с горстку, с горстку!", и указывал мне на кровь

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[99] Ollivier, 63.

[100] Ibid., 63.

> тут же на камне. Я, кажется, тронул кровь пальцем, запачкал палец, гляжу на палец (это помню), а он мне всё: "С горстку, с горстку!"[101]

He is looking, but not seeing. Here Dostoevsky creates a contrast between the visions of the narrator and of the tradesman who happens to be close by. The tradesman notices the small amount of blood, as if expecting that a fall from the fourth floor should produce a gorier result. Later the narrator also observes: "when she fell, she didn't break anything, she wasn't disfigured!" [ничего не размозжила, не сломала!][102] and even wonders if it is possible to not bury her. Michel Quenot explains that there is very little blood painted on Russian icons,[103] and that when it comes to depicting deceased persons in an icon, "[t]he characteristic absence of realism [or naturalism] serves to emphasize the spiritualization which is taking place."[104] Similarly, the tradesman's observation that only a handful of blood came out draws the readers' attention to the heroine's transformation from a mortal to an immortal state. By contrast, when the narrator first sees his wife just a few moments after the fall, his attention is drawn to *his own* body. With his finger, he touches her blood, probably kneeling beside her. His mind is so clear on this specific account that he repeats the same word three times: "I think I touched the blood and smeared the end of my finger with it; I recall looking at my finger" [Я, кажется, тронул кровь пальцем, запачкал палец, гляжу на палец (это помню).][105] The shock that he goes through narrows the scope of his vision. He wants to retreat into his corner and from there to neither see nor hear anything.

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[101] Ibid., 714. [24:33]

[102] Ibid., 714. [24:35]

[103] Contrast that, for example, with such work as Caravaggio's "Salome with the Head of John the Baptist." Such explicitness in the depiction of physical suffering is unacceptable in an Orthodox icon.

[104] Quenot, 87.

[105] Ibid., 714. [24:33]

When narrator begins his tale, there are moments of insight when he turns his attention away from himself and talks about his wife as an independent human being that lives outside of his schema; yet as he proceeds with his account, his capacity for empathy or any kind of meaningful human interaction is shrinking. He thinks about the servant's account of his wife's final moments, and continues to justify himself:

> And what of the fact that she prayed before the icon? That doesn't mean she was saying her prayers just before dying. The moment lasted no more than ten minutes, perhaps; the decision was made just while she was standing by the wall, her head resting against her arm, and smiling. The thought flew into her head, made her dizzy and – and she couldn't resist it.
>
> Say what you like, but this is a clear case of misunderstanding. She could have gone on living with me.
>
> I was too late!!!
>
> Что ж такое, что перед образом молилась? Это не значит, что перед смертью. Всё мгновение продолжалось, может быть, всего только каких-нибудь десять минут, всё решение - именно когда у стены стояла, прислонившись головой к руке, и улыбалась. Влетела в голову мысль, закружилась и - и не могла устоять перед нею.
>
> Тут явное недоразумение, как хотите. Со мной еще можно бы жить.
>
> Опоздал!!![106]

Accusing his dead wife of a lack of originality and at the same time feeling terror at the prospect of having to live in an empty apartment again, the pawnbroker concludes his narrative with a series of rhetorical questions:

> What do I care for your laws now? What do I care for your customs and your manners, your life, your state, your religion? Let your judge judge me, let them bring me to court, to your public court, and I will say that I don't acknowledge any of it. The judge will shout, "Be silent, sir!" And I will shout in reply: "What force do you have that can compel me now to obey?"
>
> Что мне теперь ваши законы? К чему мне ваши обычаи, ваши нравы, ваша жизнь, ваше государство, ваша вера? Пусть судит меня ваш

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[106] Ibid., 714. [24:34]

> судья, пусть приведут меня в суд, в ваш гласный суд, и я скажу, что я не признаю ничего. Судья крикнет: "Молчите, офицер!" А я закричу ему: "Где у тебя теперь такая сила, чтобы я послушался?"[107]

Finally, he exclaims: "Why did this blind, immutable force destroy what was dearest to me? Why do I need your laws now? I will withdraw from your world." ["Зачем мрачная косность разбила то, что всего дороже? Зачем же мне теперь ваши законы? Я отделяюсь."[108] It is hard to tell whose inertia he is referring to. In keeping with his view of his wife as a proud and naïve young woman who has fallen under the influence of materialistic ideas, the narrator may be thinking of the type of "straightforwardness" that became unbearable to the daughter of the Russian emigrant who killed herself. Nevertheless, another kind of inertia may be at play here – the one that the pawnbroker succumbs to as he continues to see himself as the center of his universe existing in a Dostoevskian "corner," separately from society. The narrator is either unwilling or unable to move and to change his vantage point on himself and the people around him. His final words are: "No, in all seriousness, when they take her away tomorrow, what will become of me?" [Нет, серьезно, когда ее завтра унесут, что ж я буду?][109] He is terrified at the thought that when he is finally left all alone, his innermost self will be revealed to him, and he will see not the mystery or the riddle that he wanted his wife to see in him, but a complete void.

Ekphrasis in "The Meek One" functions on more than one level. On the literary level, it establishes a link between the heroine and the icon and opens to the readers the dimension of the heroine's character that is most important for the narrator, but that is also overlooked by him. On a metaliterary level, it puts the readers in the position where they have to decide how they perceive and judge the narrator. This is especially important when we are dealing with "notional ekphrasis."

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[107] Ibid., 714. [24:35]

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid.

In "The Meek One" the icon of the Bogoroditsa is an example of notional ekphrasis that readers could recognize based on other similar images they may have seen in real life; however, since the readers have to do the work of creating a composite mental image based on familiar examples, each reader will have his own unique icon in mind. Here, sensitivity becomes especially important because Dostoevsky pursues an edifying purpose. Even when he talks about the pawnbroker, the character who more often than not comes across as a selfish tormentor, it is very unlikely that the author wants the audience to completely condemn him. Clearly, the pawnbroker insists on looking at the world with his own eyes, but we as readers recognize that he is blind to begin with. Instead of recognizing that his wife, like an icon, may point him towards salvation, and that he himself possesses inherent worth, he, during his darker moments, abuses her emotionally and, during his brighter moments, clings to her as a source of validation of his own existence, thus going from one extreme to the other and never finding spiritual balance.

In a way, the two young women of whose suicides Dostoevsky read in the summer and the fall of 1976 were also searching for spiritual balance – perhaps one did so more consciously than the other. Dostoevsky writes that, in his opinion, the emigrant's daughter died simply because "she could not get enough air and she began to suffocate" [просто стало душно жить, в роде того, как бы воздуху не достало],[110]and for

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[110] Dostoevsky, 653. [23:146]

Borisova "it was simply a matter of being unable to live any longer" [просто – стало нельзя жить, 'бог не захотел' и – умерла, помолившись.][111] Neither of these suicides can be justified in any way, but both of them indicate that the women who committed them were unhappy in one way or another, were searching for something that they could not even articulate. The difference between them and the narrator of the story is in the fact that they, together with the heroine of the story, were not seeking self-affirmation at someone else's expense.

Olivier states that throughout his writing Dostoevsky remains true to the Byzantine understanding of the icon as the image that is inseparably linked to the concept of Incarnation: "every holy image is linked to the archetype and is one of the deepest ways of religious expression."[112] The heroine is aware that her icon is linked to the Bogoroditsa herself. Moreover, through her own iconicity she is linked with the Bogoroditsa and her role as a protectress. The pawnbroker, on the other hand, is not only blind to this connection, but also accuses the meek one of being blind. He wants her to see the paradise that, supposedly, is within his soul. Her untimely death destroys his plans, and he accuses her of being blind: "She cannot see! She's dead; she cannot hear! You don't know what a paradise I would have created for you. I had a paradise in my soul and I would have planted it all around you!" [Слепая, слепая! Мертвая, не слышит! Не знаешь ты, каким бы раем я оградил тебя. Рай был у меня в душе, я бы насадил его кругом тебя!][113] In the pawnbroker's mind, by being silent, stern, and mysterious, he presents himself as an icon in a very corrupt form – the image that contains a deeper meaning, that points to something greater, and that needs to be understood on a spiritual level. Yet the pawnbroker focuses all of his attention on his own existence. He wants to think that the spiritual depth that can be found behind the veneer he so carefully constructs can become visible to the meek one once she learns true magnanimity. His stern silence, in a corrupt way, is meant to function as an "invitation/encouragement [приглашение-побуждение] towards a spiritual vision,"[114] to use Heller's words, but the "paradise" that the pawnbroker longs for and that he wishes for his wife to see is simply an impossibility.

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[111] Ibid.

[112] Ollivier, 54.

[113] Dostoevsky, 716. [24:35]

Thus, the pawnbroker fails on two accounts: at attempting to become an icon for his wife and at perceiving her iconicity. The pawnbroker realizes all too late that his attempts to "instill … breadth right into her heart"[привить широкость прямо к сердцу][115] and to bring her "to stand before [him] in ardent homage because of [his] sufferings" [чтоб она стояла предо мной в мольбе за мои страдания][116] were futile.

The question that remains for the readers to answer is whether they in their turn accept the author's "invitation/inducement" and gain "a spiritual vision as a higher form of perception of this realm and a perception of a higher realm" while the very disagreeable character-narrator stands as a filter between them and the tragic heroine of the story. Dostoevsky sets up a framework in which the narrator is both an obstacle and a facilitator of the readers' sensitivity.

In his *Diary of a Writer*, Dostoevsky states that "what matters is not the subject but the eye. If there is an eye, a subject will be found; if there is no eye, if you are blind, you won't find anything in any subject."[не в предмете дело, а в глазе: есть глаз – и предмет найдётся, нет у вас глаза, слепы вы, – и ни в каком предмете ничего не отыщите.][117] Later, he advises against a simplistic and "linear" view of things: "Simplicity does not change; simplicity moves in a straight line and is arrogant above all. Simplicity is the enemy of analysis." [Простота не меняется, простота "прямолинейна," исверх того – высокомерна. Простота враг анализа.][118] The complexity of the heroine's inner world is unbearable to the pawnbroker; yet while he positions himself as a deep and complex character, he exhibits such arrogance and bluntness that it eliminates any possibility of anyone considering him as such. At the same time, the pawnbroker's response with benevolent yet stern silence is his attempt to present himself as a pseudo-icon. In the end, what Dostoevsky presents in "The Meek One" is a story of a young, abused orphan who possesses religious upbringing yet who may be susceptible to modern-day social philosophies and a weak man yearning for moral nobility yet unable to let go of his wounded pride. One chooses to escape her mortal circumstances while meekly submitting herself to the Divine will while the other is confined to the state of emotional isolation from which he cannot escape.

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[114] Heller, qtd. in Mednis, 59.

[115] Dostoevsky, 688. [24:13]

[116] Ibid., 689. [24:14]

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[117] Ibid., 647. [23:141]

[118] Ibid., 650. [23:143]

Chapter Three

Mamin-Sibiriak, *Shooting Stars*: The Adventures of Pandora in St. Petersburg

Не тишина - немота.
Усталость и ломота:
голова, голова болит.
Ветер в листве.
Ветер волосы шевелит
на больной голове.

Иосиф Бродский

As James Francis demonstrates in his essay "Metal Maidens, Achilles' Shield, and Pandora: The Beginnings of 'Ekphrasis,'" in order to properly understand the nature of ekphrasis, one ought to "distinguish ancient ekphrasis from modern notions to identify aspects of modern theories of ekphrasis which are inapplicable to, and even contradicted by, the ancient uses of the term."[1] Namely, he identifies two points of divergence between the ancient and the modern approaches to ekphrasis. The first difference is in the mode of delivery, for "ancient writing about ekphrasis occurs specifically in the context of rhetoric."[2] In other words, ekphrasis was primarily the kind of genre that was grounded in "oral delivery and aural reception."[3] Second, mimesis was never the goal of ancient ekphrasis. Whereas Stephen Bann states that "Ekphrasis as a genre of writing is dependent first of all on the risky assumption that the visual work or art can be translated into the terms of verbal discourse without remainder,"[4] Francis explains that "no such claim to 'complete adequacy' is ever made in any of the ancient sources, and one can readily see that any such contention would be impossible."[5]

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[1] Francis, 4.

[2] Ibid., 5.

[3] Ibid.

This combination of the oral mode of delivery, the recognition of the power of an unmediated visual perception, and the striving to convey the impression received through vision give us yet another way of understanding ekphrasis. Particularly, this is the approach that is taken by D.N. Mamin-Sibiriak in his work *Shooting Stars* [*Падающие звёзды*, 1899], a novel about the love of an aging Russian sculptor for a mute English girl.

The novel *Shooting Stars*, despite its unusual plot and its peculiar insights into Russian culture, has been studied very little; nevertheless, it occupies an important place in the present discussion of ekphrasis for a number of reasons. First, similarly to the two works that were examined in the previous chapters, the novel presents to the readers' attention a male protagonist in a state of crisis and a silent heroine who appears to exacerbate his emotional anguish. Secondly, it expands our focus by bringing into the discussion the problem of sculptural representation as opposed to the painterly one. Traditionally, sculpture was shunned by the Russian Orthodox church because of the former's apparent, albeit relative, mimeticism. While painted religious ikons are obviously anti-naturalistic, the heightened sense of realism in sculpture was considered a distraction from the spiritual side of a represented subject and therefore a form of deception. Finally, the task of the protagonist in *Shooting Stars* is two-fold: he not only creates visual art, but is forced to speak on its behalf in order to explain it to an uncomprehending viewer.

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[4] Stephen Bann, *The true vine: on visual representation and the western tradition* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 28.

[5] Francis, 5.

Not only does the novel's protagonist have to struggle with insensitive viewers, but, on a metaliterary level, the novel itself had trouble reaching its readers. In Russian literary studies Mamin-Sibiriak (1852-1912) is commonly known either as a novelist whose works reveal the dismal life conditions of factory workers at the onset of industrialism in the Urals of the late nineteenth century or as a story teller who created magical tales with distinct local flavor to entertain and instruct children. Depending on a critic's ideological leanings and literary tastes, Mamin-Sibiriak's oeuvre has been either praised for its class consciousness or derided for wordiness and conventionality. For example, Maxim Gorky, known for his antipathy towards agricultural labor, considered Mamin-Sibiriak to be one of the "two very important writers" (Gleb Uspenskii being the other) of the late nineteenth century who, although close to the *Narodniki*, were "far more far-sighted socially and possessed far more talent … indeed more than even all of the *Narodniki* taken together." [более зоркими социально и талантливее всех, даже вместе взятых, народников].[6] By contrast, Western criticism of Mamin-Sibiriak's work has been much more restrained, although the writer's interest in regional affairs made him known as the writer who "revels in Ural scenes,"[7] as Leo Wiener noted in 1919, and who was Chekhov's "fellow-provincial, the Zola of the Urals,"[8] as observed by Donald Rayfield in 2000. Vladimir Nabokov, in his typical directness, was much less gracious in his characterization of Mamin-Sibiriak when he put him in the same group as "Goncharov, Grigorovich, Korolenko … and other stupefying bores (comparable to American 'regional writers')."[9]

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[6] Maxim Gorky, "How I Learnt to Write," *The Art and Craft of Writing*, ed. by Maxim Gorky, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Alexei Tolstoy, Konstantin Fedin, 5-42, trans. Alex Miller (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2000), 16.

[7] Leo Wiener, "Russian Literature," *The Encyclopedia Americana: A Library of Universal Knowledge* 24 (Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, 1919), 21.

[8] Donald Rayfield, *Anton Chekhov: A Life* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 366.

Anthony Briggs offers an explanation of why Mamin-Sibiriak's work is largely forgotten nowadays. He sees it in the fact that following Pushkin, the Russian literary scene was "distinguished by a wealth of good prose-writing unsurpassed in world literature" that lead to "two generations of new writers [who] poured out their ideas in a succession of stories and novels that would take the world by storm," which in turn was "followed by a succession of capable storytellers whose misfortune it was to be merely talented in an age of greatness."[10] Mamin-Sibiriak happened to be among the "merely talented" ones who today are not particularly known outside of Russia, "though their words are substantial and they might have been celebrated if they had not been eclipsed by three luminaries [Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and Tolstoy] whose works are now known to educated people the world over."[11]

What complicates the study of Mamin-Sibiriak is that among his regional works and children's tales we find a few novels that do not seem to fit the overall pattern. Some of these works were published in a posthumous edition of Mamin-Sibiriak's collected works produced by A.F. Marks between 1915 and 1917. In the book form, the novel *Shooting Stars* first appeared as part of this collection, along with such works as *A Wild Torrent* [*Бурный поток*, 1886], *A Birthday Boy* [*Именинник*, 1888], *Spring Thunderstorms*

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[9] Nabokov, Vladimir, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (New York: Vintage International, 1989), 160.

[10] A.D.P Briggs, "Introduction," in *Karamazov Brothers* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, translated by Constance Garnett (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2007), vii.

[11] Ibid.

[*Весенние грозы*, 1893], *Untitled* [*Без названия*, 1893], *Early Shoots* [*Ранние всходы*, 1896], and *A Crowd-Puller* [*Общий любимец публики*, 1898]. Gurii Schennikov explains that *Shooting Stars* and other novels like it did not have much success with readers not because these works were inadequate from the artistic point of view or lacking in quality when compared to the masterpieces that Russian literature could boast at the time, but because in those works Mamin-Sibiriak turns towards some of the more traditional themes such as the perennial ideological inquiries of the intelligentsia, the degrading influence of the capital on a society, and the problems of moral upbringing of the younger generation.[12] Mamin-Sibiriak also raises in *Shooting Stars* the question of validity of Russia's claims to being an enlightened country and, on a different plane, he explores the conflict that exists between artistic expression and consumer perception.

In the novel, Egor Burghardt is a famous Russian sculptor who has been trained in Italy and who now resides in St. Petersburg. Having obtained fame and riches through his art, Burghardt is going through a midlife crisis. He now feels that his artistic talent is on the wane and is terrified at the thought of being unable to finish what he has begun. A frequent guest at drinking parties, some of which are hosted by his rich patron, Krasavin, he mingles with actors whom he admires and art critics whom he at times despises, at times fears. It is during one of such parties that Burghardt meets the mute English girl, Miss Morton, and fascinated by her apparent purity and strangeness, falls in love with her. She responds favorably to his signs of affection, and he hopes that this love will bring back his inspiration and revive his talent; yet this dream is shattered when he finds out that the girl is pregnant with his patron's child. At the end of the novel Burghardt gives up art, settles down in his country estate with his wife and their little son, and takes up farming.

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[12] See G.K. Shchennikov, "'Vtoroi riad' romanov D.N. Mamina-Sibiriaka," *Izvestiia Ural'skogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, no. 24 (2002), 29-39.

The Levinesque ending of the novel seems to make the work fit perfectly with the populist agenda of *Russian Wealth*, the St. Petersburg literary and scientific journal in which *Shooting Stars* made its first appearance in 1899. After all, the populists believed that the Russian intelligentsia had lost touch with its national roots and that it would find its own place in the world by reaching out to the folk element of society and by adopting its age-old wisdom and world outlook.[13] Although Mamin-Sibiriak's collaboration with *Russian Wealth* betrays his temporary concessions to the populist ideology, by the time the novel was published in its entirety, the author had accepted capitalism as an accomplished fact of Russian reality and did not think that any reversion to the agricultural way of life for Russia was possible.[14] Moreover, the few examples of Mamin-Sibiriak's regard for populist ideas can be found in the novel, they were not convincing enough for the journal's subscribers. Despite the fact that at the time of the novel's publication Mamin-Sibiriak was one of the most published authors with a "large, steady readership,"[15] the publication of the novel was not a successful undertaking. The subscribers of *Russian Wealth* found that the decadent elements scattered throughout the work, such as the lavish parties and the depravity that leads to the insanity of some characters and depression in others, far outweighed in significance any populist ideas expressed in the novel.[16] Maxim Gorky, despite his high esteem of Mamin-Sibiriak's talent, called *Shooting Stars* a "bad work" [плохое произведение].[17] Soviet critics preferred to ignore this novel altogether, and even as late as 2002, in an essay devoted to Mamin-Sibiriak's less famous novels, a critic reduced the whole discussion of this particular work to classifying it as "strange" and leaving it at that.[18]

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[13] Despite its ties with the populists, *Russian Wealth* was hardly the main mouthpiece for this ideological movement, which, in its turn, allowed the journal to reach out to a wider, less politically involved, audience.

[14] See I.P. Viduetskaia's entry on Mamin-Sibiriak in *Russkie pisateli. Biobibliograficheskii slovar'*, ed. by P.A. Nikolaev (Moskva: Prosveshchenie, 1990), vol. 2.

[15] See Jeffrey Brooks, "Readers and Reading at the End of the Tsarist Era," *Literature and Society in imperial Russia, 1800-1914*, edited by William Mills Todd and Robert L. Belknap (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978): 105 and 114. Brooks, for example, states "The most published authors in 1898 were Pushkin, with over 50,000 copies priced over 30 kopecks, and Tolstoy, with 40,000. Both Nemirovich-Danchenko and the Siberian scene painter Mamin-Sibiriak also did quite well, with over 20,000 copies each. None of these writers clashed dramatically with the literary sensibilities of the educated reader; they all could be understood and appreciated."

Notwithstanding the dearth of critical response to the novel and despite the fact that, to date, *Shooting Stars* has been published only three times – as a series of installments in the journal *Russian Wealth* in 1899, as a separate volume in 1900, and as part of Marks' edition in 1917 – this work deserves a close examination as part of the present discussion of ekphrasis in Russian literature. The reason for this inclusion lies not only in the fact that the novel directly addresses the questions of artistic representation and spirituality, but, perhaps most importantly, because it does so by considering the place of sculpture in the Russian artistic tradition, the relationship between spirituality and plastic representation, and, finally, the viability of the very idea of Russian national culture.

Aside from the social problems that are explicated in the novel, Shchennikov identifies two more questions that, in his view, constitute the core of the aesthetic argument that Mamin-Sibiriak attempts to make in his novel. Shchennikov states the central problem of *Shooting Stars* is "the relationship between the outward and the inner beauty of a human being" [проблема соотношения внешней и внутренней красоты человека].[19] At the same time, the novel presents to the readers' attention "the problem of the irrationality of strong emotional outbursts that affect people in a destructive way – not only the love that drives one to madness, but also hatred towards another person" [проблема иррациональности сильных эмоциональных порывов, губительно действующих на людей – не только любви, сводящей с ума, но и ненависти к другому.][20] The solution for these two problems, Schennikov writes, is presented at the end of the novel, where Mamin-Sibiriak "expresses a deep faith in the power of human reason, enlightened by the ideal and able to overcome all the 'eclipses' of the soul, as well as in the saving power of selfless love" [выражает глубокую веру в силу человеческого разума, просветлённого идеалом и способного преодолеть все душевные «затмения», и в спасительную силу самоотверженной любви.][21]

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[16] A year after its publication in *Russian Wealth*, *Shooting Stars* came out in book form, and in 1917 it was included in a ten-volume edition of the author's collected works.

[17] Aleksandr Gruzdev, *D.N. Mamin-Sibiriak: kritiko-biografisheskii ocherk* (Moskva: Gos. izd-vo khudozh. lit-ry, 1958), 149.

[18] See Tamara Galeeva and Ramziia Galeeva, "D.N. Mamin-Sibiriak – khudozhnik," *Ural*, no. 11 (November, 2002).

The journey towards the triumph of the enlightened human reason is a circuitous one, and the novel's protagonist has to go through apathy, despair, infatuation, and disappointment before he reaches a state of emotional balance. Admittedly, the delicacy of this balance has to be guarded by a circle of Burghardt's closest friends, which makes the ending of *Shooting Stars* uncertain, yet much more hopeful than the condition in which we find Burghardt in the opening scene of the novel.

The narrative begins in a tavern where Burghardt is spending time in the company of the people who are constantly present in his life, and with whom he would prefer to have nothing in common: critics, actors, singers, Burghardt's patron, and the patron's friends:

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[19] See Schennikov.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Schennikov.

> In a private room of the fashionable country tavern The Cradling the atmosphere was befuddling. It smelled of oranges, liquor, acrid smoke of expensive cigars, and simply of people who have been drinking much and for a long time. Burghardt felt that his head had started spinning heavily, and the room went spinning with it.
>
> В отдельном кабинете модного загородного кабака «Кружало» стояла какая-то одуряющая атмосфера. Пахло апельсинами, ликёрами, едким дымом дорогих сигар и просто людьми, которые долго и много пили. Бургардт чувствовал, как у него начала тяжело кружиться голова, а вместе с ней и вся комната.[22]

Burghardt struggles to find physical balance as he, obviously inebriated, is attempting to leave the room in order to get some fresh air outside. He knocks over a chair: "Apparently, the chair was very drunk, because it swayed and fell on the floor, and Burghardt barely kept his balance, grabbing onto the table." [По-видимому, стул был очень пьян потому что покачнулся и полетел на пол, а Бургардт едва удержался, схватившись за стол.][23]

Although the novel is delivered in third person, the omniscient narrator focuses on Burghardt's thoughts and impressions frequently enough to give the readers a rather clear idea of the protagonist's inner struggle – more so than of other characters in the novel. The narrator stops short of assuming the protagonist's point of view and explicitly identifying with the protagonist; yet the more he speaks on behalf of the character, the more insight we gain into Burghardt's thoughts and feelings. As the party proceeds, the readers are introduced to three women who represent three kinds of beauty and whose presence in Burghardt's life allows him to formulate his understanding of female beauty. Shura, his constant model, has a beautiful body: she "was built like a statue, and only her hands ruined the impression: they were small and tender, but with fingers that were too short." [была сложена, как статуя, и её портили только руки, маленькие и нежные, но с слишком короткими пальцами].[24] At the party, Shura smiles "simply out of politeness, because she could never understand a joke." [простоизвежливости, потомучтоникогданепонималашуток.][25] She and Burghardt do not communicate at the party, for she is busy trying to charm his patron. Another woman, Olga Spiridonovna, is an aging ballerina whose bust Burghardt has been trying to sculpt for some time. As he leaves the table, he steps on her dress and spills a drink on it. She hisses at him for ruining her dress, and he calls her a witch.

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[22] Dmitri Mamin-Sibiriak, *Padaiushchiia zvezdy* (Moskva: Izdanie knigoprodavtsa M.V. Kliukina, 1990), 3. My translation.

[23] Ibid., 4.

The third woman, Marina Ignatievna, is waiting for Burghardt on a balcony, away from the noisy crowd. When Burghardt finally reaches the balcony, she tries to nurse him back to at least somewhat sober state by giving mix a mixture of soda water and liquid ammonia. At this time, the narrator makes the readers privy not only to the conversation that takes place between Burghardt and Marina Ignatievna, but also to Burghardt's thoughts about this woman:

> He looked at her, and suddenly he began to feel sorry for this Marina Ignatievna, wrapped by the thoughtful mood of her own moonless night. After all she is beautiful, and even very beautiful, beautiful in truth, with real pure-bred beauty. Her height itself counts for so much. And her face, thin and expressive, with a hidden tenderness in every motion, with the impeccable profile of an expensive cameo, with a lively frame of slightly curly light brown hair, soft like silk, and with a small mouth—this was a beauty, resembling a coin made out of a precious hight quality metal.

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[24] Ibid., 17.

[25] Ibid., 5

> Он посмотрел на неё, и ему вдруг сделалось жаль вот эту самую Марину Игнатьевну, охваченную раздумьем своей собственной безлунной ночи. А, ведь, она красива и даже очень красива, красива по-настоящему, красива настоящей породистой красотой. Один рост чего стоит. А лицо, тонкое и выразительное, с затаённой лаской в каждом движении, с безукоризненным профилем дорогой камеи, с живой рамой слегка вившихся, как шёлк, мягких русых волос, с маленьким ртом – это была красавица, напоминавшая монету из драгоценного металла высокой пробы.[26]

Later in the novel Burghardt explains to a friend of his that as a professional sculptor, he is trained to look at and for the outward beauty. He knows that Marina Ignatievna is in love with him, and she has been for some time. Even though he is aware of her fine spiritual qualities, his thoughts revolve primarily around her physical beauty and her ability to appreciate beauty in nature. After the party has moved from the tavern to a boat, Burghardt looks at the water and the night sky and thinks of Marina Ignatievna: "Yes, only she can understand this beauty… She has a feeling for nature." [Да, только она поймёт эту красоту… У неё есть чувство природы.][27] Yet in the course of the night, it is not Marina Ignatievna who produces the strongest impression on Burghardt.

After enjoying the view of the bay from the boat, Burghardt becomes irritated at the loud singing of the gypsies coming from the cabin. He walks back towards the cabin to express his displeasure to his patron, Krasavin, but suddenly stops in the doorway, shocked by what he sees: "Next to the patron of arts sat a slender young girl with blond hair and a striking face. She was looking at him and smiling. Her smile too was amazing, quickly appearing and just as quickly vanishing." [Около мецената сидела белокурая

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[26] Ibid., 10-1.

[27] Ibid., 23.

стройная девушка с удивительным лицом. Она смотрела на него и улыбалась – улыбка у неё была тоже удивительная, быстро появлявшаяся и так же быстро исчезавшая.][28] Astonished, Burghardt asks Marina Ignatievna:

> "Who is this?..."
> "I don't know…" - she responded dryly. "It looks like she is the new fancy of your chief. Why, are you shocked?"
> "Yes, this is something extraordinary… astounding…"
> "I only know that she is English…"
> The choir was howling wildly, the guitars were resounding, a hoarse baritone was drawing out some nonsensical roulade, and Burghardt kept looking at the blonde stranger and could not come to his senses.
>
> - Кто это?...
> - Не знаю… - сухо ответила та. – Кажется, новая прихоть вашего принципала. А что: поражены?
> - Да, что-то необыкновенное… изумительное…
> - Знаю одно, что англичанка…
> Хор дико завывал, гитары бренчали, хриплый баритон выводил какую-то нелепую руладу, а Бургардт всё смотрел на белокурую незнакомку и не мог прийти в себя…[29]

The stranger's name, as Burghardt will find out later, is Miss Morton. As he watches her, he notices something unusual about her behavior: "Krasavin was saying something to her, gesticulating more than usual, and she was smiling at him with an uncomprehending smile and was trying to explain to him something with her hands." [Красавин что-то такое ей говорил, жестикулируя сильнее обыкновенного, а она улыбалась ему непонимающей улыбкой и что-то такое старалась объяснить руками.][30] All of a sudden, Burghardt realizes the reason for this unusual manner of communication:

> "Good gracious! She is a mute!" Burghardt unwittingly cried out and, seized by horror, he clasped his hands.

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 24.

[30] Ibid.

> That exclamation caused everyone to laugh... Sakhanov approached Burghardt and, giving him a sugary smile, said to him:
>
> "Oh, Vasiatkin really is something, eh? This is all his doing. Truly, she is a mute. Who else would have such a happy thought?" …
>
> "Leave me, for heaven's sake…" Burghardt replied dryly, taking an unoccupied chair. "Where am I? What is this?"

> - Боже мой, да ведь она немая?! – невольно крикнул Бургардт, всплеснув руками от охватившего его ужаса…
>
> Это восклицание вызвало общий смех… К Бургардту подошёл Саханов и, слащаво улыбаясь, проговорил:
>
> - Нет, каков наш Васяткин, а? Ведь это его выдумка…
>
> - Оставь меня, ради Бога… - сухо ответил[31] Бургардт, занимая свободный стул. – Где я? Что это такое?[32]

In this scene, the description of Miss Morton's physical characteristics is reduced to a minimum. The narrator does not go beyond telling the readers that the girl is young and slender, that her features are striking, that she is English, and that she is mute. If the goal of this ekphrastic passage had been to describe the object in as much detail as possible so no mistake would be made about Miss Morton's external features, such as her height, the shape of her nose, the color of her eyes, etc., then this would be a failed exercise. Instead, the narrator's minimalist description provides allows him to focus on the impression that the protagonist receives when encountering the heroine for the first time. This approach to description takes us back to the original understanding of ekphrasis in which, as Michael Baxandall reminds us, "[t]he aim of ekphrasis in rhetoric has always been less to give a complete and accurate account of a particular object than to convey the effect that the perception of that object worked upon the viewer."[33]

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 25.

[33] See Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

Such a conveying of the effect is exactly what happens in the scene described above: while the protagonist is riveted by the sight of the girl, the narrator draws the readers' attention to the protagonist and to his reaction to the appearance of a stranger in the company. Miss Morton's arrival on the scene is *meant* to be impressive. Before, every party given by Krasavin resulted in the same kind of drunken debauchery as the one before it, and in Burghardt's memory they all have blended into one long sequence of sleepless nights spent with people whom he dislikes. This time, however, the apparent purity of Ms. Morton and the notorious depravity of the men with whom she now associates disgusts and enrages Burghardt and simultaneously reveals to him his own guilt by association. The next morning he confesses that he is "drunk, but not with wine… but with the previous night, drunk with this marvelous blonde little head, these maidenly, pure eyes, this mute mystery, a living sphinx." [пьян не вином …, а пьян вчерашним вечером, пьян этой чудной белокурой головкой, этими девичьими чистыми глазами, этой немой загадкой, живым сфинксом.]"[34]

For the purposes of plot development, Miss Morton is the catalyst that sets the events of the novel in motion. Vasiatkin, a "famous 'actors' friend'" [известный "другартистов"][35] has brought Miss Morton to the party with a specific plan in mind: by causing Krasavin to turn his attention to Miss Morton, Vasiatkin hopes to create a competitor for Shura, which will increase Vasiatkin's own chances of succeeding with Burghardt's former model. For Burghardt, however, Miss Morton's appearance causes him to begin to reevaluate his artistic goals and accomplishments. This peculiarity, so unexpected in the noisy environment where Burghardt meets her for the first time, immediately sets her apart from the rest of the crowd even more than the mere fact of her foreign origin would. Her beauty and her strangeness are elevated to a different plane by her muteness. In the trained eyes of a talented sculptor, she immediately becomes an ideal model.

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[34] Mamin-Sibiriak, 52.

[35] Ibid., 5.

By making the beautiful Miss Morton both English and mute, the author creates a heroine who cannot be any more attractive and at the same time any more incomprehensible for Burghardt. Beauty to him is the ultimate value of human existence. As Shchennikov notes, Burghardt "constantly seeks a higher, spiritual beauty that manifests itself in external forms, in the plasticity of the human body" [постоянно ищет высшую духовную красоту, проявляющуюся во внешних формах, впластике человеческого тела].[36] Burghardt genuinely believes in the correlation of the internal and the external factors. This applies especially to Burghardt's relationships with women – Shura, Marina Ignatievna, Olga Spiridonovna, and even his daughter Anita.

Burghardt's friend, Shipidin, imputes to him a shallow vision of women caused by a lack of pure love, let alone respect:

> your infatuation is a form of sensual insanity. It fades as soon as the sensuous hunger is satisfied. You have no true love because you lack true respect for a woman as a human being. All of you are addicted to sensual pleasure and you look at a woman with impure eyes. This is why your lauded art is impure...
>
> ваша влюблённость – чувственное помешательство. Оно сейчас же падает, как только чувственный голод получает своё удовлетворение. У вас нет истинной любви, потому что нет истинного уважения к женщине, как к человеку. Все вы – чувственники и смотрите на женщину нечистыми глазами, поэтому и ваше хвалёное искусство не чисто…[37]

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[36] See Schennikov.

[37] Mamin-Sibiriak, 56.

Burghardt knows that Shipidin is right, but he would rather not admit it. Nevertheless, the effects of Burghardt's esthetic views begin to affect his only daughter, Anita. The narrator explains:

> Papa Burghardt did was not deceiving himself when he found his daughter plain. In the early childhood Anita was a cute child, but she was ruined by smallpox, and that was a heavy blow for Burghardt who suffered doubly: both a father, and as an artist who due to his profession worshipped all beauty.
>
> Папа Бургардт не обманывал себя и находил дочь дурнушкой. В раннем детстве Анита росла прехорошеньким ребёнком, но её погубила оспа, и это было тяжёлым ударом для Бургардта, который страдал вдвойне – и как отец, и как художник, по своей профессии поклонявшийся всякой красоте.[38]

As a young woman, Anita feels painfully inadequate in the society of the women who visit their home, such as the actress Bochulskaia or the ballerina Olga Spiridonovna. The presence of Miss Morton brings only more pain to Anita. In a fit of desperation, Anita asks Burghardt a truly disturbing question:

> Papa, why am I so plain?... Girls who are born plain should be killed so they do not suffer for the rest of their lives. This, after all, papa, is unfair…
>
> Папа, зачем я такая некрасивая?...Девочек, которые родятся некрасивыми, нужно убивать, чтобы они не страдали всю свою жизнь. Это, наконец, папа, несправедливо…[39]

Burghardt attempts to console his daughter by saying that "There is an internal, deeper beauty" [Есть внутренняя, более глубокая красота][40] and that "all beauty is a matter of convention" [всякая красота – вещь условная], but he knows that he himself does not believe it and begins to sense that he "begins to sound dingenuous" [начинает брать фальшивый тон].[41] He is fully aware that he has accepted these conventionalities and that they guide not only his artistic endeavors, but even his personal interactions. For this reason, the extraordinary beauty of Miss Morton immediately propels her to the highest pedestal in the sculptor's imagination. In this regard, her Englishness becomes a necessary component of her charm by Burghardt's estimation.

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[38] Ibid., 44.

[39] Ibid., 100.

[40] Ibid.,

Burghardt is an Anglophile. His Slavic features, German name, Italian training, and even his inability to speak or understand the English language, do not prevent him from admiring the culture that, in his mind, is far superior to any other culture with which he comes in contact. Burghardt explains to his childhood friend Shipidin that his decision to hire an English spinster as a governess for his daughter Anita is motivated by the fact that only the English and the Romans evolved into higher types of humanity:

> Here, my friend, is an entire philosophical idea… the English… are a great nation that conquered the whole world… They are cruel—yes, because any power is cruel. But they have concentrated in themselves all the best qualities that could possibly be developed by our entire European civilization.
>
> Тут, брат, целая идея ... англичане … это великий народ, который завоевал целый мир … Они жестоки – да, потому что всякая сила жестока. Но они сконцентрировали в себе самые лучшие качества, какие только могла выработать вся наша ервопейская цивилизация.[42]

Burghardt wishes that his daughter would assimilate at least some English persistence, for "[a]n Englishwoman is the best woman, the highest anthropological type." [Английская женщина – самая лучшая женщина, высший антропологический тип.][43] It is completely unsurprising that he falls in love with Miss Morton as soon as he sees her. Burghardt's infatuation with Miss Morton, however, is doomed. Miss Morton's silence plays a key role in the unraveling of the idealized image of her that Burghardt creates in his mind.

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[41] Ibid., 100-1.

[42] Ibid., 11.

[43] Ibid., 45-46.

Unlike Pushkin's Dunia who is attractive, lively and talkative, yet who is rendered voiceless within the bounds of the narrative, and unlike Dostoevsky's meek woman who is endowed with both a voice and a point of view, but is silenced by the protagonist's erratic behavior towards her, in *Shooting Stars* Miss Morton is presented as a silent heroine because of her inherent physically inability to speak.

From her first appearance in the novel, Miss Morton is set apart from all other characters because of the uniqueness of her position and because of her statue-like qualities. The effect that Miss Morton produces on Burghardt and on every man at the party in the opening chapter of the novel can be compared to that of Pandora, the mythical female that Jean-Pierre Vernant describes as "[a] being fashioned out of clay moistened with water by Hephaistos at the request of Zeus and, in accordance with his instructions, designed to be offered to humans as a gift."[44] Though a human being, Miss Morton possesses a number of characteristics that explicitly make her Pandora-like.

Beautiful and silent, Pandora "exerts her irresistible power simply by being seen."[45] In Hesiod's *Theogony* 57-89, Pandora from the very beginning is presented as a being whose "appeal is purely visual,"[46] and Francis writes that "[w]hen she is led out in public for the first time, both gods and men are awestruck as soon as they lay eyes on her."[47] Like Pandora who was created by Hephaestus and is presented to humans, Miss

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[44] Jean-Pierre Vernant and Froma Zeitlin, "Semblances of Pandora: Imitation and Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (Spring 2011), 404.

[45] Francis, 16.

[46] Ibid., 15.

[47] Ibid.

Morton is introduced to society by her mother. With Vasiatkin's help, Miss Morton meets Krasavin. Both Krasavin, who enjoys an elevated status among the artists and actors with whom he prefers to associate, and Burghardt, who at one point in the novel speaks at length about his peasant origins, are impressed by her apparent beauty. The narrator states that "Krasavin, in general, was a mysterious man who had risen from obscurity to the bustling top of the life at the capital from an obscurity, and he was considered by some a millionaire, by others – a beggar." [вообще, являлся таинственным человеком, который всплыл на бурную поверхность столичной жизни из неизвестных глубин и которого одни считали миллионером, а другие – нищим.][48] Just as the amount of Krasavin's wealth is a secret, so is his age:

> He was a broad-shouldered man with a fair wrap-around beard, of that indeterminate age that Sakhanov called "a Petersburg age." His wide, strong, ruddy neck, broad face with ruddy cheeks, brown languishing eyes, his fair, slightly curly hair without the slightest trace of gray—all of this, it seemed, bespoke of the enviable health of an epic hero, while in truth this hero in the eyes of the luminaries of the science of medicine was a doomed man, with his days counted.
>
> Это был плечистый мужчина с окладистой русой бородой, того неопределённого[49] возраста, который Саханов называл «перербургским.» Широкая крепкая шея с красным наливом, широкое лицо с тугим румянцем, карие глаза с поволокой, слегка вьющиеся русые волосы без малейших следов седины – всё, кажется говорило о завидном богатырском здоровье, а между тем этот богатырь в глазах светил медицинской науки был обречённым человеком, дни которого сочтены.[50]

Similarly, little is known about Krasavin's daily occupations:

> Somewhere he was doing, organizing, taking care of, and conducting something, just as all men of business do, and he entertained himself in a mixed company of actors, artists, and intelligentsia of a certain kind, who

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[48] Mamin-Sibiriak, 15-6.

[49] Ibid., 15.

[50] Ibid., 15-6.

> willingly flocks to a free feeding. Of all the guests, gathered in the private room, it is doubtful that anyone could definitively say, who Krasavin was, and they were little interested in that.
>
> Он где-то и что-то такое делал, устраивал, хлопотал и проводил, как все дельцы, а отдыхал в смешанном обществе артистов, художников и особого сорта интеллигенции, которая охотно собирается на даровую кормежку. Из собравшихся в номере гостей едва ли кто-нибудь мог определённо сказать, что такое Красавин, да мало этим и интересовались.[51]

The mystique of Krasavin is only intensified by his behavior during the party: "Krasavin himself hardly drank anything, except for soda water, tinted with some strange wine." [Сам Красавин почти ничего не пил, кроме содовой воды, подкрашенной каким-то мудрёным вином.][52] To sum up,

> All that was known about Krasavin was that he came from the trans-Volga Raskolniks, and that he had enormous connections among the Muscovite Old Believer millionaires. Rumors had it that he used to be a hard drinker, but now, when he felt a yearning for a drink, he limited himself to gathering around himself a drinking "fraternity."
>
> Известно было только, что он из заволжских раскольников и имел громадные связи в среде московских старообрядцев-миллионеров. Ходили слухи, что раньше он пил запоем, а сейчас, когда на него накатывалась запойная тоска, ограничивался тем, что собирал вокруг себя пьющую "братию."[53]

The jaded, tired Krasavin's presence in the "fraternity" is similar to that of a demigod who is both known and unknown to everyone, and who is both powerful and dissatisfied at the same time. Vasiatkin's introducing of Miss Morton to Krasavin is similar to the act of a sly courtier who seeks to please his patron while pursuing his own interests. Vasiatkin knows:

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[51] Ibid., 16.

[52] Ibid., 15-6.

[53] Ibid., 16-17.

> What could one surprise Krasavin with, at whose service were women from all over the world? And here is a mute beauty… This was such an extravagant novelty, that it shook up the bored patron of arts beyond recognition.
>
> Чем можно было удивить Красавина, к услугам которого были женщины всех пяти частей света? А тут немая красавица…Это была такая экстравагантная новость, которая заставила оживиться скучавшего мецената до неузнаваемости.[54]

Andrew Becker observes that in Hesiodic text, "the stimulus for wonder in the audience is not a description of the visible features of Pandora, but a report of the bard's experience of these features."[55] In Hesiod's words, "Wonder seized the deathless gods and mortal men when // they saw the utter deception, irresistible for men."[56] In *Works and Days*, Hesiod writes that Zeus "ordered famous Hephaestus to mix earth with water as quickly as possible, and to place the voice of a human in (them), and strength, and in the face to liken the fine, desire-provoking appearance of the maiden to the deathless goddesses."[57] Becker explains that "[f]rom this point on, the text merely elaborates the consequences she will have among humans, without further describing Pandora as a physical object."[58] Ultimately, Pandora becomes "a gift of evil to charm the hearts of all men as they hug their own doom"[59] and the punishment that Pandora inflicts upon men is the result of their inability to resist her charm.

Becker states that "the effects of Pandora, represented by the description, are significantly more important than her appearance, represented by her status as a work of sculpture."[60] In *Shooting Stars*, the power of Miss Morton's presence is also represented by Burghardt's reaction to her, not by any special acts or looks on her part. His vision of her and his own understanding of her nature, however misguided it may be, constitute the essence of these ekphrastic passages.

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[54] Ibid., 25.

[55] Andrew Sprague Becker, "Sculpture and Language in Early Greek Ekphrasis," *Arethusa* 26, no. 3 (1993), 284.

[56] Hesiod, 588-89. Becker's translation, qtd. in "Sculpture and Language," 286.

[57] Qtd. in Becker, 287.

[58] Becker, 286.

[59] Qtd. in Becker, 287.

In Hesiod's account, the mythical gods bring the statue of Pandora to life when they give it "voice" and "vigor."[61] Speech is a special quality that sets humans apart from the metallic creatures that are made by Hephaestus. Pandora, however, remains silent and never uses this gift. As Francis notes, "[g]iven that speech is … a particular quality of the living, that Pandora has this quality but does not use it makes her even more of a contradiction and raises further questions as to what kind of being she is."[62] Having been created out of clay by Hephaestus, she is not human in the full sense of the word, but a work of art (or artifice), an artistic representation. Yet the human voice that is added to it, as Andrew Becker reminds us, "makes that representation a more powerful and persuasive replica of the original: it begins to turn a work of visual art, in this case sculpture, into life."[63] A reader who encounters Hesiod's ekphrases devoted to Pandora ought to wonder whether she is "a woman described as a statue or a statue described as a woman?"[64]

Burghardt is tortured by a similar question regarding Miss Morton. Clearly, she has a human form, but both her looks and her manners cause Burghardt to idealize her:

> Burghardt was watching Miss Morton the entire time and was experiencing some sort of quiet and sweet joy, as if one of the statues that

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[60] Becker, 278.

[61] Francis, 13.

[62] Ibid., 15.

[63] Becker, 287.

[64] Francis, 14.

> came to him in dreams some time ago came to life. This was a marvelous and young dream that overshadowed everything else. And she was so good and pure in her incomprehension, in the halo of maidenly innocence and in that silence that hid a mysterious inner human being, as if this was not an earthly being, but a visitor from some other world.
>
> Бургардт всё время наблюдал мисс Мортон и переживал какую-то тихую и такую хорошую радость, точно ожила одна из тех статуй, которые когда-то грезились ему. Это был чудный молодой сон, который заслонял всё остальное. А она была так хороша и чиста в своём непонимании, в ореоле девичей невинности и в этом молчании, скрывавшем таинственного внутреннего человека, точно это было не земное существо, а пришелец из какого-то другого мира.[65]

As days go by and Burghardt is able to see and interact with Miss Morton more, his initial impression persists. Bochulskaia knows of Burghardt's infatuation with Miss Morton, but she is certain that it will pass, and she does what is in her power to propel the process. In the second half of the novel, she performs as Medea in the play that is staged at a small theater in Ozerki, outside of St. Petersburg. Bochulskaia invites Burghardt to the play, and upon his arrival, he finds Miss Morton at the theater. Completely unaware of Bochulskaia's involvement in this meeting, Burghardt is genuinely surprised by Miss Morton's presence:

> He once again kissed her hand, seized by a sweet insanity that caused his head to spin. How she … came to this exact play and this exact box he did not ask, as if this was exactly how everything ought to be. Would anyone ask an angel fallen from heaven about how he fell, and would anyone ask a statue if she would start speaking all of a sudden?
>
> Он вторично поцеловал её руку, охваченный сладким безумием, от которого кружилась голова. Как она … попала именно на этот спектакль и в эту именно ложу – он не спрашивал, точно всё так и должно было быть. Разве спрашивают упавшего с неба ангела, как он упал и разве стали бы спрашивать статую, если бы она вдруг заговорила?[66]

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[65] Mamin-Sibiriak, 83.

[66] Ibid., 218.

Burghardt feels that happiness is within reach, and that this happiness will be as extraordinary for Miss Morton herself: “We will be happy in spite of everything. Yes, happy like gods, for even to gods happiness did not come without a price.” [Мы будем счастливы наперекор всему. Да, счастливы, как боги, а счастье даже богам не доставалось даром…][67]

Soon afterwards, when Burghardt declares his feelings for Miss Morton, the comparison with a statue becomes almost disturbing in its repetitiveness: “He was kissing her face, her neck, her hands, and she was sitting with her eyes open, like a statue, if statues ever could return kisses and embraces.” [Он целовал её лицо, шею, руки, а она сидела с раскрытыми глазами, точно статуя, если бы статуи умели возвращать поцелуи и обнимать.][68] Both Pandora and Miss Morton have hidden in them the lifelessness that will cause destruction once it is revealed; however there is a fundamental difference that exists between these two characters. Whereas, in Vernant’s words, “Pandora is fashioned to resemble a human maiden who does not yet exist and whose exact prototype she will be,”[69] Miss Morton represents to Burghardt the apotheosis of all the women whom he has encountered. Burghardt’s tragedy lies in the fact that by becoming obsessed with ideal form, he turns away from life. He is surrounded by disappointment and death: his wife has died a few years earlier, his daughter lacks physical beauty, the daughter's nanny dies unexpectedly, and Miss Morton, whose very name is a bad omen[70] from the start, dies while giving birth to a son who was already dead while still in her womb.

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[67] Ibid., 228.

[68] Ibid., 225. The comparison between Miss Morton and a statue that continues reappearing throughout the novel suggest a connection to yet another Greek myth – that of Pygmalion and his love for Galatea found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Like Pygmalion, Burghardt is in love, essentially, with a figment of his own imagination. In *Shooting Stars*, however, we see almost a complete reversal of the Pygmalion myth. Galatea is created by Pygmalion out of ivory and is allowed to come to life as a result of his love for her. Miss Morton, however, is a living being who gradually becomes more and more lifeless as the narrative progresses.

[69] Vernant and Zeitlin, 406-4.

Burghardt begins to understand the Pandora-like "craftiness, deceit, shamelessness, and irresistible allure"[71] of Miss Morton during the trip to Finland that the two of them take in order to get away from the bustle of St. Petersburg and during which Burghardt is planning to make a proposal of marriage. First, Burghardt notices Miss Morton's unusual appetite:

> According to a Finnish tradition, hors d'oeuvres were served again before dinner, and Miss Morton with great appetite began to devour some Swedish preserves. Burghardt was a little shocked at this. For him, food in general did not exist, and now especially. He was sitting and thinking about the form in which to make his proposal… The prosaic environment of the dinner seemed to disturb the importance of the solemnity of the moment, and Miss Morton's appetite only strengthened that impression.
>
> По финляндскому обычаю пред обедом была подана опять закуска, и мисс Мортон с большим аппетитом принялась уничтожать какие-то шведские консервы. Бургардт немножко был шокирован этим, - для него еда, вообще, не существовала, а сейчас в особенности. Он сидел и думал о том, в какой форме ему сделать предложение… Прозаическая обстановка обеда точно нарушала важность наступившего момента, а тут ещё аппетит мисс Мортон.[72]

In the course of the dinner, the aura of Miss Morton's external beauty fades, and Burghardt's disappointment continues to increase:

> After the first course she began with the same appetite to eat the main course and with a smile pointed at the fried trout listed on the menu… When Miss Morton was eating, Burghardt remembered the words of Dr. Hauser: on her face, indeed, showed "a predominance of animal instincts." However, all people, when they eat, do not look particularly beautiful…

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[70] From the Latin root "mort," which means "death."

[71] Francis, 13.

[72] Mamin-Sibiriak, 257.

> После закуски она с таким же аппетитом принялась за обед и с улыбкой показала на стоявшую в меню жареную форель… Когда мисс Мортон ела, Бургардту припоминались слова доктора Гаузера, - у неё в лице, действительно, получалось "преобладание животных инстинктов." Впрочем, вселюди, когдаедят, неотличаютсяособеннойкрасотой…[73]

Finally, Miss Morton begins to feel sick, but she is undeterred in her decision to devour the rest of the meal:

> Fried trout was served. Miss Morton pretended to applaud this marvel of Finnish cuisine. But she took only one piece and put it back on the plate… Miss Morton's face grew pale, she quickly got up from the table and, covering her mouth with a handkerchief, quickly went to the common room… In the room she felt nauseated, but she explained that it would pass and that she would eat the wonderful trout after all.
>
> Подана была жареная форель. Мисс Мортон сделала вид, что аплодирует этому чуду финской кухни. Но она взяла всего один кусок и положила его обратно на тарелку… лицо мисс Мортон побледнело, она быстро поднялась из-за стола и, закрывая рот платком, быстро пошла в общий зал… В номере с ней сделалось дурно, но она объяснила, что это пройдёт, и что она всё-таки будет есть чудную форель.[74]

To her disappointment, the trout would remain uneaten. The nauseating smell of crabapple that Miss Morton thought was coming from the fish has turned out to be a figment of her imagination or, in other words, a result of a food aversion caused by her pregnancy. Burghardt's shock at Miss Morton's appetite is now superseded by the utter horror at the thought that he was about to propose marriage to a woman who is pregnant with Krasavin's child. The statue that Burghardt has put on the pedestal of his artistic fancy has fallen to the ground, crushing both his dream of conjugal love and his hope for a rebirth of his artistic creativity.

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[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid., 258.

To everyone's surprise, even after the news of Miss Morton's pregnancy is revealed, Burghardt continues to care for her. She dies in the seventh month of her pregnancy, surrounded by Burghardt, Bochulskaia, and Dr. Hauser. A few moments before her passing, Burghardt comes into her room and see her utterly exhausted after her labor. Just as he does in the beginning of the novel, the narrator once again minimizes the description of Miss Morton's outward appearance and focuses on the effect that her presence produces on Burghardt:

> The patient was lying with her eyes closed the entire time and did not recognize anyone. It appeared to Burghardt that she glanced at him once, but he was not sure of that… Burghardt stood at the head of her bed and was thinking that he had failed to do something that he was supposed to do. The deceased had an expression on her face as if she were asking something. Yes, everyone leaves this world with such an unresolved question…
>
> Больная всё время лежала с закрытыми глазами и никого не узнавала. Бургардту показалось, что она один раз взглянула на него, но он не был уверен и в этом… Бургардт стоял у неё в изголовьях и думал о том, что чего-то не сделал, что должен был сделать. А у покойницы на лице было такое выражение, точно она что-то спрашивала. Да, каждый человек уходит из этого мира с таким неразрешённым вопросом..."[75]
> The precise moment of her passing is not mentioned.

At first she was called a "patient" [больная], and the next moment Burghardt looks at her she is already referred to as "the deceased," as if there was virtually no transition from one state to another. Burghardt is again left to struggle against the impression that he receives from the presence of Miss Morton's body. All he can do is wonder whether Miss Morton is asking him a question and what this question is.

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[75] Ibid., 304-5.

In the words of Aelius Theon, an Alexandrian sophist, ekphrasis is a form of "descriptive language, bringing what is portrayed clearly before the sight."[76] Francis adds that ekphrasis "communicates through *both* word and image."[77] Throughout the novel, Burghardt's attitude towards Miss Morton is presented as that of a sculptor admiring a work of art that is superior to all other forms of creation. The readers' understanding of Burghardt's admiration and subsequent disappointment in the idea that Miss Morton suggests to him is shaped by the ekphrases that the narrator offers throughout the narrative and that focus not on the object's appearance, but on the effect that the object has on the viewer. Just as Hesiod's descriptions of Pandora emphasize that "her primary significance lies in her effect,"[78] so do the words of Mamin-Sibiriak's narrator repeatedly reveal the protagonist's inability to distinguish Miss Morton's person from his own conception of what she is.

From Burghardt's point of view, his infatuation with Miss Morton was tragic. After feeling the deep disappointment that was caused by losing both Miss Morton and his idealized conception of her, Burghardt is no longer able to create art. However, unlike Pushkin's stationmaster and Dostoevsky's narrator in "The Meek One," Burghardt is not a victim of his own loquacity. As a sculptor, he a priori is somewhat distant from verbal expression, and his descriptions of people and scenes are quite weak and infrequent. For this reason, ekphrasis in *Shooting Stars* works somewhat differently from the two works we have considered before. In Mamin-Sibiriak's novel, it is the narrator, not the protagonist who offers ekphrases focused on the protagonist's impressions. Thus, to paraphrase Baxandall's formulation, ekphrasis is not a description of pictures but a narrator's description of the protagonist's thought about having seen pictures.

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[76] Kennedy, 45.

[77] Francis, 7. My emphasis.

[78] Becker, 289.

Chapter Four

Kaverin, *Artist Unknown*: The Eyes of an Artist vs. The Eyes of a Lizard

> Задача художника не в том, чтобы
> показать действительность, а в том, чтобы
> строить на материале реальной
> действительности, исходя из неё, новый мир
> – мир действительности эстетической,
> идеальной.
>
> *Дмитрий Горбов, "Поиски Галатеи"*

Veniamin Kaverin's *Artist Unknown* (*Художник неизвестен*, 1931) is a novel that, as Victor Erlich sums it up, depicts in vivid colors "the conflict between a single-track-minded Communist man of action, Shpektorov, and an engagingly quixotic painter, Arkhimedov."[1] Although highly individualized, these two male characters represent more than their own narrowly defined individual points of view. Instead, with their help, the author conveys to the readers two approaches to social reform that, although they pursue the same ultimate goal, disagree on the means of achieving it. These approaches cannot coexist and cannot be reconciled, and in its essence, the conflict between the two male characters is "the contest between 'calculating on romanticism' and 'the romance of calculation.'"[2] At the base of this conflict lies the question of the nature and the purpose of art in the pursuit of social reform.

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[1] Victor Erlich, "Post-Stalin Trends in Russian Literature," *Slavic Review* 23, no. 3 (Sep., 1964), 407.

The narrator in *Artist Unknown* recounts a family drama that involves the eponymous artist Arkhimedov, his friend and opponent Shpektorov, and Arkhimedov's wife, Esther. The recurrent plot device of a love triangle between two men and one woman, introduced in Pushkin's "The Stationmaster," briefly touched upon in "The Meek One," and referenced in Mamin-Sibiriak's *Shooting Stars*, is used extensively in *Artist Unknown*. In the latter work, however, the silence and the blindness are not immutable characteristics. While the artist's inability to paint and the heroine's suicide in a superficial way indicate that these traits do increase in intensity, on a deeper level they testify to the contrary: Esther's silent suicide act communicates to Arkhimedov much more than her words could in the past, and as a result, he finally gains the artistic vision that he has been searching for from the beginning of the novel. The narrator supplies ekphrases throughout the novel that, just as we saw in the works discussed previously, indicate that verbal communication between characters may be not only unnecessary, but also detrimental to true communication. Finally, the blindness and silence that up till now were clearly associated with men and women, respectively, are at times shared in *Artist Unknown* by characters of both genders.

Writing in 1931 in Leningrad newspaper *The Star* [*Звезда*], Veniamin Kaverin expressed his opinion that a new work of art will not be truly new until "it not only contains new ideology, but also has a new form."[3] Kaverin's bold statement regarding his artistic position was not an anomaly for his time. The 1920's and the very early 1930's were the period in Soviet literature when writers were searching for new forms, new ways of expression, and new approaches to subject matter. Numerous literary organizations were formed, reformed, or disbanded on the basis of the literary and ideological positions of their members. The most prominent organizations of the time included the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers [Российская ассоциация пролетарских писателей, or РАПП, 1925-32], the Union of Proletarian Writers' Associations [Всесоюзное объединение ассоциаций пролетарских писателей, or ВОАПП, 1928-32], Vladimir Mayakovsky's Left Front of the Arts [Левый фронт искусства, or ЛЕФ, 1922-9], and The Pass [Перевал, 1923-32]. Besides these major organizations, there were such groups as The Young Guard [Молодая гвардия], The Workers' Spring [Рабочая весна], The Smithy [Кузница], and others. Some of these organizations were created in order to attract and influence a specific social group: the children, the youth, the workers, etc.[4] Kaverin himself was an active member of The Pass, the literary association that, along with many others, was disbanded in 1932, and several of whose former member were executed in the later years.[5] Kaverin captures some of the turmoil caused by the search for new artistic forms that would reflect the new ideology in his novel *Artist Unknown* and he even pushes the question a little further by asking whether art in any of its forms has a

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[2] Vladimir Solov'ev, "Gulliver in The Land of The Giants (On the Seventy-fifth Birthday of Iurii Olesha)," *Soviet Studies in Literature* 12, no. 3 (1976), 11.

[3] Qtd. in Donald Piper, V. A. *Kaverin; a Soviet Writer's Response to the Problem of Commitment. The Relationship of Skandalist and Khudozhnik Neizvesten to the Development of Soviet Literature in the Late*

Nineteen-twenties. (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1970), 123. Original in *Zvezda*, VIII (1931).

[4] See Gleb Struve, *Russian literature under Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971) and Svetlana Leontieva's dissertation, *Literatura i pionerskie organizatsii: ideologiia i poetika* (Tver', 2006).

[5] See Vasilii Grossman, *The road: stories, journalism, and essays*. Edited by Robert Chandler, Elizabeth Chandler, Olga Mukovnikova, and Yury Bit-Yunan (New York: New York Review Books, 2010).

place in the new society. He also addresses in his novel the problem of teaching the youth and bringing up one's own ideological posterity.

The year 1932 became the final year for most if not all the independent literary organizations in the Soviet Union because a new and centralized organization was put into place by the bureaucratic apparatus. Regine Robin describes this transition as follows:

> What was involved was not actually a long contradictory process of gestation, the result of more than ten years of polemical struggles, questioning, and confrontations in the critical, literary, and aesthetic realms; it is easy enough to imagine that the notion came directly – along with everything else – from the top, that it was administratively imposed.[6]

This imposition virtually annulled all the arguments and artistic positions that were expressed in the earlier years by authors and artists of various degrees of political conviction, ideological commitment, and artistic talent. On April 23, 1932, all the circles, groups, and associations were closed by the single directive that came from the Central Committee of the Communist party "in order to make way for the Union of Soviet Writers."[7] Once set in place, the organization could control virtually all literary production in the country and steer it in one direction. Specifically, the statutes of the Writer's Union declared the following:

> The victory of socialism, the rapid growth of productive forces unprecedented in the history of humanity, the burgeoning process of the liquidation of classes, the elimination of all possibilities of exploitation of man by man and the elimination of the contrasts between city and countryside, and, finally, the progress of science and culture create limitless possibilities for a qualitative and quantitative increase in creative forces and for the expansion of all types of art and literature.[8]

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[6] Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992), 12.

[7] See Robin, 12 and Struve, 253.

[8] Qtd. in Robin, 11.

In the same document, the writers were encouraged to take the "opportunity to manifest any artistic initiative and a choice of various forms, styles, and genres," as long as they remembered that their primary role was to offer to their readers "a historically concrete presentation of reality in its revolutionary development."[9] Naturally, this type of depiction demanded that the authors imagined the revolutionary development of reality with the ultimate victory of communism in mind.

The "limitless possibilities" in the realm of Soviet literature became an even more unattainable ideal after the year 1932. Although when it comes to Kaverin's political convictions, there is little doubt that he did subscribe to the cause of Marxism, the author himself insisted that writing on prescribed topics and producing predictable plot lines was detrimental to the development and to the quality of Soviet literature. Specifically, he stated: "Everyone knows that collectivization is transforming the countryside to a socialist pattern. But if I were set such a theme, I should not write about it. It is impermissible to set a writer a theme prematurely, he must discover it himself."[10]

Willing to conform to the Marxist idea, but insisting on retaining his artistic authority and the freedom to explore, Kaverin found himself in a very uncomfortable position. In 1929 he finished an early draft of *Artist Unknown*, but set it aside. He returned to it in 1930, after the unsuccessful publication of his cycle of stories *The Prolog* [*Пролог*].[11] In 1931, he published the novel at first in the journal *Zvezda* and later, with the help of the Publishing House of Writers in Leningrad, as an individual book. Significantly revised,

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Qtd. in Piper, 122.

[11] See V. Borisova, "V poiskakh puti," *V. Kaverin, Sobranie Sochinenii* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964), 2:556.

Artist Unknown came out again in 1964 as part of a six-volume edition of Kaverin's collected works.

To do the novel full justice, a thorough comparative textological analysis of the earlier and the later editions is required. A cursory comparison between the 1931 and the 1964 edition of the novel suggests that Kaverin's own understanding of the nature of social reforms and his preferences for the direction that they should take fluctuated. The later texts contains several changes and omissions that to some extent tone down the pathos associated with the artist's persona. In the 1964 edition, the narrator's words betray less pity towards Arkhimedov and at the same time less demonization of Shpektorov. For example, in the 1931 version Shpektorov presents Arkhimedov with the following accusation: "We know that the abolition of the right to privacy will become the abolition of familial, industrial, and scientific tradition. And you are fighting for that right!" [Мы знаем, что уничтожение права на личную жизнь будет уничтожением традиций семейных, производственных, научных. А ты борешься за это право!][12] The later edition omits this charge entirely. Also in the 1931 edition the narrator shares his musings on the protagonist's status as a Soviet Don Quixote and allows one of Arkhimdov's disciple to explain that while Don Quixot "faught against illusions in the name of nobility, but we fight for nobility in the name of … art" [сражался с иллюзиями во имя благородства, а мы сражаемся за благородство во имя … искусства]."[13] This explanation is cut out of the later versions of the text, and so is the brief moment in Chapter Two when the artist's paternal love and pride is rebuffed by filial hunger for independence. After attempting to run away from home and to take his son with him, Arkhimedov realizes that he will need help to attend to the baby's physiological needs, and the narrator, present at the scene, offers help by inviting to his own home. Arkhimedov then "loudly" [звонко] kissed his swaddled infant. In response, "His son opened his eyes, with effort pulled out his hand and hit him in the face." [Сын открыл глаза, с усилием вытащил руку и ударил его в лицо.][14]

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[12] Veniamin Kaverin, *Khudozhnik neizvesten* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo pisatelei v Leningrade, 1931), 14.

[13] Ibid., 50-51.

Arkhimedov of the later edition appears to be somewhat lacking in the idealist luster, and to some extent this palpable difference between the two versions of the same character allowed the Soviet critic V. Borisova to claim that during the late 1920s – early 1930s, when the key questions in literary life revolved around the nature of artistic creation, the ties between art and reality, and the relationship between an artist and his contemporaries, Kaverin had not yet been able to resolve these problems in the spirit of "party-mindedness" [партийность] and the "popular spirit" [народность], and he appeared to display both social pessimism and literary formalism.[15] In Borisova's opinion, the ideological aspect of Kaverin's work suffered significantly.

Borisova's conclusions echo the criticism that Kaverin received in the 1920's and 1930's. On one occasion, the literary critic Kozakov lashed out against Kaverin for what he perceived to be the author's unsound position, insisting that "Kaverin's system of literary and theoretical views is manifestly corrupt, it should be destroyed at its very roots."[16] Kaverin's attempts to defend his and other authors' artistic freedom, to shield it from the encroachment of ideological uniformity and revolutionary utilitarianism, were condemned by literary bureaucrats, and as a consequence, his novel *Artist Unknown* was considered "a battle call of bourgeois restorationism."[17]

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[14] Ibid., 32. Some of the other important cuts are found in Ch. 2, section 8 (the narrator's imagining of an argument between Shpektorov and Arkhimedov regarding the role of morality), Ch. 3, section 1 (the words "fallen angesl" [падшие ангелы] are replaced with "demons" [демоны]), second half of Ch. 3, section 3 (Shpektorov's conversation with the narrator), Ch. 3, section 7 (Zhaba's speech about the danger that is faced by the republic).

[15] Borisova, 556-7.

It was apparent to literary critics that Kaverin was influenced by such authors as Olga Forsh, Boris Pasternak, and Iury Olesha – Soviet authors who, hesitant to take a firm and ideologically sound stand at the time when the society was heading into socialism at full speed, were called "fellow-travelers" [попутчики]. In retrospect, Borisova suggests that these authors' fears of an onslaught of "vulgar utilitarianism"[18] were unjustified, and that in fact towards the end of the novel *Artist Unknown*, Kaverin himself sympathizes with Shpektorov, the dedicated builder of socialism who thinks that Arkhimedov, despite his status of a talented artist and the novel's unfortunate protagonist, is out of touch with contemporary reality.[19] Even if Borisova's response to the novel is based upon the 1964 edition, her conclusions are still debatable.

The present analysis will focus on the 1931 edition of the novel, the version that appears more complete and that lacks the relatively small edits that resulted in significant semantic changes in later versions. The plot of the novel evolves on two planes: a domestic and an ideological one. The narrator, whose name we do not know, tells the story of two men, Aleksei Arkhimedov and Aleksandr Shpektorov, one woman, Esther, and a child, Ferdinand. Arkhimedov is the artist who believes that art is able to teach such moral values as honesty and responsibility, and therefore it plays an integral role in social improvement. Esther, Arkhimedov's wife, is distant from ideological debates and is tired of her husband's lack of interest in domestic life and in their baby Ferdinand. Their friend and a next door neighbor, Shpektorov, is actively engaged in the cause of literally building a new world: he goes to the steppes and works on a construction site, managing hundreds of local, barely literate, workers. Arkhimedov, on the other hand, attempts to forge a following among the youth. He also hopes that his son will follow in his footsteps. Ferdinand, however, turns out to be Shpektorov's son, both biologically and legally after Shpektorov adopts him at the end of the novel. Unable either to leave Arkhimedov for Shpektorov or to continue living a lie by staying Arkhimedov's wife, Esther commits suicide by throwing herself off the roof of a five-story building. Having lost both his wife and his son, Arkhimedov appears to have lost any hope for posterity – biological, ideological, artistic, or any other. Nevertheless, the novel ends with a description of a masterpiece by an unknown artist that not only powerfully depicts Esther's suicide but also suggests that Arkhimedov's artistic, and therefore ideological, legacy will, after all, continue.

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[16] Qtd. in Piper, 122. Orig.: reported in *Zvezda*, VIII (1931).

[17] Maxim Shrayer, *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature: Two Centuries of Dual Identity in Prose and Poetry* (Armonk, N.Y.: Sharpe, 2007), 268.

[18] Borisova, 556.

[19] Ibid., 563.

Writing thirty-five years after the first publication of *Artist Unknown* and looking at it from outside of the Iron Curtain, Hongor Oulanoff explains that through his art Arkhimedov simply wishes to "regenerate a spiritually regimented society and reclaim it from its narrowly technological craze to a more balanced vision of the world [as he] engages in what he believes to be a crusade to make the vulgar and the base more humane."[20] Rosemarie Kieffer states that although some critics side with Arkhimedov against Shpektorov and believe that Kaverin does likewise, she is of the opinion that

> the author recognizes … the richness of human nature, the difficulties and obstacles to be surmounted along the road which leads to truth. In certain situations and in certain epochs, he seems to say, human liberty is manifest more easily in the control of material things than in creations of the intellect and the imagination.[21]

Still, Arkhimedov's position, despite its apparent disadvantages, displays the kind of faith in a higher cause that does not shrink in the face of even the most obvious probability of defeat. Even though Shpektorov, the "realistic builder of the new world," shows contempt towards ethics and "holds the product of art to be low on the list of requirements for the new state," the artist Arkhimedov, despite his apparent weakness, "has produced, nonetheless, a single deathless picture."[22] It is this deathless quality of art that gives the reader a valid reason to think that the achievement of materialistic ends does not always justify the means of achieving them.

From the very beginning of the novel, Arkhimedov is presented as a prophet-like figure. The narrator sets the opening scene by describing the variegated crowd that one can encounter on the streets of a large city, and then turns his attention to Arkhimedov who "stopped and hit a rock with a stick" [остановился и стукнул палкой о камень], and declared: "For the thief, for the girls, for the thankless labor of the floor-polishers, for the hypocrite who just rode by holding a briefcase on his lap, for the wench – you are responsible" [За вора, за девиц, за неблагодарный труд полотёров, за этого лицемера, который проехал, держа на коленях портфель, за девку – отвечаешь ты].[23] The suddenness and intensity of this statement suggest that the conversation must have started some time before, and that here the readers are witnessing a continuation of a long argument. In a way, this conversation will continue throughout the novel, until the two main characters finally go their separate ways. Before that happens, however, the narrator's task is to introduce the readers to both sides of the argument.

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[20] Hongor Oulanoff, "Kaverin's *Khudozhnik neizvesten*: Structure and Motivation," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 10, no. 4 (Winter, 1966), 390.

[21] Rosemarie Kieffer, "A Long Fidelity: The Career of Veniamin Kaverin," trans. by William Riggan, *World Literature Today* 52, no. 4 (Autumn, 1978), 578.

[22] Edward J. Brown, *Russian Literature Since the Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982), 76.

Arkhimedov's prophetic status in the novel is at first marked indirectly. The symbolic gesture of hitting the rock with the stick in his hand is a reference to the Old Testament prophet Moses who led the ancient Israelites out of their bondage in Egypt. While sojourning in the wilderness, the Israelites have grown dissatisfied with their physical conditions and begun to pine for the comforts that they had left behind in Egypt. To alleviate their suffering, Moses obtained water for them by hitting a rock with a stick.[24]

Although Arkhimedov does not make water run from a rock in the opening scene of the novel, he is the person who is responsible for providing material comforts for others. Just like the Israelites, who at one point were given manna from heaven but eventually began wishing for meat, Arkhimedov's own son presents him with demands that the artist would rather avoid. The narrator develops the biblical allusion when Arkhimedov and Shpektorov arrive at Arkhimedov's home where they are greeted by Esther who, with a measure of frustration, informs Arkhimedov, speaking of the baby: "He no longer wants to nurse. He wants meat." [Он больше не хочет сосать. Он требует мяса.][25] Arkhimedov's immediate response to Esther's complaint is simple: "Give him meat" [Дай ему мяса].[26] Whether he is pandering to the infant or whether he is simply too distracted to pay attention to the fact that infants physically cannot chew meat, remains unclear. At the same time, baby Ferdinand is unusually large for his age and develops faster than it would be normally expected. When Zhaba, one of Arkhimedov's disciples, is given charge to take care of the infant, he informs him: "The son of a Slav and a Jewess, you are born under the Soviet coat of arms!" [Сын славянина и еврейки, ты рождён под советским гербом!][27] For this reason, Zhaba believes, Ferdinand ought to be temperate in his desires; yet, as he finds out first-hand, Ferdinand thinks otherwise.

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[23] Kaverin, 8.

[24] Exodus 17:6.

Arkhimedov hopes to raise his son in such a way that he, too, would value honesty and nobility as Arkhimedov understands them. Because of his unwillingness to compromise quality for the sake of efficiency, Arkhimedov comes across as a misfit in his contemporary society; yet at the same time, with his trained eye of an artist, he can observe his environment and note the details that go unnoticed by others. The narrator makes several attempts to present Arkhimedov as someone more than an artist, certainly more than the buffoon or the simpleton that others may think him to be. In the beginning, he notes that Arkhimedov stands out because of his appearance: "He looked very strange in his long overcoat, in a little cap, and glasses covered in shining raindrops." [Он выглядел очень странным в своём длинном пальто, в кепочке, в очках, на которых блестели дождевые капли.][28] The narrator mentions Arkhimedov's glasses several times throughout the novel. In fact, the two most striking qualities that the narrator remembers from his very first meeting with Arkhimedov as Shpektorov's neighbor are his reticence and a sense of dignity:

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[25] Kaverin, 12.

[26] Ibid.,12.

[27] Ibid., 65.

> At one point he introduced me to his neighbor who was baggy, taciturn, bespectacled. I remembered his last name. One could sense a tinge of importance in it, the kind that is associated with a seminary.
>
> And he was important.
>
> During the entire evening he said only two or three insignificant phrases.
>
> [Однажды он познакомил меня со своим соседом, мешковатым, молчаливым, в очках. Мне запомнилась фамилия. Оттенок семинарской важности чувствовался в ней.
>
> Он и был важен.
>
> За весь вечер он сказал только две или три незначительных фразы.][29]

A number of years later, the narrator meets Arkhimedov again. This time, he sees Arkhimedov on a street late at night and notices that he is not alone, but with a baby who is sleeping on the steps leading towards a monument to Ferdinand Lassalle, a German social political activist. Arkhimedov notices the look on the narrator's face, and says:

> You are looking at me as if I am Muhammad who just ran away from Mecca to Medina. He had more followers than I do. I only have one.
>
> Вы смотрите на меня, как на Мухаммеда, только что сбежавшего их Мекки в Медину. У него было больше сторонников, чем у меня. У меня пока только один.[30]

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[28] Ibid., 8.

[29] Ibid., 29.

[30] Ibid., 31.

The narrator responds to Arkhimedov's observation: "you do not look like a prophet. You do not have the confidence that anyone in Mecca is anxiously waiting for you." [вы не похожи на пророка. У вас нет уверенности, что в Мекке вас ждут с нетерпением.][31] The ill-starred prophet acknowledges the narrator's observation and then admits:

> No one is waiting for me… Mundane life was against me, and I have freed myself from it today at eleven-thirty at night. Everything, including the fight for existence, I am starting anew.
>
> [Меня никто не ждёт … Быт был против меня, и я освободился от него сегодня в половине двенадцатого ночи. Всё – в том числе и борьбу за существование – я начинаю сначала.][32]

Only the narrator and Arkhimedov's two disciples recognize prophetic traits in the artist's character. Elsewhere in the narrative, Arkhimedov is called "a teacher" and "a preacher." His movements and manner of speaking are both pleasing and impressive. As a teacher, he is described as "unhurried, majestic," so that "the smooth tranquility of his movements imparted even to his silence the cogency of concentrated speech." [неторопливый, величественный, и плавное спокойствие движений придавало самому его молчанию убедительность сосредоточенной речи.][33] Yet it all comes to nothing when, towards the very end, Arkhimedov is arrested for delivering a street sermon on behalf of the homeless because no one could get away with speaking rubbish in a public place.[34]

Despite his remarkable ability to be a laughing stock for strangers and an idealistic preacher for his disciples, Arkhimedov possesses the quality that first and foremost sets him apart from the crowd as a true artist and, second, allows him to distinguish between what he considers true art and counterfeit. Arkhimedov's keen vision is not immediately apparent in the narrative and presents an undercurrent theme that becomes more prominent towards the end of the novel.

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[31] Ibid., 31.

[32] Ibid., 31-2.

[33] Ibid., 93.

[34] Ibid., 90.

Arkhimedov's glasses are mentioned several times throughout the narrative. Logically, they serve as an index to Arkhimedov's poor vision; however, when we fist see Arkhimedov in the opening scene of the novel, he is wearing glasses are "glasses covered in shining raindrops" [на которых блестели дождевые капли].[35] The little drops of water, in essence, are tiny convex lenses that transform the world that Arkhimedov sees. They expand his vision both in terms of space and in terms of clarity.

As the narrative goes on, Arkhimedov continues noticing things that should be apparent to everyone, but are not. Arkhimedov's artistic vision is perfected at the end of the novel not because of any remarkable physical transformation, but because of the experiences that he goes through. The final transformation is also due to the fact that all through the narrative Arkhimedov searches for what is not apparent, for the meaning of things instead of their merely physical representation. The narrator notes that Arkhimedov "interfered in the past, giving a new meaning to things that no longer meant anything in reality, which no longer existed for him" [вмешивался в прошлое, придавая новый смысл тому, что ничего не значило в действительности, для него уже не существовавшей.][36] Incidentally, this ability to look into the past, to disregard the present, and to value the future makes Arkhimedov even more prophet-like in the light of what Mamin-Sibiriak wrote in *Shooting Stars* about St. Sergius of Radonezh, the medieval Russian monk who later became recognized as a saint. Shipidin, upon visiting Burghardt's studio, notices a bas-relief that depicts the Russian prince Dmitri Donskoi visiting St. Sergius before departing for a battle with the Mongol invaders in 1380. The narrator of *Shooting Stars* observes:

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[35] Ibid., 8.

[36] Ibid., 39.

> The bas-relief astonished Grigorii Maksimych [Shipidin], although he had had high expectations for it … Sergius turned out to be splendid, amazing, marvelous. How good this old face was, emaciated through fast, prayer, and labor, filled with internal light, purified through spiritual suffering, and looking into a distant, distant future… The great hermit foresaw a distant future, and he saw the present as if it was the past.
>
> Барельеф поразил Григория Максимыча [Шипидина], хотя он ожидал от него многого… Сергий вышел великолепно, удивительно, чудно. Как хорошо это измождённое постом, молитвой и трудами старческое лицо, проникнутое внутренним светом, очищенное душевными муками и смотрящее в далёкое-далёкое будущее… Великий подвижник провидел далёкое будущее и настоящее видел прошлым."[37]

Whether Arkhimedov is able to clearly foresee the future is debatable; yet his attitude towards time is very similar to that of St. Sergius who did not allowed himself to be distracted by the temporal and temporary considerations. Arkhimedov's main concern about his contemporary reality has to do with the extent to which the pursuit of material progress has undermined such non-material human values as a sense of dignity and of personal responsibility for the quality of the work that one performs. To cite one example, early in the narrative Arkhimedov notices an iron shield that serves purely decorative purposes as a part of an iron-wrought gate. Upon examining it, he voices to Shpektorov his disappointment with the way heraldry has lost its semantic value in the modern age. He says:

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[37] Mamin-Sibiriak, 39.

> It is hard for me to look at this shield… It is hideous. It speaks of the fact that the heraldry of the revolution has fallen into the hands of apartment managers. The sculptor who made it ought to be publicly reprimanded. And not only for doing his work poorly by combining the coats-of-arms of the trade with emblems of power, but also for failing to understand the connections between personal dignity and responsibility for one's labor.
>
> Мне тяжело смотреть на этот щит … Он безобразен. Он говорит о том, что геральдика революции попала в руки управдомов. Скульптору, который слепил его, следует вынести общественное порицание. И не только за то, что он плохо исполнил свою работу, смешав гербы ремесла с эмблемами власти, но за то, что он не понимает связи между личным достоинством и ответственностью за труд.[38]

Shpektorov, on the other hand, understands Arkhimedov's point of view, but refuses to support it. Convinced that Arkhimedov argues an obvious and outdated point of view, Shpektorov responds:

> you assert that people's attitude towards labor and towards each other improves more slowly than the increase in technology, and thus it halts this growth. In other words, the dead inventory of socialism increases faster than the live inventory. I agree with you; yet even that is not new.
>
> ты утверждаешь, что отношение к труду и друг к другу улучшается медленнее, чем растёт техника, и тем самым задерживает этот рост. Иными словами – что мёртвый инвентарь социализма растёт быстрее живого. Я согласен с тобой. Но и это не ново.[39]

Undeterred by the strength of Arkhimedov's conviction, Shpektorov offers to him and the readers an explanation for his own position on morality and its role in facilitating progress:

> Morality? … I haven't time to think about that word. I'm busy. I'm building socialism. But if I had to choose between morality and a pair of trousers, I'd choose trousers. Our morality is the morality of creating a world.

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[38] Kaverin, 10.

[39] Ibid., 11.

> Мораль? … У меня нет времени, чтобы задуматься над этим словом. Я занят. Я строю социализм. Но, если бы мне пришлось выбирать между моралью и штанами, я бы выбрал штаны … Наша мораль – это мораль сотворения мира.[40]

Shpektorov's declaration of his conviction as frank as it is, is like Arkhimedov's earlier point, unoriginal. Here Shpektorov responds not only to Arkhimedov's accusation, but also to the frustration that was expressed almost exactly one hundred years earlier by the lyric hero in Alexander Pushkin's poem "The Poet and The Crowd" ("Поэт и толпа," 1829):

Be silent, senseless mob, grunt not,
Wage worker, slave to care and want,
I cannot stand your cheeky rant!
Worm of the earth, not son of heaven,
Utility's what you believe in,
Your judgment is inane and hollow:
You weigh the torso of Apollo,
Yet in his form you see no good.
That marble is a god! So what?
You much prefer your cooking pot,
Because therein you cook your food!

Молчии бессмысленный народ,
Подёнщики раб нужды, забот!
Несносен мне твой ропот дерзкий,
Ты червь земли, не сын небес;
Тебе бы пользы всё — на вес
Кумир ты ценишь Бельведерский,
Ты пользы, пользы в нем не зришь,
Но мрамор сей ведь бог!.. так что же? …
Печной горшок тебе дороже:
Ты пищу в нём себе варишь.[41]

The cooking pot of Pushkin's poem has not disappeared from the literary debate, but only transformed into an article of clothing that is just as mundane as its predecessor.

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Pushkin, 3:85. Translation by Philip Nikolayev, "The Poet and the Crowd" in *The Battersea Review*, <http://thebatterseareview.com/poems/145-alexander-pushkin-and-osip-mandelshtam>

Thus, with Arkhimedov's and Shpektorov's helo, Kaverin lays out before the readers two approaches to improving the human condition. These approaches appear to be at great odds with each other despite the fact that both characters believe in addressing the need for social development. The dispute between them, therefore, pertains not to the goal, but to the means of achieving progress, and Arkhimedov's faith in moral responsibility for the quality of one's work becomes a hindrance on the way towards progress in Shpektorov's opinion. Arkhimedov, nonetheless, is convinced that "a sense of personal dignity must be an essential component of socialism" [личное достоинство должно быть существенным компонентом социализма],[42] and that in the environment where morality lags behind technology, the wellbeing of the society as a whole is endangered. He does not separate morality from socialism; to the contrary, he does not see the possibility of building socialism and achieving material prosperity without morality.

Curiously, the author places Shpektorov at the moment of delivering his speech on a bridge:

> Shpektorov stood, resting his arms on the rails of the … bridge. His shadow, falling from the rails, quivered on red water. The ripples took it towards the shore. He was standing broad-shouldered, calm, with clear face, with the eyes of a lizard, turned to the West.
>
> [Шпекторов стоял, положив руки на перила … моста. Его тень, падая с перил, колыхалась на рыжей воде. Рябь несла её к берегу. Он стоял широкоплечий, спокойный, с ясным лицом, с глазами ящерицы, обращёнными на Запад.][43]

The eyes of a lizard are the characteristic that Shpektorov shares with the statue of Lassalle. Only seven pages later the narrator uses the same metaphor when describing the motionless statue when, after his argument regarding morality with Shpektorov,

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[42] Kaverin, 8.

[43] Ibid., 11.

Arkhimedov attempts to carry on a conversation with it in order to understand who of the two of them is right in his views – Arkhimedov or Shpektorov. The artist asks, addressing the statue, “Who do you vote for, teacher?” [За кого ты голосуешь, учитель?][44] Predictably, Arkhimedov receives no response: “Lassalle was silent. Motionless was his head with a furrowed brow, with the eyes of a lizard, turned to the West.” [Лассаль молчал. Неподвижна была его голова с нахмуренным лбом, с глазами ящерицы, обращёнными на Запад.][45] Hardly a flattering characteristic, the eyes of a lizard become a metaphor for the utilitarian way of looking at the world and of seeing with great clarity only the nearby objects. Shpektorov himself explains his pragmatic interest in the West when he states, “The West for us is a tool box without which one cannot build even a wooden shed, let alone socialism.” [Запад для нас – это ящик с инструментами, без которых нельзя построить даже досчатый (sic.) сарай, не только социализм.][46]

Attached in one way or the other to both of these men, Esther is caught between the two ways of looking at the world and understanding one’s place in it. She bears the brunt of Arkhimedov’ quest for ideological followers while herself being quite distant from all ideology. When he finally takes his son and leaves his home, Esther blames herself for Arkhimedov’s departure. Shpektorov comes to the narrator’s study and asks that he accompany him and Esther to the Youth Theater where Arkhimedov has set up his headquarters. The narrator notices that Esther too is in the study and is impressed by her quiet, almost enigmatic presence:

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.,18.

[46] Ibid., 9.

> Hidden by the open door, as if behind a screen, in a corner, in an armchair, there sat a woman. I did not know or did not recognize her.
> He shut the door.
> - Esther, - he said quickly.
> Without a smile, she firmly shook my hand.
> We sat down.
> I looked at her once more. It must have been women like this, - thought I, - in the days of the fall of Jerusalem prophesied on the steps of the temple.
>
> [Как ширмой закрытая распахнувшейся дверью, в углу, в кресле, сидела женщина. Я не знал или не узнал её.
> Он захлопнул дверь.
> - Эсфирь, - сказал он кратко.
> Не улыбаясь, она крепко пожала мне руку.
> Мы сели.
> Я ещё раз взглянул на неё. Должно быть, вот такие, - подумалось мне, - в дни гибели Иерусалима пророчествовали на ступенях храма!][47]

Esther's physical beauty is striking. More than that, throughout the novel, she is described as a woman with a certain sense of dignity about her. When introduced to the readers for the first time, Esther is described simply as a "tall woman, with black hair, with a motionless face" [высокая женщина, черноволосая, с неподвижным лицом].[48] At this moment, Esther stands on the threshold of her apartment as Arkhimedov and Shpektorov are returning from the walk that is referenced in the opening scene. The narrator is not present at the scene, so he must have received this account from Shpektorov. During the conversation in his study, however, the narrator is impressed by Esther's demeanor: "I was amazed by the stately simplicity with which she lowered her head." [Я подивился величественной простоте, с которой она опустила голову.][49] Then, a few minutes later, he adds:

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[47] Ibid., 38.

[48] Ibid., 11.

[49] Ibid., 38.

> The woman got up, and again I saw her stern and sorrowful forehead, the straight nose of the daughters of Lebanon and a tall ignorant neck, the one that the Bible would have undoubtedly dared to compare with an ivory tower facing Damascus.
>
> Женщина встала, и вновь я увидел её грозный и печальный лоб, прямой нос дочерей Ливана и высокую невежественную шею, которую Библия решилась бы, без сомнения, сравнить с башней из слоновой кости, обращённой лицом к Дамаску.[50]

Her majestic dignity notwithstanding, Esther realizes that she is partly to blame for Arkhimedov's flight from home. When asked by the narrator what prevented Arkhimedov from continuing his preaching without leaving his home, she looks "in front of herself with her black, steady eyes" [прямо перед собой чёрными, ровными глазами], and then "with epic simplicity" [с эпической простотой] responds, "I prevented him." [Ему мешала я.][51]

Esther then explains that Arkhimedov would not have left the home had she paid more attention to him. The "fervent speech" [пылкая речь] that she delivers with a "motionless face" [неподвижное лицо] not only conveys her sense of remorse regarding what Arkhimedov had to deal with at home, but also betrays the heavy burden that she carries regarding what Arkhimedov is not aware of:

> "I, I alone am to blame for everything! He coughed. He walked around in torn socks! No one took care of him when he was hungry. He is right, I want to see him to tell him that he is right! I thought only of myself. Didn't I wake him up at nights when the child was crying? … Would he leave me had I been taking care of him as I used to in our first years together? Back then would I be gone from morning till evening? Would he, having come home, have to cook his own supper? Would I lie to him then? Would …"
>
> Shpektorov sternly raised his eye brows.
>
> "No one is interested in that."

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[50] Ibid., 41.

[51] Ibid., 39.

> - Я, я одна виновата во всём! Он кашлял. Он ходил в рваных носках! Никто о нём не заботился, когда он ходил голодный. Он прав, я хочу увидеть его, чтобы сказать, что он прав! Я думала только о себе. Разве я не будила его по ночам, когда плакал ребёнок? … Разве он ушёл бы от меня, если бы я заботилась о нём так же, как в первые годы? Разве тогда я уходила с утра до вечера? Разве, возвращаясь домой, он должен был сам готовить себе обед? Разве тогда я лгала ему? Разве …
>
> Шпекторов сердито вскинул брови.
>
> - Это никому не интересно.[52]

Shpektorov, who has been listening patiently, stops Esther short of confessing to her infidelity to Arkhimedov and revealing the true identity of Ferdinand's father. Esther goes quiet, but a storm is still raging inside of her. She is unable to choose one man over the other, or, to be more precise, between her duty to Arkhimedov and her love for Shpektorov, although hardly anything is said on the latter subject. Nonetheless, it is this emotional and moral impasse that drives her to suicide. The narrator surmises that something is bothering Esther on a very deep level, but he is unable to identify what it is. When he meets her at the Youth Theater, he notices that her usual dignified and calm demeanor is hiding something:

> Without lifting her eyes, Esther was sitting in the corner with the palm of her hand on a sleeping child. She was calm. But sometimes immobility came down like a curtain revealing the face of an agitated woman who was contemplating, perhaps resolving to make a serious step. At one moment a challenge would be seen in her face, then despair, then a recognition of guilt. And then the curtain would close, and again her reticence and paleness were beyond doubt.
>
> Не поднимая глаз, сидела в углу Эсфирь, положив ладонь на спящего ребёнка. Она была спокойна. Но иногда неподвижность падала как занавес, и открывалось взволнованное лицо женщины, размышляющей, быть может рещающейся на серьёзный шаг. То вызов проходил по лицу, то отчаянье, то сознание вины. А потом занавес задёгивался, и вот уже снова вне подозрений были её молчаливость и бледность.[53]

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[52] Ibid., 40.

[53] Ibid., 51.

By taking her final step off the roof of a five-story building, Esther leaves all the arguments and unresolved questions behind. Nevertheless, by killing herself, the heroine does not extinguish her own influence upon the protagonist. Her presence, silent though it may be, continues to be felt in the novel and in the protagonist's mind even after her death. The heroine's suicide causes the artist to finally transcend the limitations of his own self and to gain a deeper insight into human experience. If in "The Meek One" the heroine's suicide inadvertently drives the protagonist deeper into despair and isolation, Kaverin's artist is able to look outward, make discoveries, and create the kind of art that transcends human limitations.

Earlier in the novel Zhaba, one of Arkhimedov's disciples and a "liar with an unmistakable sense of taste" [враль с безошибочным вкусом],[54] explains to the narrator that "Arkhimedov is such a man … he is not a simple man. He is an artist, and he is beyond the reach of all of us." [Архимедов это такой человек … это не простой человек. Это – художник, и нам всем до него, как до неба.] [55] The narrator is surprised by such an evaluation, and asks, "Perhaps you are talking about a different Arkhimedov?" [Ты, может быть, не о том Архимедове говоришь?][56] Zhaba responds:

> "I'm talking … [about] Aleksei Arkhimedov. A great artist … Why are you laughing? Everyone laughs when I say that Arkhimedov is a genius!"
>
> "Where can one see his works?
>
> Zhaba was puffing.
>
> "Nowhere," he said angrily. "He does not show them to anyone. And he won't sell them. He has bequeathed them to the proletariat."

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[54] Ibid., 58.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

> - Я говорю … [об] Алексее Архимедове. Великий художник … Чего ты смеёшься? Все смеются, когда я говорю, что Архимедов гениален!
> - Где же можно видеть его работы?
> Жаба отдувался.
> - Нигде, ещё сердито сказал он. – Он никому не показывает их. И не продаст. Он завещал их пролетариату.[57]

Zhaba calls Arkhimedov a genius and a great artist, but it is hard to either support or to refute this statement, because Arkhimedov's paintings are like a hidden treasure: everyone believes that it exists, but nobody has seen it. Such a response only further piques the narrator's interest. He asks Zhaba whether he himself has ever seen Arkhimedov's works. Indeed, Zhaba has, and he can tells the narrator about Arkhimedov's unique vision and "the art of a man who is not afraid of anything" [искусство человека, который ничего не боится.][58] Zhaba explains:

> true art, the only kind that is needed by its time … is a dangerous thing, pitiless, with successes and failures, with rebellions against teachers, with real battles in which not only canvases, but people die too. This is a battle for the eye, for an honesty of the eye that is not subject either to laws or to prohibitions. In this matter, one ought to tolerate hunger, cold, and mockery. One has to hide his ambition in his pocket or clench it in his teeth, and if there is no canvas, then to draw on his own bed sheet. And to work, even if your best friend and brother tell you that your occupation is nonsense.
>
> живопись настоящая, единственная, которая нужна своему времени … дело страшное, безжалостное, с удачами и неудачами, с восстаниями против учителей, с настоящими сражениям, в которых гибнут не только холсты, но и люди. Это борьба за глаз, за честность глаза, который не подчиняется ни законам ни запрещениям. Это дело такое, что нужно идти на голод, на холод и на издевательство. Нужно спрятать честолюбие в карман или зажать в зубах, и, если нет полотна, рисовать на собственной простыне. И работать, даже если твой лучший друг и брат скажет тебе, что ты занимаешься вздором.[59]

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[57] Ibid., 58-9.

[58] Ibid., 59.

[59] Ibid., 61.

Zhaba's peculiar love for flowery rhetoric and perhaps overstatement is quite apparent in his declamatory speeches. Nonetheless, it is also apparent that he is the only person who has a true sense of appreciation for Arkhimedov's work, regardless of whether the artist's view is viable in his contemporary reality. Finally, Zhaba formulates the secret to artistic success: "one has to die in order to be discovered" [нужно умереть для того, чтобы тебя открыли.][60] Paradoxically, as we later find out, Arkhimedov's genius allows him to both experience death and to continue working in order to create his masterpiece.

Arkhimedov does not witness Esther's suicide. He arrives on the scene shortly afterwards, and even this leaves such a deep impression on him that, in effect, he vicariously goes though this experience before depicting it on canvas. The narrator himself runs to the scene after he hears someone say in a crowd, "It must have been scary after all, if she bound her eyes." [А, должно быть, всё-таки страшно было, если завязала глаза.][61] Upon his arrival, the narrator sees Esther:

> She was lying on the pavement, with wooden legs spread a little, the kerchief has slipped off, and her eyes were open. And the entire face, always so reserved, was now open, as if the curtain was removed from it by the proximity of death. The face was pensive and simple.
>
> "Just think about it, from the fifth floor," people were saying all around. "And she tied her eyes."
>
> Feeling embarrassed in the presence of death, everyone stepped away.
>
> Она лежала на мостовой, немного раздвинув деревянные ноги, платок сдвинулся, и глаза были открыты. И всё лицо, всегда такое замкнутое, было открыто теперь, как будто занавес был сдёрнут с него близостью смерти. Лицо было задумчивое и простое.
>
> - Подумать только, с пятого этажа, - говорили вокруг, - и глаза завязала…

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[60] Ibid., 61.

[61] Ibid., 98.

> Стесняясь смерти, все отступили прочь.[62]

Soon afterwards the narrator notices Arkhimedov in the crowd and decides to follow him. At first Arkhimedov's movements appear to be erratic, but then the narrator realizes that Arkhimedov is searching for colors. The final chapter of the novel is filled with descriptions of minute scenes once can encounter on city streets, of people and events that normally pass by unnoticed, and of numerous colors and hues that Arkhimedov sees during his wondering about the city. He notices that the colors change once street lamps are lit and that shadows transform the appearance of reality without making it any less real. He sees a tavern, a church, a woman with a child, an abortionist, a policeman, and many others. He sees various colors: hues of blue, black, golden, splashes of light and pockets of darkness. His vision absorbs all of it.

In the end, he loses his wife, his son, his disciples, yet he gains the kind of vision that allows him to produce a masterpiece. On the surface, it depicts Esther's suicide scene:

> She is lying, with her arms broken, full of shadows. Like a fishing net, they entangle the entire intersection. They sway on squatting houses, in distorted rhombs of windows. In hollow perspectives of the suburb they pass with somber self-importance of unattached beings. They fall onto a headscarf that shifted during the fall from her eyes to her lips that she is biting in exertion.
>
> Strangers stand around her … Everyone is looking at her. She is lying, crossed with hazy stripes of shadow and light. With an open mouth and a raised red baton, a policeman is riding towards her in a stilted carriage; horses have round, surprised faces.
>
> [Она лежит, сломав руки, полная теней. Как невод, они опутывают весь перекрёсток. Они качаются на присевших домах, в перекошенных ромбах окон. В пустынных перекрёстках пригорода они проходят с угрюмой важностью одиноких. Они падают на

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[62] Ibid., 99.

> платок, сдвинувшийся при падении с глаз, на закушенные от усилий губы…
>
> Чужие люди стоят вокруг ... Все смотрят на неё. Она лежит, пересечённая туманными полосами теней и света. Разинув рот, подняв красную палку, милиционер едет к ней на кособокой пролётке; у лошадей – круглые, удивлённые лица.][63]

Like a refrain, the narrator keeps repeating: "And everyone is looking at her" [И все смотрят на неё.][64] She is the central figure in the composition of the painting, and the unknown artist who created it (Aleksei Arkhimedov, that is) makes it absolutely unambiguous what, or whom, the viewers should be looking at. At the same time, the artist imparts an air of dignity to the woman despite the very unfortunate ending to her life:

> And she is lying there as if at the end of a flight, not a fall, as if she did not crash, but died from altitude. And it seems that the last person who was close to her just now turned the corner and disappeared…
>
> А она лежит такая, как будто это был полёт, а не падение, и она не разбилась, а умерла от высоты. И кажется, что последний близкий человек только что повернул за угол – и скрылся…[65]

The word "flight" implies not only a degree of purposefulness on the heroine's part, but also a sense of liberation. She dies not from the impact that her physical body experiences once it hits the pavement, but from the fleeting and deceptive sense of overcoming all constraints – physical, as well as emotional – however deceptive this impression may be. Physical gravity, although still at work, is but for a moment overcome by a sense of independence from everything and everyone. The big question that remains unanswered is how the artist is able to reflect all of these considerations without ever experiencing them first-hand. The narrator continues his ekphrasis:

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[63] Ibid., 148.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid., 149.

> This could have been accomplished only by someone who with all the freedom of genius could step over the caution and dishonesty of contemporary art, which is so distant from people … Along with an unconscious power of imagination one could see here reason and memory – the terrible memory that is based, perhaps, on clear ideas of what goes past the eyes of a person who is plummeting from a fifth story. One neede to crash and die in order to paint this work.
>
> Это могло удаться лишь тому, кто со всей свободой гениального дарования перешагнул через осторожность и нечестность современной живописи, которая так отдалилась от людей…На ряду с бессознательной силой изображения здесь видны ум и память – страшная память, основанная, быть может, на ясных представлениях о том, что проходит перед глазами человека, летящего вниз с пятого этажа. Нужно было разбиться насмерть, чтобы написать эту вещь.[66]

Clearly, Arkhimedov could not have died in order to paint this masterpiece, which makes his talent of depiction, his sense of empathy, and the extent of his imagination all the more remarkable. We also get the sense that his eye glasses, referenced throughout the novel, and his "nearsighted blue eyes" [близорукие голубые глаза][67] mentioned in the scene when he signs Shpektorov's adoption papers for Ferdinand have nothing to do with his ability to see colors, experience emotions, and depict them on canvas. In fact, the heroine's last act that makes her forever silent finally cures the remnants of Arkhimedov's blindness that prevented him from finding the right colors and, at least in his mind, making his paintings good enough to be seen by others at the present. By contrast, Shpektorov's "eyes of a lizard" and his predatory inclinations in dealing with both his friend Arkhimedov and the workers in the steppe expose the spiritual bankruptcy of his seemingly strong ideological position.

Like the meek woman in Dostoevsky's story discussed previously, by committing suicide Esther neither seeks to shock the public nor does she attempt to answer anyone's questions. Also like the meek woman, Esther is torn between two options, neither of which is appealing to her because regardless of what she chooses, she will be constantly reminded of the other option that she passed by. The dilemma that Esther faces is whether to make the selfless choice to stay, despite her own unhappiness, married to Arkhimedov or to leave him and raise her son together with Shpektorov. Tragically, neither of these options is entirely appealing to her. Yet unlike her nineteenth-century counterpart who leaves the protagonist to face the consequences of his own self-centered way of dealing with the world and to drive himself only deeper into the corner of his own solipsistic thinking, by her suicide Esther gives the artist the impetus – both the subject matter and the emotional impulse – for gaining such insight into the human nature that, it appears, he could not have gained otherwise. The shock of Ether's death and the gradual loss of everything that could have been considered his – the wife, the son, the disciples and friends – allow him in the end to find the right angle, the needed colors, and the appropriate technique for depicting the state of the woman's mind and soul during the very final moments of her life.

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[66] Ibid., 148.

[67] Ibid., 146.

As a complete contrast to "The Meek One," the novel *Artist Unknown* offers to the readers an example of a protagonist who finds a path to selflessness and to a better understanding of human nature through art. The partial blindness that Arkhimedov exhibits early in the novel, when he is unaware of Esther's emotional state, through tragedy transforms into an ability to see the world in a new light and to relate to this world in a new way. While, on the surface, the amount of communication that takes place between Arkhimedov and Esther tapers off until it ceases completely, his keenness to observe suddenly increases after every opportunity for verbal communication has run out. It is only after Esther goes completely silent and Arkhimedov becomes passive, disinterested, and devoid of any motivation to fight for anything, that he finally reaches the degree of kenosis that is necessary for him in order to overcome the barriers that have precluded him from creating his masterpiece up to this point.

Conclusion

This research project began five years ago as an attempt to understand in broad terms the place that ekphrasis occupies in Russian literature. It soon became apparent that since Russian culture differentiates between two types of images – secular paintings and religious icons – a literary scholar's approach to examining ekphrasis in the Russian context has to account for two different ways of experiencing a work of visual art. Although both of these types of images can expound on similar spiritual themes or address the same religious subjects, they differ in their purpose and technique.

A religious icon is considered to be not a mimetic representation of objects of the material reality, but a window through which a believer can see the spiritual realm, the exalted personages dwelling in it, and, what is extremely important, to be also seen by these personages. This two-way interaction between a beholder and an image, especially an image of an exalted saint, results (or so it is intended) in a significant emotional and psychological change in the beholder. Whereas in ekphrasis a speaker imposes his authority on an image by attempting to give his own voice to it, in iconography it is the image that overpowers the beholder and brings about a transformation in him. The ekphrastic and the iconographic principles of expressing meaning are at odds with each other, and when they find their way into a literary narrative, they overturn the usual gender roles assigned to the word and the image.

When it comes to iconic representation, the tension between the verbal descriptive impulse and the pictorial silence do not follow the usual dynamic of the gendered antagonism that James Heffernan speaks of. The silence of an iconic image is an expression not of its submission, but of its power. By remaining silent, the iconic image defies a speaker's attempts to impose his own interpretation on a visual image and to pare down the meaning that is hidden in the depicted object. As Shanti Elliott expresses it,

> The icon, the ideal marriage of word and image in Orthodox culture, embodies the aesthetic of the unuttered word; and iconic theology provides crucial explanations of why it must remain unspoken. Drawing thought from the limits of verbal expression allows for expansive simultaneity and multivalence.[1]

Moving beyond the narrower scope of verbal and pictorial expression per se and applying ekphrastic and iconographic principles to the realm of human interaction takes this conflict to a higher and a markedly more intriguing level. It appears that the gendered conflict between a word and an image can be applied directly to male-female interactions, especially when a verbose male character or a narrator encounters a taciturn or an altogether silent heroine.

In a literary narrative, a character can be represented either through discourse (direct or indirect) or by means of description. As my analysis shows, because of their silence, a heroine is represented in a narrative for the most part through ekphrasis. An author may deliberately choose to describe her in such terms as would make her look and act like an iconic personage. Her facial features and her piety may remind one of an icon of a saint. She may also be represented as standing within door or window frames or even as an object of someone's veneration. In other words, an author may choose to endow a heroine with icon-like characteristics and make her, in effect, a living icon within a narrative.

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[1] Elliott, 55.

When the gendered conflict between a word and an image is taken literally and a loquacious male character finds himself in a relationship with a taciturn iconic heroine, her silence not only allows her to resist his attempts to describe, define, and explain her character to himself and others, but ultimately, it becomes a powerful tool for revealing the hero's nature and, in some cases, for changing it. By constantly trying to engage in verbal discourse, the male character, in effect, uses a wrong tool for accessing the meaning that is concealed in the iconic image represented by the heroine. Thus, what began as an exploration of a rhetorical device has gradually turned into a study of female silence. At the same time, the crux of the problem associated with iconophobia and iconophilia has transferred from a relationship between a poet and a painting to a relationship between a hero/narrator and a heroine.

In Pushkin's story "The Stationmaster," Samson Vyrin talks extensively of his need for his daughter Dunia, but it is apparent that he has no conception of what Dunia's own desires, wishes, or concerns are. Similarly, the narrator of the story, who for the most part gets his information from Samson, is unable to tell the readers anything about the true motivations behind Dunia's actions. To the male characters, Dunia is a riddle, and her silence allows her to turn the events of the story to her advantage. Her iconicity is in no way a reflection of her spirituality or morals the way Samson understand them; instead, Pushkin uses it as a literary device that, on the one hand, helps to reveal the insolvency of the narrator's and the protagonist's sentimental view of life and, on the other, demonstrates to the readers that even a sentimental approach to literature is becoming antiquated.

In Dostoevsky's tale "The Meek One," the theme of heroine's iconicity is woven through the entire narrative, reaching its apogee at the moment immediately prior to her suicide. Because an actual icon of Bogoroditsa is featured in the narrative, a link between the heroine and her icon is easily established. Yet aside from the obvious physical connection, the heroine's increasing silence renders her more and more icon-like. Dostoevsky ponders the problem of silence in literature (the paradox of it, really), and he writes in his *Diary of a Writer*: "The very valuable rule that an uttered word is silver but an unuttered one golden has long ceased to be a habit among our artist. They have little faith in their readers."[2] In Dostoevsky, "[t]he icon stands for a way of seeing things and acting and remains remarkably unfixed in function and idea,"[3] and the increasing silence of his heroine is not only an indictment against the abusive behavior of the narrator, but also a challenge to the readers. In the case of "The Meek One," iconicity and the silence that is connected with it remain unappreciated and completely unapprehended by the narrator.

The key to understanding either an actual icon or an iconic heroine is what some scholars call an "iconic vision." Often used in connection with the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky, this term refers to a specific way of perceiving an image that, regardless of its actual connection with religious themes and techniques in a strict sense, becomes an icon in the eyes of a beholder.[4] A thorough exploration of iconic vision will be the next step in this research project.

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[2] Qtd. in Elliott, 55.

[3] Elliott, 57.

[4] While Elliott in "Icon and Mask in Dostoevsky's Artistic Philosophy" considers the notion of iconic vision and the way it applies to Fyodor Dostoevsky's and Nikolai Leskov's works, Stanton's in his book *The Optina Pustyn Monastery in the Russian Literary Imagination* also brings in the works of Gogol and Tolstoy into the discussion. For a brief discussion of iconic vision as a wider cultural phenomenon, see E. N. Trubetskoi's essay "Gosudarstvennaia mistika i soblazn griadushchego rabstva," *Russkaia mysl´* 38 (January 1917): 83–88.

Although Dostoevsky's narrator in "The Meek One" exhibits a clear lack of iconic vision, as do all of his self-centered villains, a gradual turn towards the proper way of perceiving an icon is witnessed in Mamin-Sibiriak's *Shooting Stars*. Again, illustrating the point that iconicity in the literary sense does not require sainthood in the religious sense, the narrator of this novel presents to the readers a study of human longing for perfection. The protagonist of the novel is the sculptor who correlates a person's spiritual beauty with his or her physical appearance. It can be said that drawn in by the silence of the novel's heroine, he misapplies his iconic vision. Female silence in this narrative hides a false kind of iconicity; nevertheless, even here the protagonist's and the narrator's efforts to create an ekphrasis of the heroine are futile. Having realized that his iconophilia has no basis, the protagonist gives up art and never speaks of his past infatuation. Neither do other characters around him. A conscious silence, at least when a specific topic is concerned, sets in where before ekphrastic attempts were made to envoice the subject that was completely barren in any spiritual sense.

Finally, in Kaverin's novel *Artist Unknown* the heroine's hidden emotional suffering, which also results in a suicide, facilitates the transition in the protagonist that allows him to see both the heroine and the world in a new way. Here, again, biblical overtones help to establish the heroine's iconic status; yet it is her inability to verbally communicate with the protagonist in a direct way that complicates their relationship and adds another dimension to her character. The shock of her loss and the kenotic gesture of giving up his son allow the protagonist to break free from the social structure that could not fully accept him. He becomes simultaneously an outsider to the Soviet society and a visionary who can transcend the usual physical boundaries imposed on people in his day and age and create art from what ought to be under normal circumstances an impossible point of view. Of the four works examined in this dissertation, only Kaverin's *Artist Unknown* offers an example where the talkative male character grasps the concept of iconicity without being completely incapacitated by it.

Thus, the question of female silence in a Russian literary narrative can be examined through the prism of Eastern Orthodox iconography. Here, both the purpose of religious icons and the techniques of icon art add a new dimension to what otherwise may be considered as a flat or an improbable heroine. To fully comprehend the complexity of iconic characters, one ought to study not only the spiritual purpose behind icons, but also the unique way of depiction that is traditionally used by iconographers. The way in which images are framed, human figures are depicted, and even verbal text is incorporated into icon art bears a special meaning. Perhaps most notably, the way in which reverse perspective is used to organize pictorial space of an icon must be accounted for. As Elliott reminds us, the purpose of reverse perspective is "to renounce the allure of immediate vision offered by the realist perspective."[5] Pavel Florenskii, who himself was an Orthodox priest, studies the spiritual underpinnings of linear and reverse perspective in much detail, and expresses a similar thought in much stronger terms:

> For there is, after all, only two ways of experiencing the world – the experience that is common to all mankind and the "scientific" experience, Kantian that is, just as there are only two ways of relating to life – an internal and an external one, just as there are two types of culture – contemplatively artistic and predatorily mechanistic.
>
> Ведь есть, в конечномитоге, только два опыта мира – опыт общечеловеческий и опыт "научный", т.е.кантовский, как есть только два отношения к жизни – внутреннее и внешнее, как есть два типа культуры — созерцательно-творческая и хищнически-механическая.[6]

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[5] Elliott, 58.

[6] Florenskii, 3(1):61-2.

Though Florenskii's conclusions regarding the nature and the function of pictorial perspective may appear exaggerated and even biased, they nonetheless reflect an overall attitude towards what begins as a problem of a more effective way of drawing pictures and ends as an attempt to spell out a world outlook (alleged or actual) of an entire culture. In this system of beliefs, rationalism and mimesis in art are strongly opposed to spirituality and perhaps even mystery of expression. For this reason, after the concept of iconic female silence is examined, the problem of male gregariousness is resolved, and the notion of iconic vision is worked out, the next very valuable questions that ought to be addressed are, first, how a narrative as a whole can function as a literary icon and, second, in what way a reader ought to expect to be changed after encountering it. At this point, we leave the sphere of textual analysis and enter the realm of Philosophy of Literature.

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