

GOGOLIAN SPATIAL MODELS AND MANKIND'S POTENTIAL FOR  
REDEMPTION: A COMPARISON OF "THE CARRIAGE" AND *DEAD SOULS*

Maxwell O. Mason

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Approved by  
Advisor: Christopher Putney  
Reader: Beth Holmgren  
Reader: Ivana Vuletic

## ABSTRACT

MAXWELL O. MASON: Gogolian Spatial Models and Mankind's Potential for Redemption: A Comparison of "The Carriage" and *Dead Souls*  
(Under the direction of Christopher Putney)

This analysis explores Nikolai Gogol's utilization of spatial models in his short story "The Carriage" and his epic novel *Dead Souls* in an attempt to deduce a connection between a character's physical environment and his potential for redemption. These works are unique in that they reflect two distinct periods of a highly formative time in Gogol's theological development. "The Carriage," the earlier published of the two, represents this period's point of departure, whereas *Dead Souls* conveys the output of Gogol's complex journey.

Employing the insight of Iurii Lotman, this study examines first the dominance of evil in the "static" environments of these two works and then its subordination to "boundless" space in *Dead Souls*. To replace his dominant model of evil even temporarily, though, Gogol was forced to extend his vision limitlessly, a task that was ultimately more than he could bear.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The critical attention paid to Nikolai Gogol's<sup>1</sup> epic poem *Мертвые души* (*Dead Souls*) is evidenced by the volumes of analyses, the countless articles, and numerous book-length studies devoted solely to this work. Standing in stark contrast to *Dead Souls* in terms of attention paid to it is Gogol's short story "Коляска" ("The Carriage"). Completed in 1835, this work favorably impressed Aleksandr Pushkin, the editor of the magazine *Sovremennik*, in which the story was first published. Several decades later, it caught the attention of Lev Tolstoi, who said that "The Carriage" was Gogol's greatest work, "the peak of perfection in its kind" (qtd. in Fanger, *Creation* 122). These comments would seem to beg for extensive analysis of this tale. Of Gogol's major works, though, "The Carriage" is one of the least analyzed.<sup>2</sup>

As the critic John G. Garrard has observed, the value of "The Carriage" "lies in the fact that it has not been overlaid by accretions of critical opinion, so that we can come to it fresh, without preconceptions" (855). Although Garrard made this claim in 1975, I believe the basic premise is still applicable today. Overall, the tendency of existing analyses of "The Carriage" has been to skim the surface, identifying elements, devices, and techniques that link it to Gogol's craft as a whole. While many of these analyses provide valid

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<sup>1</sup> The Library of Congress system of transliteration is used throughout this thesis with one exception: Gogol's name is transliterated without the soft sign.

<sup>2</sup> John G. Garrard enumerates in his article "Some Thoughts on Gogol's 'Kolyaska'" the myriad "book length studies...[that] contain no reference whatsoever to "Kolyaska" (859).

interpretations of this tale, they generally lack critical consideration of whether “The Carriage” possesses a fundamental connection to the themes that dominated Gogol’s entire body of work, and particularly his masterpiece *Dead Souls*.<sup>3</sup> I intend to illustrate in this analysis that an important connection between these works does indeed exist.

Certainly, I am not the first to notice a link between “The Carriage” and *Dead Souls*. James B. Woodward, for example, acknowledges in his work *The Symbolic Art of Gogol* that “‘The Carriage’ and the third chapter of *Dead Souls* were written at approximately the same time” (114). Having acknowledged the similar timeframe during which these two works were written, Woodward then attempts to justify the inclusion of “The Carriage” in Gogol’s Petersburg cycle. He concludes that the numerous allusions to the capital in “The Carriage” illustrate that it does indeed belong. The specific connection of “The Carriage” to *Dead Souls* implied by Woodward, though, is conspicuously lacking.

The critic Vsevolod Setchkarev also pays some attention to “The Carriage” (just over three pages) in his study *Gogol: His Life and Works*. He concludes his assessment of the tale by remarking upon Gogol’s creative development, noting that: “From here, the road to *Dead Souls* is not very long” (165). Setchkarev provides little tangible evidence to confirm a direct and meaningful thematic link between these works. Nevertheless, I would contend that his conclusion is indeed accurate.

While critics have properly identified a relationship between “The Carriage” and *Dead Souls*, the explication of this connection is limited and generally insufficient.<sup>4</sup> I

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<sup>3</sup> Donald Fanger, for instance, considers “The Carriage” primarily as only a “basic anecdote [that] is straightforward and minimal, just sufficient to sustain [Gogol’s] narrative embroideries” (*Creation* 123).

<sup>4</sup> I should mention again Garrard’s contribution to the analysis of “The Carriage.” While insightful, it focuses largely on his belief that Gogol was above all else an ironist, particularly in his use of irony “to keep the vulgarity of life at a distance...” (857). Leo Hulanicki has also contributed to the study of this work in his article “‘The Carriage’ by N. V. Gogol.”

contend that this short story is in fact a far more substantive work than has been recognized. I contend that “The Carriage” serves as the optimal tool with which to explore one of the more dominant themes in Gogol’s work: mankind’s potential for redemption. I consider this issue through the lens of the spatial models employed by Gogol in these works, first recognizing correspondences, and then focusing principally on divergences. The unique value of “The Carriage,” I conclude, is that it captures paradigmatically a younger Gogol’s view of the human condition, which he determined had been perverted by the influence of the Devil. This work, therefore, provides a fruitful basis from which to evaluate Gogol’s attempt to move past this almost entirely bleak portrayal of mankind and shift toward something more hopeful (though still distant) in *Dead Souls*. Although Gogol was ultimately unsuccessful in this endeavor, “The Carriage” helps us better understand *Dead Souls* as a vehicle through which he envisioned guiding mankind toward redemption.

### **Types of Gogolian Space**

My analysis of these works relies substantially on the insight of Iurii Lotman and specifically his essay “Artistic Space in Gogol’s Prose,” in which he explores various manifestations of Gogolian space and the connection between these settings and the characters that occupy them. Lotman delineates Gogolian settings into two general categories: 1) static, everyday space and 2) boundless, fantastic, magical space. Both “The Carriage” and *Dead Souls* fit conveniently within these two constructs. “The Carriage” is a paradigmatic representation of static space, which Lotman defines generally as space that “stagnates, [...] excludes movement, [...] is delimited on all sides, and [has a] boundary

[that] is immovable” (210).<sup>5</sup> As I shall eventually discuss in greater detail, these (and other) features of the static environment work hand in hand with Gogol’s conception of evil as a subtle, insidious force that tempts mankind to live a petty and insignificant existence.

Like “The Carriage,” *Dead Souls* is set primarily in a static environment; however, as Lotman has observed, in actuality Gogol’s epic (a work “about all facets of life and about all of Russia”) is made up of “all types of artistic space [...] synthesized into a single system” (234). Examples of these various spaces include “infinity [...]; small-scale triviality [...]; and domestic warmth [...]; and others” (236). The settings of *Dead Souls* that Lotman recognizes as “infinite,” and particularly the final image of boundless Russia (and what it signifies for Gogol), set this work apart from “The Carriage.”<sup>6</sup>

According to Lotman, the defining feature of the various settings of *Dead Souls* is that they are united by the image and function of “the road” (“дорога”), which “becomes a ‘universal form of organization of space’” (236). Lotman carries this observation further, noting that although the road “passes across all kinds of Gogolesque space [it] belongs to none of them” (236). The road, therefore, is more closely associated with boundless space and the potential Gogol saw in it.

Building from this classification of spaces, Lotman recognizes that certain character types are associated with various settings. He specifically distinguishes between characters that are at one with the static environment and those that are more fluent, like the road itself: “All the heroes, ideas, and images are divided into those belonging to the road, aspiring, having a goal, moving—and those that are static, aimless” (236). The protagonists (as well

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<sup>5</sup> Except where otherwise noted, all Lotman citations are from his study “Artistic Space in Gogol’s Prose.”

<sup>6</sup> In the absence of a concrete vision of bounded space that does not stifle human existence, Gogol comes to rely upon the potential for prodigious change associated with the notion of boundless space.

as the secondary characters) of both “The Carriage” and *Dead Souls* illustrate the aptness of Lotman’s classification. As with the settings of these two works, though, there is overlap with respect to the hero of *Dead Souls*, who pursues the same petty desires as Gogol’s wholly stagnant characters. However, because he can never settle down in one place, he preserves the possibility for redemption that comes with belonging to the road.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Lotman’s study, though, is the distinction he makes between the idea of the road and that of “the path” (“путь”), which he defines as “the realization (full or partial) or the non-realization of the road” (236). Even more specifically, the path “is a continuous succession of states, where each state forecasts the next” (Lotman 231). This notion of the path presupposes a definite or potential endpoint (which, as Lotman says, can either be realized or not). In the context of Orthodox theology, this endpoint would amount to mankind’s union with God, or, *theosis*.<sup>7</sup>

It was in his attempt to depict this positive realization of the path, though, that Gogol most struggled personally and creatively. Instead of setting his protagonist on a path with a definitive outcome, Gogol made the path “isomorphous to the road and in principle limitless” (Lotman 237). The road, in this context, comes tenuously close to being a variant of static space.<sup>8</sup> That is, even though the road can be a component of a path to redemption, mere travel along it does not guarantee realization of this end, for motion on the road can be non-directional and purposeless. Nevertheless, movement along the road did at least guarantee that the individual who belonged to this environment “is not frozen into immobility”

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher Putney defines *theosis* as “the mystical union with God—without, actually, understanding God—[...] (the process of becoming divine), which is part of the natural phenomenon Dionysius describes whereby all things yearn to be united with God” (*Russian Devils* 13).

<sup>8</sup> Lotman notes that “the tendency to spread aimlessly in all directions and the tendency to be closed in a ‘pointed’ shell are perceived equally as variants of the non-directional and, consequently, static space” (234).



(Lotman 237). As a result, the Gogolian hero of the road is destined to eternal motion, which although substantially less rewarding than the outcome Gogol hoped to produce, is still a preferable state to that which befalls the man of a static environment.

Utilizing Lotman's observations, I first compare these works in terms of their similarly static physical environments, observing that the settings share many features of stagnancy, influenced by an insidious evil force that works to stifle mankind's existence. After establishing the correspondence of these settings, I then consider individually the protagonists that occupy them, one who belongs entirely to the static setting, and his counterpart, who belongs to the road. As part of this consideration, I assess the manner in which Gogol attempts in *Dead Souls* to break from his typically bleak portrayal of the human condition and to depict mankind's potential for redemption. This task proves particularly challenging for Gogol, for he has created an environment and a protagonist that largely resemble those of his earlier work. Very little about Gogol's epic suggests that a positive outcome is possible for his protagonist. Although a shift in the author's approach to his craft is evident, one in which Gogol demonstratively contemplates the potential of boundless space in the redemption of mankind, he nevertheless struggles to overcome the insidious hold of evil (the hallmark of static space).

### **Background: Gogol's Conception of Evil and Proper Existence**

Gogol's almost pathological determination to find and convey a rubric for proper existence was an evolutionary process, whose origins can be traced to points early in the author's life. In a letter to his mother from 1829, Gogol stated that writing, as a profession, would provide him "a position to sow good and work for the benefit of the world"

“рассеивать благо и работать на пользу мира” (Proffer 32; PSS X, 146). Later in the same letter he proclaimed the devotion of his “entire life to the happiness and good of [his] fellowmen” “всю жизнь посвящу для счастья и блага себе подобных” (Proffer 34; PSS X; 146). Although motivated primarily by a youthful exuberance and a sense of idealism, these lines reflect a tendency that would gradually bloom into obsession.

For the young Gogol, “the service of good demand[ed] the truthful depiction of evil” (Lotman, “The Truth as Lie” 52). He sought to represent evil in the most concrete manner he knew, as a force that influenced mankind to strive for earthly, petty, and fleeting passions, the misguided way of life he witnessed and condemned as a young man in St. Petersburg. The tendency of Gogol’s characters to succumb to petty desires was the result of an evil force, which Gogol conceptualized as the Devil, whose objective was to encourage mankind’s focus on the insignificant.<sup>9</sup>

In Gogol’s earliest works, particularly those of his *Dikanka* series, the Devil was portrayed in the form of tangible beings, frequently manifest as “anthropomorphic folk-based devils” (Putney, “Theology of Privation” 76). By his later works, the Devil no longer revealed himself so tangibly. Instead, the Devil was depicted as a subtle, insidious force that focused mankind’s attention and concern toward both “unworthy object[s]...[and]...prosaic...goal[s]” (Merezhkovsky 320) and “a lowly ambition in lieu of a grand passion, a mundane fixation rather than a meaningful emotional involvement, or to put it differently, an overinvestment in trivia” (Fanger, *Creation* 143). Leading mankind on this course was the Devil’s modus operandi, one grounded in nothingness, absence, and

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<sup>9</sup> Jesse Zeldin has identified Gogol’s typical character as “a seducee of artificiality, of the false, accepting the temptations offered Christ in the dessert rather than affirming their opposite” (*Gogol’s Quest*, 168).

privation,<sup>10</sup> all of which are unmistakably predominant features of evil in Gogol's work. These states are also all components of *poshlost'*, that condition which, according to Nabokov, consisted of elevating to significance "not only the obviously trashy but also the falsely important, the falsely beautiful, the falsely clever, the falsely attractive" (70). It is this form of evil, one that is neither demonstrative nor overt, but rather subtle and insidious, that dominates "The Carriage" and *Dead Souls*.

In Gogol's view, the problem with the misdirected way of life that this brand of evil encouraged was that it represented a blatant violation of a principal tenet of Eastern Orthodoxy: that mankind should lead a good and proper existence by faithfully performing the duties required of his specific role or "place" in life. As noted by Putney in his book *Russian Devils and Diabolic Conditionality in Nikolai Gogol's Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka*, the Orthodox "theology of place" amounts to "knowing and keeping to one's proper place in the immutable God-given hierarchy[, which] is essential in order to become a fully realized participant [...] in the divine scheme" (*Russian Devils* 202).

Robert Maguire has observed that "the idea of 'place,' as a desirable state of being, is present in [Gogol's] work from the outset," and it was likely an idea that "he absorbed unconsciously and took for granted" (*Exploring Gogol* 85).<sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, proper existence by Gogol's calculation amounted to mankind's avoidance of the temptation

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<sup>10</sup> Putney, in his article "Gogol's Theology of Privation and the Devil in 'Ivan Fedorovich Shponka and His Auntie'", has effectively described the basis for this interpretation of evil, citing the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius, who professed the notion that evil is "literally nothing-in-itself, phantom-nonbeing, emptiness rather than substance" and that it is in direct opposition to Good, the ultimate manifestation of God.

<sup>11</sup> Vladimir Golstein also explores Gogol's treatment of "place" in his article "Landowners in *Dead Souls*: Or the Tale of How Gogol Blessed What He Wanted to Curse." Unlike Maguire's work *Exploring Gogol*, which examines the multiple manifestations of "place" throughout the entire body of Gogol's work, Golstein's analysis focuses particularly on *Dead Souls*. Golstein concludes that Gogol curses the characters Manilov, Nozdrev, and Pliushkin by illustrating the improper fulfillment of their duties as landowners. Conversely, though, Gogol blessed the landowners Korobochka and Sobakevich, whose portrayals are actually illustrations of a suitable, if not proper, fulfillment of each of these characters' "place."

to claim a position in society to which he was not entitled, and, even more importantly, to reject the trivialities and petty passions that were so prevalent in the daily round. The basis for this position, as discussed briefly above, can be attributed to general Orthodox theology; however, specific influence can be found in the teachings of the fifth century Syrian monk Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, of whom Gogol likely had at least some familiarity.<sup>12</sup> Of particular resonance with Gogol's conception of mankind's proper existence is the idea according to Pseudo-Dionysius that God:

assigns what is appropriate to all things; he distributes their due proportion, beauty, rank, arrangement, their proper and fitting place and order, according to a most just and righteous determination...It is the righteousness of God which orders everything, setting boundaries, keeping things distinct and unconfused, giving each thing what it inherently deserved... (DN, VIII, 7, p. 113)

Gogol's conception of man's responsibility to the place granted him by God indeed resonates with these lines recognizing the purposeful order created by God. According to Pseudo-Dionysius, the benefit of living in accordance with this ordered system is that "all that exists is drawn back to God and will return to him" (Putney, *Russian Devils* 13).

Accepting the notion of God as creator and assignor to man of what he inherently deserves, Gogol concluded that mankind's objective should be to live "fruitfully and creatively" in order to return to God; however, he "offered no vision in his earlier fiction as to how [people could live in this manner]" (Maguire, *Exploring Gogol* 92). Instead, Gogol frequently depicted in his works individuals attempting to acquire material possessions or to improve (as they saw it) their social standing by moving into a position they considered

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<sup>12</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius' influence on the Eastern Church has been discussed by Putney in his *Russian Devils and Diabolic Conditionality in Nikolai Gogol's Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka*, particularly pp. 11-15.

somehow more esteemed.<sup>13</sup> The danger of this improper existence has been recognized by Putney, who has observed that “to transgress the boundaries of one’s divinely circumscribed *place* is to challenge God’s order, to turn away from what is “real,” and to deliver oneself into the hands of the devil” (*Russian Devils* 202-3). This assessment effectively captures Gogol’s depiction of mankind, one that repeatedly illustrates the influence of the Devil in human existence, particularly with regard to his attempt to lead man astray from his path toward God.

Gogol most frequently depicts this manner of improper existence within various static environments, for it is in these settings, these closed spaces, that the Devil has been able to gain a foothold. Gogol’s static settings are environments of simple human beings, who by their very nature are susceptible to the lure of evil. These characters perpetually assign meaning to that which is meaningless. The effect of this misguided existence is complete disconnection from the duties of one’s place within God’s prescribed order.

Gogol of the early to mid- 1830s had no remedy to this negative condition of mankind. His stories of this era masterfully presented the insidious grip of evil on humanity, but they never proposed an alternative means of existence. At this point in his career, Gogol’ had not yet concretized the notion of the road as a potential means to redemption.<sup>14</sup> Instead, his works more closely mirrored “The Carriage,” published in 1835, which is an example of a story that emphasized mankind’s improper existence within a static space and that offered

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<sup>13</sup> These two forms of improper existence often went hand-in-hand for the Gogolian character who hoped to improve his social standing by means of gaining some form of wealth.

<sup>14</sup> Lotman noted that it was in Gogol’s Petersburg tales, and particularly “Diary of a Madman”, in which the “motifs of the road and the troika first occur” (233). Poprishchin, the protagonist of “Diary of a Madman,” making his escape from the world of imaginary bureaucracy into the imaginary world of clinical madness and making a hopeless attempt to break away altogether from the world, cries: “Give me a troika with horses swift as whirlwinds! Take your seat, my coachman, ring out, my little bell, fly up, steeds, and take me away from this world!” Lotman concludes, though, that because “there is no talk of the moral rebirth of Poprishchin, his road still has very much in common with the familiar “flight” motif...” (233).

no specific alternative to the status quo.<sup>15</sup> Gradually, though, Gogol sought a foil to this depiction of evil's dominance over mankind. *Dead Souls* was to be the tool to accomplish this lofty objective.

Begun in 1835, *Dead Souls* incorporates numerous elements of Gogol's typical presentation of mankind's faults in full light; however, it also reflects a shift in Gogol's conception of his role as a writer. That is, more than any work that preceded it, Gogol's epic illustrates concrete signs of an author who believed that he had "been chosen for a special mission and therefore [had] the right to be a teacher (of morality, if nothing else) [...]" (Gippius, *Gogol* 154). This break from the status quo, represented in part by his utilization of the road as a means to his protagonist's (and, therefore, mankind's) redemption, is by no means sweeping. Nevertheless, it is a logical reaction to his conception of the dominant evil of the static environment. The boundless road, while itself not totally immune from the evil in the world (and not necessarily directed toward worthwhile ends), still represents an inherent opposition to the basic structure of static space. Gogol's adoption of this approach to redeeming mankind corresponds to personal changes he underwent while writing *Dead Souls*.

Completed and published in 1842, *Dead Souls* was begun during the same period over which "The Carriage" was written. Gogol's theological and ideological foundation was notably different at the time of *Dead Souls*' inception than it was near its finalization in 1840 and later. Given the significant time that passed between its initiation and completion, it is

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<sup>15</sup> "Diary of a Madman" (1835) is another example of this type, although it is set in St. Petersburg. This work deals with an individual obsessed with social standing and the privileges afforded particular ranks. In this story, the titular councilor Poprishchin (the 9<sup>th</sup> rank) wishes he could attain a rank just one degree higher, which would grant him hereditary nobility, thereby increasing his chances (he thinks) of winning the favor of a woman that has caught his fancy. Poprishchin is denied this change in rank, and instead is variously reminded that in his current rank he is quite insignificant ("Why, you are a nonentity and nothing else!"). Eventually, he is overcome by his insanity, a state that is marked by various musings of his place in society, including his position as the head of several foreign states.

unsurprising that early in the creation of *Dead Souls* “neither the size, nor the plan, nor the scope of the contents, nor the general tone was completely clear to the author himself” (Gippius, “Introduction” 490). The form *Dead Souls* would eventually take, though, was the product of personal theological growth that occurred between 1835 and 1842.<sup>16</sup>

In the context of Gogol’s theological development, 1836 stands out as a particularly noteworthy year. It was at this time, just following publication of “The Carriage” and shortly after beginning work on *Dead Souls* in earnest, that Gogol experienced a crisis, the impetus for which was negative reviews of his play *The Inspector General*.<sup>17</sup> While in actuality the criticism was mixed, Gogol concluded that:

Moscow can offer me no peace now, and I wouldn’t like to go there in the restless state that I am in now. I am going abroad, and there I’ll try to get rid of the sadness which my compatriots cause me. The present-day author, the author of comedies, the author concerned with morals must live far from his homeland. A prophet is without glory in his own country. (Setchkarev 48)

Чувствую, что теперь не доставит мне Москва спокойствия, а я не хочу приехать в таком тревожном состоянии, в каком нахожусь ныне. Еду за границу, там размыкаю ту тоску, которую наносят мне ежедневно мои соотечественники. Писатель современный, писатель комический, писатель нравов должен подальше быть от своей родины. (PSS XI, 41)

In July of the same year, Gogol left Russia and would return only infrequently during his remaining sixteen years. He believed, however, that this decision to leave was not one over

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<sup>16</sup> Suzanne Fusso comments on this period of Gogol’s life, noting that “throughout his career, but especially in the years 1834–42, Gogol manifests two seemingly contradictory urges: the urge toward order, system, clarity, and wholeness and the urge toward disorder, disruption, obscurity, and fragmentation” (1). This dichotomy can be explained by recognition of Gogol’s fairly well-established belief in the basic ideas of Orthodox theology (to which the notions identified by Fusso can be ascribed). While he desired to depict the faithful realization of these qualities (especially by the time of *Dead Souls*), he was mostly unable to overcome the disorder, disruption, obscurity, and fragmentation that he witnessed as dominant elements of actual human existence.

<sup>17</sup> Gogol “sincerely expected the [Inspector General] to work an immediate spiritual transformation on its audience. When that did not happen, when he detected no unanimity of opinion about it, he concluded that it had failed” (Maguire, *Exploring Gogol* 92).

which he had any control. Rather, he concluded that: “it is not an earthly will that directs my path” “не земная воля направляет путь мой” (Setchkarev 48; PSS XI, 46). It was with this claim that “the religious tendency in Gogol appeared [...] for the first time” (Setchkarev 48).<sup>18</sup> To be sure, it would not be the last.

In 1840, Gogol experienced what he perceived to be a near-fatal illness,<sup>19</sup> after which point: “[H]e increasingly identified God with Christ, and vowed to serve him. He became convinced that he and all others must imitate Christ...[an] enthusiasm...[that] was fed by an avid study of theology and philosophy” (Maguire, *Exploring Gogol* 82-3). Vladimir Nabokov, too, has recognized this evolution, observing that Gogol’s “period of preaching begins with certain last touches that he put to *Dead Souls*—those strange hints at a prodigious apotheosis in the future” (117-8).<sup>20</sup> Gogol’s increasing tendency to preach is manifest in certain narrative features of *Dead Souls*, which are largely absent from earlier works such as “The Carriage,” and shall be discussed later.

Following this second crisis, Gogol’s obsession with his own and mankind’s connection with God only increased. Since my analysis focuses primarily on the time frame over which “The Carriage” and *Dead Souls* were created, I will not explore in detail Gogol’s further theological development (or, deterioration, as the case may have been). Stopping at this point, though, should not be problematic, for Gogol’s successful creation of fiction

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<sup>18</sup> Maguire, too, remarks upon this incident, noting that: “[Gogol’s] decision to flee Russia was an enactment of what he had to do as an artist: leave his own place for good, see new things, and look back on old things with entirely new eyes. The fact that he was just beginning work on *Dead Souls*, his most important book, must have made his journey all the more imperative. In effect, he was choosing to make himself placeless, clearing the way for the next stage of his work” (*Exploring Gogol* 93).

<sup>19</sup> Gogol describes in his correspondence the various sicknesses he experienced throughout his life, particularly those affecting his digestive system. While Gogol’s general health was less than stellar, scholars widely attribute his excessive proclamations of severe illness to hypochondria.

<sup>20</sup> Lotman evaluated the situation in a similar context, noting that by this time Gogol had adopted the “position of the preacher” (“Truth” 53-4).



essentially ceased with the publication of *Dead Souls* and his subsequent literary life consisted mostly of failures. *Dead Souls* is indeed the last surviving representation of Gogol's exceptional literary ability. The understanding of this epic shall, I hope, be enhanced when considered in comparison with "The Carriage," and even more specifically, with Gogol's treatment and conception of spatial models as indicators of mankind's ability to live properly and achieve redemption.

### **Setting and Occupants**

That a basic similarity of physical setting exists in the depiction of the two provincial towns that serve as backdrops of "The Carriage" and *Dead Souls* is unquestionable. Of course, it is far too facile to state that the primary significance of this common setting is its provincial nature. To fully parse out this connection, I rely on Lotman's definition of static space, in which "movement itself is presented as a variety of immobility [...]" (209). The effect of this environment on its occupants is also profound, for "everyday space stagnates [and] by its very nature it excludes movement" (Lotman 210). These qualities are indeed evident in the very physical make-up of these towns and in the characters that are their inhabitants.

This analysis shall progress first by establishing the shared features of these particular static environments. What I intend to illustrate is that an evil force pervades "the very fabric of [these] world[s] and [...] inhabitants," and as a result, it is unsurprising that it envelops and then dominates the existence of the protagonist that is inherently one with this environment (Putney, "Theology of Privation" 84). The dominance of this "abstract, metaphysical force" over man was typical of Gogol's work (Putney, "Theology of Privation"

84). There would come to be an alternative to mankind necessarily succumbing to this force, escape, as represented by Chichikov and the limitless road in *Dead Souls*, and it is best evaluated when compared to the rule, Chertokutskii in “The Carriage”.

As noted by Hulanicki, the town of B in “The Carriage” is portrayed as generally depressing and pathetic, and “devoid entirely of genuine humanness” (70). In fact, the town itself is so lifeless that “there is never a soul to be met in the streets; at most a cock crosses the road [...]” “на улицах ни души не встретишь [...]” (240; PSS III, 177).<sup>21</sup> Similarly, it is said that “it is not easy [...] to meet a traveler in the town of B” “проезжающего трудно встретить в городке Б” (240; PSS III, 177). Nothing of significance seems to happen in this town. This description suggests of this environment, as Lotman observed, “the impossibility of the occurrence of new events, the impossibility of change” (216).

Before proceeding further, a word must be said about Gogol’s use of narration and narrative voice. As a general rule, a reader must always be wary of Gogol’s narrator, who is typically unreliable. Frequently in Gogol’s texts, negative qualities of characters and settings are described not as they actually are (e.g. fat, ugly, etc.), but rather, in a manner that appears to downplay or lessen the intrinsic negativity. This effect is often accomplished by means of irony or equivocation. The narrator’s apparent effort to minimize negative characteristics actually draws more attention to a condition, quality, or situation being described, therefore exposing the actual qualities (which, again, are almost always negative). As a result of this tendency, Gogol’s narrators often appear to be easily impressed by the individuals or settings they describe, despite the fact that nothing about which they are narrating ever seems to warrant admiration. This style of narration, one that relies upon a narrator no more

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<sup>21</sup> All English citations from “The Carriage” are from the Kent/Garnett translation, which is included in Volume Two of *The Complete Tales of Nikolai Gogol*.

enlightened (perhaps less) than the characters he describes, lends itself ideally to Gogol's static environments, those examples of "closed, everyday space" in which "the scene of action of simple people, attracted to ordinariness and humanity" is depicted (Lotman 232).

This narrative technique is employed throughout "The Carriage." Early in the story the narrator reveals that "the gardens have long ago, by order of the mayor, been cut down to improve the look of the place" "садики, для лучшего вида городничий давно приказал вырубить" (240; PSS III, 177). There is a clear disconnect between the notion of tearing down gardens and an effort to beautify; however, in a world dominated by illogicality, this action is presented as an improvement. Given the nature of this narrator, though, the reader simply must take notice that this information should not be accepted at face value.

A similar manifestation of this type of senselessness is encountered in *Dead Souls*. During Chichikov's initial exploration of the town of N, he comes across a park consisting of "the puniest of trees, which had taken but poorly to the soil, propped at the bottom with boards placed in triangles and very handsomely painted in a glossy green" "тоненьких дерев, дурно принявшихся, с подпорками внизу в виде треугольников, очень красиво выкрашенных зеленою масляною краскою" (5; PSS VI, 11).<sup>22</sup> The painting of the boards, while amusing and presented in a wholly positive manner by the narrator, actually represents an attempt to conceal the failure of this park's trees to grow. The absurdity elicited by this image of trees "no higher than reeds" "не выше тростника" (5; PSS VI, 11) is described in the town's newspapers:

"Our city has been graced, thanks to the solicitude of the Municipal Director, by a park of shady trees whose spreading boughs provide coolness on a sultry day," and that during the ceremonies, "it was most touching to observe how the hearts of the citizens throbbed in an excess of gratitude, while torrents of tears streamed forth as a mark of appreciation

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<sup>22</sup> All English citations from *Dead Souls* are from the Guerne translation.

for His Honor the Mayor.” (5)

Город наш выкрасился, благодаря попечению гражданского правителя, садом, состоящим из тенистых, широковетвистых деревьев, дающих прохладу в знойный день, и что при этом было очень умилительно глядеть, как сердца граждан трепетали в избытке благодарности и струили потоки слез в знак признательности к господину градоначальнику. (PSS VI, 11)

Significantly, these lines are presented not as the narrator’s words, but as an excerpt from a newspaper. In this context, they provide a break from the preceding ironic description of how splendid the green boards appear. Because the lines from the newspaper are not directly attributable to the narrator, they offer evidence of the townspeople’s acceptance of this absurd display of false, manufactured beauty.

Other physical features of these settings warrant further comment. In “The Carriage,” for example, the “tailor’s shop is idiotically located, not facing the street but meeting it sideways; facing it [is] a brick building with two windows [that] has been under construction for fifteen years [...]”<sup>23</sup> “дом портного выходит чрезвычайно глупо не всем фасадом, но углом; против него строится лет пятнадцать какое-то каменное строение о двух окнах” (241; PSS III, 178). This particular image is reminiscent of the layout of parts of the town of N in *Dead Souls*: “Here and there, right out on the street, stood stalls with nuts, soap, and cookies that looked like soap” “кое-где просто на улице стояли столы с орехами, мылом и пряниками, похожими на мыло [...]” (5; PSS VI, 11). The specific absurdity of this positioning of the stalls is that they literally seem to be set up “on the street” (“на улице”).

The shared feature of these descriptions is their connection to a general, overriding sense of illogicality. There are additional instances that capture the dominance of this state. For example, in the town of B there is “a little further, standing all by itself, [...] one of those

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<sup>23</sup> This description is suggestive of Merezhkovsky’s observation that “the Devil is something that is begun and is left unfinished [...]” (qtd. in Maguire, *Exploring Gogol* 57).

paling fences once so fashionable, painted gray to match the mud [...]” “далее стоит сам по себе модный дощатый забор, выкрашенный серою краскою под цвет грязи [...]” (241; PSS III, 178) This description is notable for the fact that the fence is “standing all alone,” that is, apparently not enclosing or protecting anything, as would be the intended function of such a structure. A fence that seems to be serving no practical function at all recalls in the town of N the “never-ending wooden fences” “некончаемых деревянных заборов” which, when described in this manner, suggest a similarly illogical function (5; PSS VI, 11). These examples, when taken together, emphasize the general sense of dreariness and illogicality that prevails in these stagnant, lifeless environments.

In the context of this discussion, it would be remiss to not comment upon the following aspect of “The Carriage,” which on the surface may appear to contradict the preceding line of reasoning. According to the narrator, the town of B had been recently enlivened when a cavalry regiment took up post there. The narrator, whose reliability has already been questioned, suggests that the presence of the regiment is entirely positive, proclaiming that “everything was changed: the streets were full of life and color, in fact, they assumed quite a different aspect...” “всё переменилось...улицы запестрели, оживились, словом, приняли совершенно другой вид” (241; PSS III, 178). The primary evidence for this claim, though, is that “the wooden fence between the houses was always studded with soldiers’ caps hanging in the sun; a gray military overcoat was always conspicuous on some gate” “деревянный плетень между домами весь был усеян висевшими на солнце солдатскими фуражками; серая шинель торчала непременно где-нибудь на воротах” (241; PSS III, 178).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> This description is reminiscent of Mirgorod in “The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich”, where “the fence is always adorned with objects [...]and [...] everyone hangs on his fence what he

As astutely observed by Setchkarev, the change produced by the military regiment is actually just “a surface brilliance that only emphasizes the essential hollowness [of the town]” (163). It is the narrator who elevates this “surface brilliance” into something almost transcendent. Hulanicki also comments upon this aspect of the text, noting that:

the narrator accepts the lifeless philistine world surrounding him, he is immersed in it, and is a part of it. He is not critical of it, especially not of those who play an important role in it. He takes for granted the idle mayor, the pompous general; he is full of admiration for the general’s reception, for other officers and for Čertokuckij (75).

This observation, although technically correct, fails to account for the irony of Gogol’s narrative technique. While the narrator appears caught up in the banality and general illogicality of the town, one cannot ignore the fact that this tactic was Gogol’s intention. That is, this instance seems characteristic of this narrator, who consistently expresses apparent fondness for much of the absurdity he describes. At the same time, however, Gogol (as author) is pulling the strings of the narrator and seems to be winking at the reader, confirming his position as the ironist who recognizes the foolishness of what is being described. But this narrator is not one to preach, even though Gogol may have been. This type of narrator appears later and most notably in *Dead Souls*, when Gogol more overtly pulls back the curtain separating himself from the narration.

This discussion of the narrator points to another important component of these environments: the general condition of the towns’ occupants (particularly the town officials). The few words devoted to the town leaders in “The Carriage” confirm that they live an essentially meaningless, mostly inane existence. As mentioned earlier, the mayor of B’s strategy to raze greenery—in an attempt to beautify the town—lacks logic. Nevertheless,

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thinks fit” “плетень всегда убран предметами [...и...] каждый вешает, что ему вздумается” (187; PSS II, 244).

according to the narrator, this mayor was “a very sagacious person, but [he] slept absolutely the whole day from lunch to supper and from supper to lunch” “рассудительного человека, но спавшего решительно весь день: от обеда до вечера и от вечера до обеда” (241; PSS III, 179). Additionally, the town’s other notable personage, the judge, “lived in the same house with a deacon’s wife” “жившего в одном доме с какою-то диаконицею” (241; PSS III, 178-9).<sup>25</sup> Despite the narrator’s efforts to convince the reader that these characters were somehow estimable, it seems that their most significant contribution was an official stamp of approval for lives improperly lived.

Similarly, the prominent officials of the town of N in *Dead Souls* are presented in a manner that emphasizes their connection to illogicality. The Governor of N, for example, is noted for his occasional embroidery of “fancywork on tulle with his own hands” “сам вышивал иногда по тюлю” (7; PSS VI, 12). Although a relatively minor point, this description suggests a degree of gender transposition, at least in as far as the Governor’s hobby is typically associated with that of a woman. True to Gogolian form, instead of lambasting the illogicality of this characteristic, the narrator suggests that this hobby is evidence of the Governor’s extremely fine character.

Perhaps a more convincing illustration of the questionable condition of the town officials is their initially unquestioning acceptance of Chichikov. Knowing only few details about this new visitor, they immediately concluded that Chichikov “was a right-thinking man...a learned man, an experienced and meritorious man...an amiable man...[and] that he was the most amiable and the most courteous of men” “он благонамеренный человек...он ученый человек, он знающий и почтенный человек; ...и любезный человек...[и] он

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<sup>25</sup> This living arrangement is reminiscent of the suspect cohabitation in “May Night” of the mayor and his sister-in-law.

любезнейший и обходительнейший человек” (12-13; PSS VI, 18). Given this reaction, one should indeed question the suitability of such officials and their “exaggerated admiration for men who are (to the reader) obvious rascals [...]” (Garrard 856).

Although individually minute, the totality of these examples (by no means intended to be all-inclusive) contribute to a larger picture of an environment that is “isolated on all sides [without] any direction, and [in which] nothing new happens” (Lotman 215). By accepting that these settings and the background characters are essentially replicas of one another and both static environments, it is possible to evaluate the events of these stories and the two protagonists that operate within them.

It is Lotman’s identification of opposing Gogolian protagonists—the hero who is in motion (“движущийся герой”) and the hero who is static (“неподвижный”)—that facilitates comparison of Chichikov’s and Chertokutskii’s fates within these similarly stagnant environments. My objective at this point is to show that Chertokutskii fits the role of a hero “of the immobile, ‘closed’ locus” (Lotman 203). He is aimless and has only insignificant and unimportant concerns. By existing in a static environment, he is necessarily immobilized and is left with no potential to move forward. As a result, redemption is impossible.

In opposition to the stagnant Chertokutskii, Chichikov is a hero of the road. Although he, like Chertokutskii, is motivated by the pursuit of petty passions, his fate is not sealed when he ventures into a static environment. It is in this respect that Chichikov is a problematic character. His immorality and negative character traits would seemingly place him right at home in a static environment. Yet, he is able to escape the evil forces working to relegate him to this world of pettiness in which his insignificant and *poshlyi* concerns would



be rewarded.

Chichikov's escape, though, is not represented as merely an exodus from this negative setting, such as is the case for a character like Khlestakov in *The Inspector General*, who is certain to persist in his misguided existence.<sup>26</sup> Instead, Gogol provides Chichikov the potential for redemption. This opportunity afforded to Chichikov is an unmistakable advancement for Gogol. He moves beyond the mere portrayal of improper human existence and toward the depiction of mankind's potential for redemption (as unconvincing as the ultimate rendering may have been). This divergence should be expected, for as I contend, it corresponds to Gogol's increasing religiosity and personal quest to remedy the evil he considered endemic to all aspects of human existence.

### **Chertokutskii and "The Carriage"**

The description of the landowner Pifagor Pifagorovich Chertokutskii<sup>27</sup> warrants careful attention, for in numerous ways it links him inextricably to the static nature of his environment. On the most basic level, his existence truly is one of immobility and stagnancy. While Chertokutskii is officially a landowner, it turns out that he had previously served in a cavalry regiment. He was forced to resign his commission, though, "owing to

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<sup>26</sup> Gogol's own description of Khlestakov reveals that he is by no means a one-to-one model for Chichikov (although similarities certainly abound): Khlestakov "is simply stupid; he babbles only because he sees that they are disposed to listen" "он просто глуп, болтает потому только, что видит, что его расположены слушать" (Proffer 55; PSS X, 39). This description suggests that Khlestakov is merely a vapid individual, that he possesses no aim whatsoever. In this sense, he is much more similar to Chertokutskii. This observation is significant, because, according to Lotman, that which allows for Chichikov's escape from certain destruction in the town of N is the fact that not only is he mobile, but that he has an aim. Even though Chichikov's objective was ignoble, the fact that he was active provided hope.

<sup>27</sup> Maguire muses about the significance of Chertokutskii's name, particularly with regard to its obvious connection with the devil (черт), about which he specifically ponders: "Why he is also devilish is harder to fathom..." (*Exploring Gogol* 200). The connection, though, does not seem as mysterious as Maguire suggests. As discussed throughout this analysis, the Devil is quite prominent in this tale. Specifically, Chertokutskii embodies key elements of Gogol's conception of the Devil, such as being a purveyor of *poshlyi* desires.

one of those incidents which are usually described as ‘an unpleasantness’; either he had given someone a box on the ear in the old days, or was given it [...]” “в отставку по одному случаю, который обыкновенно называется неприятною историею: он ли дал кому-то в старые годы оплеуху, или ему дал ее [...]”(242; PSS III, 179). Unfortunately, the narrator is unable to remember the specific circumstances that precipitated Chertokutskii’s resignation of his commission. All he is able to recall is that Chertokuskii “had been one of [his regiment’s] most important and conspicuous officers, anyway he had been seen at numerous balls and assemblies [...]” “был один из числа значительных и видных офицеров [...] по крайней мере его видали на многих балах и собраниях [...]” (242; PSS III, 179). As is characteristic of this narrator, even this minor suggestion of something worthy or significant about this Chertokutskii (i.e., his importance) is likely overstated. In this one sentence Chertokutskii has gone from a significant personage to a mere attendee of social events.

Garrard has offered an analysis of this information in which he notes that Chertokutskii’s life “has not progressed in a normal way since [he was slapped] and he declined to deal with the offender” (852). Garrard also recognizes that the incident was, indeed, “a turning point in Chertokutsky’s life” (852). He does not address the fact, though, that this turning point consisted of Chertokutskii’s immobilization into a stagnant environment. While it is almost certain that Chertokutskii was always a banal and petty individual, this event must be considered as the catalyst that fused the protagonist into this negative space. On a symbolic level, landownership differs substantially from the inherent movement associated with a cavalry regiment.<sup>28</sup> Once he lost his commission, he became

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<sup>28</sup> It should be noted, though, that landownership is not necessarily an occupation that Gogol associates with stagnancy and improper existence. In *Dead Souls: Part Two*, for example, the landowner Kostanzhonglo represents Gogol’s ideal example of proper existence. He is the paragon of a landowner, converting even waste into profit, and he has a spiritual side.

inextricably linked to this environment.

As more information about Chertokutskii is revealed, it becomes increasingly evident that he truly belongs to this stifling environment. The primary source of motivation in Chertokutskii's life is the opportunity to recapture his former existence as an officer, or at least to interact with men who are actively enlisted in the military. To this end, he preserves the image of his former status by wearing "a highwaisted dress coat of military cut, spurs on his boots, and a mustache under his nose" "фрак с высокою талией на манер военного мундира, на сапогах шпоры и под носом усы" (242; PSS III, 179-80). Chertokutskii also "had a special talent for smelling out where a cavalry regiment was stationed, and always went to interview the officers [...]" "он пронюхивал носом, где стоял кавалерийский полк, и всегда приезжал видетъся с господами офицерами" (242; PSS III, 180). Whatever his motivation for this action, it is clear that Chertokutskii is not engaged in efforts to reenlist in the military in order to redeem himself. His only objective is to maintain, even on the most minimal level, this former image and to participate in the petty, insignificant actions of the active servicemen. Any potential for forward movement is prevented by Chertokutskii's fixation on this past existence.

This claim is corroborated further by the fact that within his position as a landowner, Chertokutskii exhibits no particular skill or adeptness at performing the requisite duties. Although it is said that of all the neighboring landowners Chertokutskii is "the most noteworthy" "более [...] замечателен", the narrator completely contradicts this assertion (242; PSS III, 179). Indeed, noteworthiness appears to be a grossly misapplied attribute to Chertokutskii. The narrator describes the protagonist in this manner more for the fact that he had "made more noise than anyone at the elections and drove to them in a very smart

carriage” “более всех шумевший на выборах и приезжавший туда в щегольском экипаже” than to any tangible contributions made to society (242; PSS III, 179). Here again, though, is an example of ironic narration used to criticize that which is supposedly being praised.

At the time of these elections it is revealed that Chertokutskii had given the nobility of the provinces an excellent dinner, at which he had declared that, if only he were elected leader, he “would put the gentlemen on the best possible footing” “он поставит дворян на самую лучшую ногу” (243; PSS III, 180). Chertokutskii’s interest in this position seems to be related primarily to the benefits it might afford him socially. Also of significance is the fact that Chertokutskii apparently lost this election. This failure suggests that his potential for any degree of movement or mobility, even in the admittedly modest sense of occupying a minor elected post, is impossible.

In fact, the only sense of movement that can be attributed to this character is the motion required of him when “he visited all the much-frequented fairs, to which those who make up the heart of Russia, that is, the nurses and children, stout landowners and their daughters, flock to enjoy themselves, driving in chaises with hoods, gigs, wagonettes, and carriages such as have never been seen in the wildest dreams” “он бывал на всех многолюдных ярмарках, куда внутренность России, состоящая из мамок, детей, дочек и толстых помещиков, наезжала веселиться бричками, таратайками, тарантасами и такими каретами, какие и во сне никому не снились” (242; PSS III, 180). This movement, obviously, is strictly literal, and it does not facilitate progress in any sense, but rather represents a further manifestation of the insignificance of Chertokutskii’s existence. Lotman comments on this type of movement, stating that “the tendency to spread aimlessly

in all directions [is a] variant of the non-directional and, consequently, static space” (234). The road on which Chertokutskii travels merely meanders from one banal event to another, in reality going nowhere.

Chertokutskii’s defeat in the elections notwithstanding, the narrator states unequivocally that he “was a proper sort of landowner, a very decent sort of landowner” “он был помещик как следует... Изрядный помещик” (243; PSS III, 180). This description (again, ironic), though, is unmotivated, and begs for consideration of what sort of proper and decent landowner he is. In fact, information contradicting the narrator’s claim is provided immediately prior to his statement affirming Chertokutskii’s significance. His adeptness as a landowner is questionable based on what he does with the serfs and money he received as his wife’s dowry:

The money was at once spent on a team of six really first-rate horses, gilt locks on the doors, a tame monkey, and a French butler for the household. The two hundred serfs, together with two hundred of his own, were mortgaged to the bank for the sake of some commercial operations. (243)

Капитал был тотчас употреблен на шестерку действительно отличных лошадей, вызолоченные замки к дверям, ручную обезьяну для дома и француза дворецкого. Двести же душ вместе с двумястами его собственных были заложены в ломбард, для каких-то коммерческих оборотов. (PSS III, 180)

Chertokutskii’s fiscal sense, if not absurd, is at least irresponsible. He is obviously motivated by material acquisition, and as a result he is like the landowners Manilov, Nozdrev, and Pliushkin in *Dead Souls*, who “clearly...abuse the position (*mesto*) they occupy, contribute to chaos and disorder, and serve the Devil rather than God” (Golstein 246).

Having attempted to establish Chertokutskii as an individual who inherently embodies the negative qualities of his environment, I will now consider the unique manner in which Gogol reinforces and reveals the static, immobile nature of this character’s existence.

Consideration of Chertokutskii's interaction with the military regiment, whose presence has drawn the protagonist into the action of the story, facilitates this analysis. The purpose of this exercise is to illustrate that Gogol goes to great lengths to illustrate that either movement within or escape from the static environment truly would amount to a feat of enormous consequence.

Chertokutskii's first interaction with the cavalry officers is captured by the narrator's recollection of the big dinner arranged by the general, which is described as "remarkable...all was in harmony" "чрезвычайный...всё отвечало одно другому" (243; PSS III, 180-1). After indulging in the many dishes and drinks (described in striking detail) all of the diners "got up from the table with a pleasant heaviness in their stomachs [...]" "встали с приятною тяжестью в желудках" (243; PSS III, 181). In keeping with his ironic tendencies, even the physical state of the group of gluttons assembled at this party is idealized by the narrator. In this environment, such insignificant (even disgusting) aspects of an event are always elevated to a level beyond what they deserve. Therefore, even overeating is presented as a positive experience ("a pleasant heaviness in their stomachs").

Following the meal, the general, completely unprovoked, informs Chertokutskii that he can look at his bay mare. The exchange between these two consists of completely inane discourse; it lacks significance and substance, another defining aspect of the static environment. The discussion proceeds about the horse, absurdly named Agrafena Ivanovna,<sup>29</sup> who is "a very decent mare [and] strong and wild as a beauty of the south" "лошадь очень порядочная...крепкая и дикая как южная красавица" (243-4; PSS III, 181). This description is yet another example of the elevation of the inherently insignificant

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<sup>29</sup> This feature is particularly reminiscent of Ikharev's naming of his deck of cards "Adelaida Ivanovna" in Gogol's play "The Gamblers."

to a level of unjustified importance. Another prominent feature of this conversation is the continuously exhaled smoke from the general's mouth, so dense at one point that he "completely disappeared [...]" "генерал весь исчезнул в дыме" (244; PSS III, 181). The absurd picture drawn here emphasizes the inanity of the conversation and the absurdity of the discussion about a topic that is completely undeserving of such elevated treatment.<sup>30</sup>

Chertokutskii eventually shifts the focus of the conversation from the oddly ennobled Agrafena Ivanovna to the condition of the general's carriage. He accomplishes this feat in mid-sentence: "Very fine horse, very; and have you a suitable carriage, your Excellency?" "Очень, очень хорошая...статистая лошадь! а позвольте, превосходительство, узнать, как она ходит?" (244; PSS III, 182). This question, which is actually moot,<sup>31</sup> serves only to shift the discussion to a topic more to Chertokutskii's liking. His effort is awkward at best, though in this setting, not unexpected, for even though it represents a change in topic, it certainly does not amount to anything of substance.

Following this interjection, Chertokutskii informs his company that he possesses "an excellent carriage...of real Vienna make" "чрезвычайная коляска настоящей венской работы" (245; PSS III, 182). Soon, this "excellent" carriage becomes one of unmatched stature with incomparable features.<sup>32</sup> This carriage, though, does not exist—at least not in

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<sup>30</sup> One wonders, also, whether there may be some significance to the veil of smoke before the general's eyes, an image that resembles scenes from "The Overcoat" when there was a mist before Akakii Akakievich's eyes. Neither occasion was a positive occurrence for this protagonist.

<sup>31</sup> Agrafena Ivanovna, it turns out, is a saddle horse. Given his past as a cavalry officer, it is likely that Chertokutskii "surely would have noticed the difference" between a saddle and a carriage horse (Hulanicki 64).

<sup>32</sup> Chertokutskii states: "I used to put a dozen bottles of rum and twenty pounds of tobacco in the luggage compartment, and besides that I used to have about six uniforms and underwear and two pipes, the very long ones, your Excellency, why you could put a whole ox in the glove compartment" "когда я служил, то у меня в ящики помещалось 10 бутылок рому и 20 фунтов табаку, кроме того со мною еще было около шести мундиров, белье и два чубука, ваше превосходительство, такие длинные, как с позволения сказать солитер, а в карманы можно целого быка поместить" (245; PSS III, 183). These boasts recall the similar exaggerations of Nozdrev in *Dead Souls*.

the manner in which he describes it. Once Chertokutskii has started down this path of lies, there is no turning back. Nor is there any positive presence to rein him in. Chertokutskii's boasts expand to meet what he considers to be the expectations of his military companions. He feeds off of the apparent interest that these individuals take in his description.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, Chertokutskii's braggadocio leads him to invite the general and his men to his estate to view this fictional carriage.

Hulanicki attributes Chertokutskii's behavior at this point to the protagonist's "vanity and his weakness" (64). More should be said, though, about the connection of these qualities to the static environment Chertokutskii occupies. It is not merely the fact that Chertokutskii is vain and weak that is significant. In a world that values inanity and petty passions over anything substantive, such qualities are typical characteristics of the individuals that occupy it. Chertokutskii's interaction with these military officers has provided a specific opportunity for his vanity and weakness to be on display in full force, and, as a result, exposed. The full process of this exposition, though, is unique and requires assessment, for it is facilitated by an insidious evil force, a hallmark element of Gogol's static settings.

Chertokutskii, knowing he should set off for home immediately to prepare for the following day's events, takes his hat and begins to depart from the gathering, "but, strangely enough, it happened that he stayed on for some time" "но как-то так странно случилось, что он остался ещё на несколько времени" (246; PSS III, 184).<sup>34</sup> Hulanicki describes Chertokutskii at this point as lacking "the strength to leave" (65). This interpretation,

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<sup>33</sup> Related to this aspect of the story, Garrard astutely connects "the exaggerated attention paid [...] by the officers to Chertokutskii's description of his elegant carriage [...] [to] that lavished upon Akaky Akakievich's overcoat" (854).

<sup>34</sup> Garrard, too, notices in regard to this incident that "one is hard put to discover [...] the actual source of the trouble. The reasons for problems or conflicts are often mysterious, the result of rumor or ignorance, and sometimes are said to be the work of devils." (853-4).



though, does not account for the specific use of the Russian, which in this case suggests action on the part of an unseen force, one that “seems to pervade the very fabric of this world” (Putney, “Theology of Privation” 84). The Russian “но как-то так странно случилось” suggests that Chertokutskii has limited control over that which is happening. The “как-то” (“somehow”) combined with “случилось” (“it happened”) points to the uncertain motivation behind Chertokutskii remaining at this gathering.

The influence of this force affects Chertokutskii even more profoundly as the evening progresses: “By his side there *appeared* a glass of punch which, *without noticing it*, he drank off instantly” “Нечувствительно *очутился* перед ним стакан с пуншем, который он *позабывшись* в ту же минуту выпил” (246; PSS III, 184). Shortly thereafter, Chertokutskii “again found a glass of punch at hand and again *without observing it* emptied the glass” “Чертокуцкий опять нашел стакан с пуншем, который тоже *позабывшись*, выпил [...]” (246; PSS III, 184). Again, this language points to the occurrence of events over which Chertokutskii has only limited control. Chertokutskii apparently did not himself obtain a glass of punch, rather, one “очутился” (“appeared”). The use of the word “опять” (“again”) emphasizes the appearance of these glasses seemingly of their own volition. Furthermore, the repeated use of “позабывшись” (“without observing”) conveys a similar sense of Chertokutskii’s (at best) partial involvement in the action around him.

It is acknowledged that these examples are very subtle; however, it is the very subtle nature of these occurrences that corresponds to the notion of evil to which Gogol subscribed, that it was almost “invisible...[that it existed] in inanity and planarity...not in the greatest things, but in the smallest” (Merezhkovsky 58). Although Chertokutskii certainly is not an unwilling participant in the events of the evening, the ambiguity of the source of these

occurrences further suggests the degree to which progress and movement in this environment were so stifled. (All italics in this paragraph are mine.)

Somewhat later Chertokutskii once again attempts to leave: “it’s time for me to be getting home, gentlemen, it really is time” “пора, господа, мне домой, право пора”, “but again he sat down to the second game” “но опять присел и на вторую партию” (246; PSS III, 184). Even later, Chertokutskii “remembered perfectly that he had won a great deal [at whist], but he picked up nothing” “очень помнил, что выиграл много, но руками не взял ничего” (247; PSS III, 185). By this point, whether it is a force compelling him to stay, or simply his own enjoyment of the *poshlyi* event (which is the result of his acceptance of the Devil), it is clear that Chertokutskii is one with this static environment. Eventually, Chertokutskii manages to escape the gathering, though only when carried out by his coachman like “parcels of groceries” “узелки с покупкою” (247; PSS III, 185).

The arrival of a new day in this environment only brings with it additional instances of this immobilizing evil force. On the next morning, the reader is greeted by Chertokutskii’s wife, who after awakening glanced “at herself a couple of times in the mirror, [and] saw that she was looking very nice that morning” “на себя раза два, она увидела, что сегодня очень недурна” (248; PSS III, 186). The narrator states further that “this apparently insignificant circumstance led her to spend two hours extra before the mirror” “это, по-видимому, незначительное обстоятельство заставило ее просидеть перед зеркалом ровно два часа лишних” (248; PSS III, 186).<sup>35</sup> This degree of vanity is not

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<sup>35</sup> This description resembles Chichikov’s actions prior to his initial dinner with the townspeople, in which it is described that “his preparations for this evening-at-home took up two hours and a bit over” “приготовление к этой вечеринке заняло с лишком два часа времени” (8; PSS VI, 13).

surprising in an environment that values the insignificant over anything meaningful.<sup>36</sup> Also noteworthy about these lines, though not fully conveyed in the translation, is the use of the Russian verb “заставить,” which although reasonably translated as “led” in this instance, also has a common meaning of “to force or to compel.” This sense of the verb certainly is applicable to occurrences in an environment influenced so strongly by a brand of evil that seeks to misguide mankind.

The protagonist’s immobility is revealed once again as he lies in bed that morning, struggling to comprehend his wife’s repeated declarations that the officers had arrived: “Chertokutsky lay for a minute in bed with his eyes popping out of his head, as though struck by a thunderbolt” “Чертокуцкий, вытаращив глаза, минуту лежал на постеле, как громом пораженный” (249; PSS III, 187). This image resembles the “dumb (or “mute”) scene” (“немая сцена”) of *The Inspector General*, in which the reaction of the townspeople is captured after they learn of the actual inspector general’s arrival: “All are thunderstruck by his words. A single cry of surprise escapes from the lips of all the ladies. The entire group abruptly shifts position, then freezes on the spot.” “Произнесенные слова поражают, как громом, всех. Звук изумления единодушно улетает из дамских уст; вся группа, вдруг переменявши положение, остается в окаменении” (114; PSS IV, 95). As might be expected, challenging situations are met with inaction in these static environments.

“The Carriage” concludes with the general and his men exposing Chertokusky (literally and figuratively) in the fraudulent account of his carriage. What is important about this conclusion, though, is not the specific absurdity with which it transpires. The depiction of Chertokutskii “in his dressing gown, curled up in an extraordinary way” “сидящий в

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<sup>36</sup> In an alternative interpretation, Hulanicki downplays the significance of vanity, instead suggesting that this instance is “included in the story simply to provide a suspension and to maintain the reader’s interest as to the outcome of Čertokuckij’s invitation.” (69).

халате и согнувшийся необыкновенным образом” under the carriage’s apron is not only pathetic, but also a final example of his complete immobility (251; PSS III, 189). The general, who is most put off by Chertokutskii’s antics, can only muster the bland exclamation, “ah, you are here” “а, вы здесь” when he discovers the protagonist in this unflattering, vulnerable position (251; PSS III, 189). As Hulanicki observes, in this state Chertokutskii is “a completely defeated man, unable to react to the general’s [comment]” (66).

The ultimate impact on Chertokutskii of his exposure is unknown. For that matter, anything that transpires after the departure of the officers is unknown, including Chertokutskii’s specific fate.<sup>37</sup> This result is attributable to the tale’s *ex abrupto* ending. Such an ending, one that provides no concrete answers, nevertheless delivers a concrete message – Chertokutskii is nothing more than a simple fool, distracted by the fleeting passions of the world. He is trapped in an environment that facilitates his failure, and that provides no possibility for change. According to Lotman, “when a hero is of the same type as his environment [...] he does not have his own path. Moving within the space of his own environment, artistically he is immobile” (230-1). Lotman adds, though, that “the picture changes if the hero breaks with his environment. Then his movement forms a kind of linear trajectory [...]” (Lotman 231). This outcome, though, is unlikely to befall Chertokutskii. Rather, it seems more likely that he will surely be involved again in similarly inane action, never accepting the consequences of his foolishness.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Like so many of Gogol’s tales, the conclusion of “The Carriage” presents a world in which its occupants seemingly fail to recognize the emptiness of their lives, the extent of their sins, and the disposition of their souls. In this context, one thinks of Kovalev in “The Nose” and Pigorov in “Nevsky Prospekt,” each basking in his *poshlyi* ways, seemingly having learned nothing either from his misdeeds or misfortune.

<sup>38</sup> Chertokutskii, in this context, is like “Khlestakov and Chichikov [who] learn nothing from their humiliations and injuries and are seen at the end of their respective narratives fleeing the scene of their crimes [...]”(Putney,

This depiction of Chertokutskii, though, was sufficient for Gogol. As Garrard has noted, Chertokutskii merely “focuses Gogol’s larger themes and provides a vivid foreground illustration of his view of the human condition” (855). It is unlikely that Chertokutskii was intended to represent an individual capable of redemption. In general, positive examples of proper existence were scarce, if existent at all, in Gogol’s fiction of this era. Maguire has concluded that by choosing not to offer a concrete remedy to the problems he depicted, Gogol, in the 1830s, “seemed to have been relying on his readers’ awareness that the world presented in these early works was anything but ideal or desirable” (*Exploring Gogol* 88). Even his style of narration, laden with irony, can be viewed from this perspective, for it demands that the reader himself deduce the folly of the existence depicted. While this narrative approach certainly was indirect, it is evidence of Gogol’s underlying desire to communicate a positive message.

A shift in Gogol’s approach, however, was materializing at this time, and it was one that must be addressed, for it offered a more explicit criticism of his audience than that contained in his ironic commentary. Although not an element of “The Carriage,” this shift is reflective of Gogol’s personal evolution in the mid to late 1830s. In his play *The Inspector General*, the mayor makes the following direct comment to the audience: “What are you laughing at, you idiots!? At yourselves, perhaps!” “Чему смеетесь? Над собою смеетесь!..Эх вы!” (112; PSS IV, 94). While the spirit of this criticism is present in works like “The Carriage”, Gogol only began to adapt this direct message into a tangible depiction of mankind’s potential with his writing of *Dead Souls*.

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*Russian Devils* 223). However, unlike these two protagonists, Chertokutskii is not “heading onward and upward toward new territory” (Putney, *Russian Devils* 223). This distinction is critical as it ties directly to Gogol’s conception of mankind’s possibility to find redemption depending on the environment to which he is connected.

### Chichikov and Dead Souls

Whereas Chertokutskii is an extreme example of a static hero, Chichikov is a “hero of the road.” This distinction, though, does not preclude the consideration of similarities between these protagonists, for as a hero of the road, Chichikov passes through the static environment that has ensnared Chertokutskii, and that is the prevailing background for Gogol’s fiction. It is ultimately Chichikov’s connection to the road, though, that enables him to escape. However, it is Chichikov’s interaction within this environment that provides the opportunity to explore the manner in which Gogol’s treatment of these characters differed and to attempt to deduce the reasons for this variation.

As in the case of Chertokutskii, information about Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov’s background provides evidence to suggest that his existence revolves around petty, vain, and material concerns. In this respect, he is very similar to Chertokutskii, an unsurprising correspondence given that this character-type populated all of Gogol’s stories. Before engaging in the purchase of dead serfs, Chichikov was a civil servant who served in several different administrative roles. Officially, he occupied the rank of Collegiate Councilor (“Коллежский советник”<sup>39</sup>). In a clear attempt to pretend to a position that he did not rightfully occupy, Chichikov indicated that he was a “landowner” “помещик” when introducing himself in the town of N.

As it turns out, Chichikov reached his actual rank due in no small part to his resolve “to buckle down fervidly to his work, to conquer and overcome everything” “жарко заняться службою, всё победить и преодолеть” (228-9; PSS VI, 228). The result of these efforts was that Chichikov eventually reaped considerable financial rewards, growing ever

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<sup>39</sup> As indicated by Guerny in his translation, as a Collegiate Councilor (the sixth of fourteen civil ranks in the Russian Table of Ranks), “Chichikov is neither too high nor too low in rank” (4).

closer to possessing the “things that incessantly swarmed through his head [carriages, an excellently built house, delectable dinners]” “вот что беспрерывно носилось в голове его [экипажи, дом, отлично устроенный, вкусные обеды]” (228; PSS VI, 228). However, because his hard work was always directed toward material acquisition (and also the usurpation of a higher rank<sup>40</sup>), his successes were fleeting.<sup>41</sup> Following a final reprimand for corrupt behavior, Chichikov concluded that the civil service no longer afforded him the opportunity to achieve his petty objectives. From this realization was born the scheme to acquire (and then mortgage) deceased serfs, which makes up the action of *Dead Souls*.

In contrast to Chertokutskii, who took up landownership in earnest following his dismissal from the military, Chichikov took to the road after his punishment to engage in his new business scheme. Chichikov most obviously fits Lotman’s classification of a hero who belongs to the road not merely for the fact that he is traveling throughout the vast lands of Russia, but also because he clearly was unable to function properly within the various positions he occupied. In essence, he belonged nowhere.

Several points, though, must be made regarding the significance of Gogol’s attribution of Chichikov to the road. First, for such a character as Chichikov, who had been exposed on numerous occasions for corrupt behavior, a suitable existence would have consisted of him retiring “into the peaceful backwoods of some small district town and there [he would] vegetate forever in a chintz dressing gown by the window of a squat little house”

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<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that Chichikov obtained the modest rank of Registrar (“повытчик”) as the result of his disingenuous effort to betroth himself to another Registrar’s daughter. As part of the ruse, he moves in with the Registrar and his fiancée, winning the fondness of his superior, only to move out the very day he receives the rank of Registrar.

<sup>41</sup> In the capacity of Registrar Chichikov embezzled funds, which he utilized to construct a house, only to be exposed and stripped of his new residence and rank. As a Customs official, he eventually received his rank of Collegiate Councilor, and he became quite wealthy by establishing illicit relationships with smugglers, only to lose all he had acquired after a petty quarrel with a coworker.

“в какое-нибудь мирное захолустье уездного городишка и там заклёкнет навеки в ситцевом халате у окна низенького домика” (238; PSS VI, 238). This way of life, “which would have sufficed, if not to kill, then at least to chill and tame any man forever” “что бы достаточно было если не убить, то охладить и усмирить навсегда человека”, did not befall Chichikov (238; PSS VI, 238).

Secondly, and somewhat more concretely, Chichikov’s belonging to the road can be discerned through consideration of the various ways in which the narrator describes him. Chichikov is most frequently characterized as a “transient.” He is referred to as such no fewer than four times in the first four pages. Two Russian words are used to convey this notion of transience: “приезжий (господин)” and “проезжающий.” While these descriptors are derived from the imperfective motion verbs “приезжать” and “проезжать,” suggesting perpetual or repeated motion, their use in this context is even more revealing. According to Ozhegov, “приезжий” conveys a specific meaning of “не здешний,” which can be translated and understood not only as “not local” but also, as “not of this place.” While the road itself is a place, by its very nature it suggests movement and motion, and as a result, it also implies no connection to any specific location. Therefore, “the hero of the road does not belong to any environment” (Lotman 236).

Additional evidence also supports Lotman’s conclusion. In lacking association with any specific location, Chichikov must adapt to each environment he encounters. It is in this context that Donald Fanger has described Chichikov as a “mirror...all surface” (“Mirror” 460). Specifically, Fanger points to the description I have cited earlier with regard to Chichikov’s ability to participate productively in any conversation when in the company of the town’s officials. Along similar lines, and as has been noted by numerous critics,



Chichikov is often described in non-specific terms, which suggests a general lack of identity. He is neither this nor that: “The gentleman seated in this carriage was not handsome, but he wasn’t bad to look at either; he was neither too stout nor too thin; you couldn’t say he was old, but still he wasn’t what you might call any too young either” “в бричке сидел господин, не красавец, но и не дурной наружности, ни слишком толст, ни слишком тонок; нельзя сказать, чтобы стар, однако ж и не так, чтобы слишком молод” (1; PSS VI, 7). This example is just one of several.

Chichikov’s lack of a concrete identity seems to be a characteristic clear even from birth:

Obscure and humble is the origin of our hero. His parents were of the nobility, but whether hereditary nobility or from a newly created lot, God knows...[and] he was born simply, ‘neither like his mother nor like his dad, but like some unknown, *passing* lad.’ (224) (**Emphasis mine.**)

Темно и скромно происхождение нашего героя. Родители были дворяне, но столбовые или личные—Бог ведает...[и] он родился, просто, как говорит пословица: ни в мать, ни в отца, а в *проезжего* молодца. (PSS VI, 224) (**Emphasis mine.**)

Eventually, Chichikov is even deprived of his identity as a human being when he is described by his colleagues as a “a fiend and not a human being” “чорт, а не человек” (236; PSS VI, 235).<sup>42</sup>

Despite the fact that so many components of Chichikov’s identity link him almost preternaturally to the road, there is evidence suggesting that he either strives for or is drawn to a less transient existence, one similar to Chertokutskii’s. He seeks money, possessions, a wife, children, but most importantly, “a life all of ease” “жизнь во всех довольствах” (228; PSS VI, 228). Maguire has recognized this desire in Chichikov, noting that he is driven “to

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<sup>42</sup> As discussed earlier, Chertokutskii, too, has a blatant connection to the devil by virtue of his very name.

acquire an estate” (*Exploring Gogol* 90). However, Maguire also suggests that Chichikov’s yearning is one “to which his placeless condition does not entitle him” (*Exploring Gogol* 90). In his wish for such an existence, though, Chichikov is no different from any of Gogol’s typical characters whose actions are motivated by worldly, material things. Chichikov’s fate, however, differs significantly from Gogol’s usual treatment.

The effect of static space on Chichikov is particularly fascinating. Chichikov enters a setting (the town of N) that is typical of the static environment occupied by Chertokutskii in “The Carriage.” It is replete with the various manifestations of subtle, insidious evil on all levels,<sup>43</sup> and as has been illustrated, this environment retards forward movement, a fact that would seemingly indicate that escape from its grasp is unlikely. In the town of N, this force indeed works to ensnare Chichikov into an existence similar to Chertokutskii’s.

Chichikov’s arrival in the town of N creates a whole new focus for the townspeople, just as the cavalry regiment did for the town of B in “The Carriage.” Although his arrival initially “created no stir whatever in the town of N and was not coupled with any remarkable event” “не произвел в городе совершенно никакого шума и не был сопровожден ничем особенным”, Chichikov quickly catches the attention of the occupants, setting out almost immediately to introduce himself to the town’s most important officials (1; PSS VI, 7).

Very quickly both Chichikov’s existence and his affairs becomes the primary concern of the townspeople, whose lives before this event had been fully stagnant. In fact, prior to Chichikov’s arrival “there had not been, for the space of three months, anything occurring” “даже не происходило в продолжение трех месяцев ничего такого” (187; PSS VI, 191). As was the case in “The Carriage,” in which there was no activity in the town and never a

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<sup>43</sup> As Gogol himself stated about the Town of N, it was “emptiness raised to the highest degree” and “busy with scattered idleness” (qtd. fr. Lotman, “Artistic Space” 235).

traveler to be seen, the town of N is equally lifeless.<sup>44</sup> In this context, it is unsurprising that the townspeople latched on to Chichikov, who at least represented something different in this otherwise static environment.<sup>45</sup> This notion is supported by Maguire, who recognizes that:

for isolated provincials, any newcomer is a source of novelty and diversion; and when the newcomer is as engaging and eager to please as Chichikov, efforts must be made to prolong his stay, if not to keep him permanently. At the same time, he is intruding into a tightly bounded space, and therefore poses a threat. (*Exploring Gogol* 234)

The threat that Chichikov poses ultimately is the result of his connection to a fluid existence. That is, at least in Gogol's evolving conception, Chichikov, who otherwise resembles many other depraved characters, does not belong in an environment that so fundamentally contravenes the potential embodied by the road. His escape from the town, however, would not come off easily, for despite Gogol's desire to save this character, Chichikov could not ignore the seductive powers of petty evil. As a result, evidence throughout *Dead Souls* suggests that a fate of fixedness and immobility looms over Chichikov. The instances that point to this potential outcome for Chichikov are sometimes blatant, and sometimes subtle.

In Chapter Seven, as Chichikov is on his way to finalize the purchase of his dead serfs, he encounters the landowner Manilov, at which point "they immediately clasped each other in an embrace and for five minutes or so remained in that position right out in the street" "они заключили тут же друг друга в объятия и минут пять оставались на улице в таком положении" (135: PSS VI, 140). Manilov's action, a very literal instance of immobilization, is not surprising, for it was he who had earlier implored Chichikov to move

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<sup>44</sup> It is also revealed that as a result of Chichikov's affairs, "the whole town, the lie-abeds and sit-by-the fires who had been lolling and vegetating at home in their dressing gowns for years...now came crawling out of their holes..." "вылезли из нор все тюрюки и байбаки, которые позалеживались в халатах по несколько лет дома" (187; PSS VI 190).

<sup>45</sup> While Chichikov imbues this setting with a sense of liveliness, it is most certainly a perverse one. In actual fact, no substantive improvement occurred. This outcome is similar, if not identical, to the effect of the arrival of the military regiment in "The Carriage."

in with him: “it would really be a fine thing if we were to live thus together, under the same roof [...]” “как было бы в самом деле хорошо если бы жить этак вместе, под одною кровлею [...]” (32; PSS VI, 37). This example further illustrates Gogol’s tendency to depict the danger of fixedness in exaggerated, apparently inconsequential events.

This occurrence is particularly telling when considered in juxtaposition to Chichikov’s thoughts immediately prior to encountering Manilov. Recognizing the tenuous legality of his business dealings, Chichikov had been contemplating bringing his affairs “to an end as soon as possible; until such time as it was ended, everything seemed to him to be in an uneasy and awkward state” “скорее как можно привести дела к концу; до тех пор ему казалось всё беспокойно и неловко” (135; PSS VI, 139). Shortly thereafter, Chichikov states explicitly to the Chairman of the Division of Purchase Deeds that he would “like to leave town tomorrow” “мне завтра хотелось бы выехать из города” (141; PSS VI, 145). For an individual so intimately connected to a mobile existence, this desire to avoid fixedness would be a natural tendency. Similar to Chertokutskii, though, Chichikov seems unable to move on. Something is acting to keep him in this environment.

Initially, Chichikov’s delay can be attributed to the whims of the townspeople, as evidenced by the Chairman, who upon hearing Chichikov proclaim his intention to leave the town responds: “that’s all very fine, but, whether you like it or not, we shan’t let you go so soon...you’ll have to tarry with us for a while” “всё это хорошо, только уж как хотите, мы вас не выпустим так рано...вы всё-таки с нами поживите” (141; PSS VI, 145). Almost immediately thereafter, at the celebration of Chichikov’s purchases, a toast is made to the new property owner in which the townspeople begin:

to implore him most convincingly to stay on in their town for at least two more weeks: No, Pavel Ivanovich! Say whatever you like, but it’s just as

if you were merely chilling the house, stepping on the threshold and then backing out! No, you really must spend some time with us! There, we'll marry you off. Isn't that so, Ivan Grigorievich? We'll marry him off? (147)

упрашивать убедительно остаться хоть на две недели в городе: “Нет, Павел Иванович! Как вы себе хотите, это выходит, избу только выхолаживать: на порог, да и назад! Нет, вы проведите время с нами! Вот мы вас женим: не правда ли, Иван Григорьевич, женим его? (PSS VI, 151)

This possibility of marriage certainly piques the interest of Chichikov, who on several occasions has shown a desire to settle down with wife and children.<sup>46</sup> This outcome, though, would likely have negative consequences for the hero of the road, for as noted by Fusso, marriage would facilitate fixedness: “Family ties encumber movement, cloud the moral sense, [and] smother creative freedom” (40).

Not only is Chichikov assured that he will be found a bride, the Chairman also informs him that:

You can resist hand and foot, but it won't do you any good! We'll marry you off just the same. No, my dear, since you've fallen into our clutches, you mustn't complain! We don't like to fool around! (147)

Уж как ни упирайтесь руками и ногами, мы вас женим! Нет, батюшка, попали сюда, так не жалуйтесь. Мы шутить не любим. (PSS VI, 151)

This demonstrative behavior illustrates that “the people of N strive to encourage Chichikov's impulses toward congealing, toward fixity and limitation [...]” (Fusso 39). Despite his inherent resistance to this type of existence, Chichikov does not immediately detect the deleterious effect that acceding to the townspeople would have on him.

Similar to Chertokutskii, who was enlivened by his interaction with the military officers, Chichikov is buoyed by the favorable attention he receives from the townspeople.

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<sup>46</sup> In Chapter Eleven, it is stated that Chichikov “would ponder on many pleasant things—a little woman, a nursery—and a smile would follow such thoughts [...]” “подумывал он о многом приятном: о бабенке, о детской, и улыбка следовала за такими мыслями [...]” (234; PSS VI, 234).

His once seemingly well-reasoned determination to leave N as soon as possible begins to recede as various individuals continue to implore him to “stay [...] for just one short week more” “еще одну недельку поживите” (154; PSS VI, 157). Eventually, Chichikov is unable to “see any means of tearing himself out of the town...” “он не видел средств, вырваться из города” (154; PSS VI, 157). He is captivated by this sense of adoration and belonging, constantly wavering between the desire to remain mobile and to settle down, still not realizing that the latter option would likely constitute his ultimate demise.

As events progress, it appears that Chichikov is increasingly approaching a fate similar to Chertokutskii’s, one in which the static environment that he occupies will render him immobile. While at the governor’s ball a specific event points to the possibility of this outcome. After watching the governor’s daughter depart to another section of the room,

Chichikov still did not stir from the spot, like a man who has gaily sallied out of doors for a stroll, his eyes disposed to take in all the sights, and then suddenly comes to a dead stop, remembering that he has forgotten something; and when that happens you won’t find anything sillier than this individual [...] But [...] he has everything with him, and yet at the same time some unseen demon is whispering into his ears that he has forgotten *something*. And by this time he’s staring absentmindedly and in a muddled way at the throng moving past him [...] yet without really seeing a thing. (163)

Чичиков всё еще стоял неподвижно на одном и том же месте, как человек, который весело вышел на улицу с тем, чтобы прогуляться, с глазами, расположенными глядеть на всё, и вдруг неподвижно остановился, вспомнив, что он позабыл что-то, и уж тогда глупее ничего не может быть такого человека [...] но [...] всё, кажется, при нем, а между тем какой-то неведомый дух шепчет ему в уши, что он позабыл что-то. И вот уже глядит он растерянно и смутно на движущуюся толпу перед ним [...] и ничего не видит. (PSS VI, 167)

This description is reminiscent of Chertokutskii’s compulsion to stay on at the general’s gathering despite efforts to leave, and his remaining in bed, eyes popping out of his head, after being confronted with the information of the officers’ arrival.

The various happenings that affect Chichikov's mobility in one form or another resemble closely those forces that were dictating Chertokutskii's immobile existence in "The Carriage." An important distinction must be made in this regard, though. Whereas in "The Carriage" evil functions wholly to immobilize Chertokutskii, to put him in his place, this force operates in a more nuanced manner in *Dead Souls*, both luring Chichikov into the stagnant environment, while at the same time, facilitating his escape. In order to accomplish this task, Gogol made evil the catalyst for the positive outcome he sought to project. This approach can be seen explicitly in the events that precede the departure of his protagonist.

As soon as Chichikov's unscrupulous dealings are exposed, the town's remaining fondness for him abates.<sup>47</sup> The recognition of Chichikov as a con-man, though, does not reduce the inanity with which he is treated. First, in paradigmatic illustrations of illogicality and absurdity, the female society determines that Chichikov was conspiring to kidnap the Governor's daughter. Similarly, the male society contemplates, in all seriousness, the possibility that Chichikov is the infamous brigand Captain Kopeikin, a benighted army veteran who was missing an arm and a leg. After rejecting this possibility (Chichikov did, in fact, have all of his limbs), they then consider that perhaps he is actually Napoleon. Ultimately, the town can conclude concretely only that Chichikov poses a threat to this environment and that he must be dealt with in some manner.

Instead of taking action against Chichikov, though, either by expelling him or imprisoning him, the town reacts to his exposure in a most ridiculous manner. In fact, it is at this point that the absurdity of the town's relationship with Chichikov reaches its pinnacle, and it does so through the further proliferation of the inane, absurd, petty, and *poshlyi* sort of

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<sup>47</sup> The female society had, by this time, already begun to sour towards Chichikov given the preference he showed to the governor's daughter over any other woman.

evil that has been at work since Chichikov's arrival. As Iurii Mann has noted, "illogicality blooms into a luxurious flower in the last chapters of the poem, where the reaction of the city's inhabitants to the Chichikov affair is described. Here there is an absurdity at every step; each new 'thought' is more rib-tickling than the last" (486). Despite this neutral classification of the events that transpire (Mann does not employ the term "evil"), this description does indeed acknowledge the influence of this force. The illogicality recognized by Mann (consisting primarily of the townspeople's ever expanding gossip and rumor-mongering) is representative of the core notion of evil that it is a force based on privation. The existence of these townspeople has already been shown to lack substance. At this point in their depiction the purpose of their collective existence has been reduced to speculation about a visiting con man. At every turn this environment and its inhabitants represent the effect of this evil force that functions solely to deprive human existence of meaning and significance.

The initial effect of the various rumors concerning Chichikov's identity and activities was that "each town member [...] came to a dead stop, like a ram, with his eyes bulging" "всякой, как баран, остановился, выпучив глаза" (186; PSS VI, 189). As I have mentioned already, this immobilization motif often signifies the inability of members of a static environment to deal with challenging or unexpected news. This instance is no exception. These townspeople have no concern for getting to the bottom of the matter in an efficient way. Instead, they contemplate dealing with Chichikov in a roundabout manner. They decide that rather than confronting him, it would be more prudent "to make thorough inquiries among those whom Chichikov had traded with and bought these souls from, in order to learn, at least, what each transaction had consisted of, and what, precisely, was the



meaning of these dead souls [...]” “сделать несколько расспросов тем, у которых были куплены души, чтобы, по крайней мере, узнать, что за покупка, и что именно нужно разуместь под этими мертвыми душами [...]” (192; PSS VI, 195).

This and similar efforts (also circuitous) produce no leads; however, in the process of trying to determine who Chichikov actually is, the townsmen become so disconnected from logic that they begin to wonder whether the protagonist is “the kind of man who should be apprehended and detained as a suspicious person, or the kind of man who could himself apprehend and detain all of them as suspicious persons” “такой ли человек, которого нужно задержать и схватить как неблагонамеренного, или же он такой человек, который может сам схватить и задержать их всех как неблагонамеренных” (194; PSS VI, 196). After eventually putting this irrational fear aside, the officials try to elicit information from Nozdrev, even though “they knew very well that Nozdrev was a liar, that one couldn’t believe him” “ведь очень хорошо знали, что Ноздрев лгун, что ему нельзя верить ни в одном слове” (206; PSS VI, 207).

Never does it occur to the townsmen to detain Chichikov and question him directly. Their circular logic and indirect approach to resolving this issue are part and parcel with the stagnancy of the environment, one in which there is never progress and things never move forward. The primary effect of the rumors about Chichikov was not action, but rather the birth of extreme worry, to such an extent, in fact, that the town officials “actually lost weight” “они даже похудели” (195; PSS VI, 197). Affected most significantly by these rumors and inane suppositions was the Public Prosecutor who, “suddenly, without rhyme or reason, up and died” “вдруг, как говорится, ни с того ни с другого, умер” (209; PSS VI, 209). The townspeople’s absurd concerns and buffoonish efforts to reveal Chichikov’s

identity simply provided the protagonist with the opportunity to escape. Nevertheless, Chichikov managed to do so with only minimal urgency.

For the course of a three day period of illness and recuperation, during which time he was confined to his room, Chichikov was unaware of the events transpiring in the town. He finally learns from Nozdrev, completely in passing, that “the whole town has turned against [him]” “в городе все против [его]” (213; PSS VI, 214). Even at this point, when Chichikov realizes that his demise is imminent if he stays on any longer, his preparations for departure lack urgency, and as a result, his escape does not come off hastily. The immobilizing effects of this petty world are indeed powerful.

Instead of setting off at once, Chichikov ordered his coachman “to be ready at dawn, so that they might leave the town no later than six o’clock in the morning, without fail” “быть готовым на заре, с тем, чтобы завтра же в 6 часов утра выехать из города непременно” (214; PSS VI, 215). At the prescribed hour, though, “nothing came out the way Chichikov had intended...he awoke considerably later than he had thought he would...[he found out that] the carriage...wasn’t harnessed yet and that nothing was in readiness” “ничего [...] не случилось так, как предполагал Чичиков [...] проснулся он позже, нежели думал [...] бричка еще была не заложена и ничего не было готово” (216; PSS VI, 216). Chichikov learned further that the horses were not shod and that “the iron rim [of the wheel] will have to be changed entirely [and] the front of the carriage has been jarred all loose...” “шину нужно будет совсем перетянуть [и] перед у брички совсем расшатался [...]” (216; PSS VI, 216).

Just as an imperceptible force acted to delay Chertokutskii’s departure from the general’s party, the events that delay Chichikov’s seem similarly motivated. Chichikov does

eventually overcome the difficulties with his carriage and escape from the town of N, an outcome that represents a significant divergence for Gogol. Like few characters in Gogol's fiction, Chichikov does not succumb to the pervasiveness of this insidious evil. Other characters do manage to escape; however, the basis for this outcome is substantially different than it is for Chichikov, specifically in terms of these characters' potential to be redeemed.<sup>48</sup>

That Gogol facilitated Chichikov's escape must be viewed as a necessary step in his projection of his protagonist's eventual redemption. He certainly could not have had Chichikov take up residence in this town, though this outcome was not entirely unfathomable.<sup>49</sup> Nor could Gogol have left Chichikov in his damaged carriage, apprehended by the town's authorities in a scene similar to the exposure of Chertokutskii. Neither of these outcomes would have met Gogol's objective, which, as stated by Merezhkovsky, was "to save Chichikov at any cost: for he thought that by saving him he would be saving himself" (100). Only a return to the road afforded the opportunity for escape, thereby preserving Chichikov's potential for redemption and perhaps even salvation.

This treatment of Chichikov, however, is problematic and symptomatic of Gogol's incomplete vision for the redemption of mankind. The reality is that Chichikov is in no way above the pettiness and the self-interestedness that defines and motivates the existence of the

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<sup>48</sup> Examples of other characters that manage to escape are few. The most obvious examples include Khlestakov from *The Inspector General* and Podkolesin in the play *Marriage*. These individuals unquestionably escape from their environments; however, their respective escapes, while similar to each other, differ from Chichikov's in one crucial respect. Khlestakov, it is safe to assume, has not learned from his near apprehension. He will surely hoodwink the townspeople of the next provincial hamlet he encounters. Similarly, Podkolesin's escape from his impending marriage (it should be noted that Khlestakov, too, was to be married to the mayor's daughter), will likely only facilitate his return to a life of being "the most frivolous and ordinary man in the world" (722). While it may be the case that Podkolesin, like Chichikov, has escaped the imminent fixedness of marriage, nothing more or specific is known of his fate. To be sure, Chichikov's future is also unknown; however, Gogol intended to develop a means by which Chichikov would reject his misguided existence in favor of a more righteous life.

<sup>49</sup> Fusso recognizes that Chichikov indeed "comes close to being initiated, accepted, and fixed in his proper place by the town of N" (34).

townspeople with whom he interacts. He is just as empty as they are. He, like Chertokutskii, does not exist for any purpose higher than concern for the temporal and worldly. As a result, the fact that Chichikov was able to escape required an explanation, and unlike “The Carriage” with its *ex abrupto* ending, Gogol obliges by offering a look into what can be expected of Chichikov. Gogol accomplishes this task by using a more focused narrator, one who does not merely resort strictly to irony, but rather, engages in an effort to reconcile the complexities of Chichikov with the author’s ultimate vision of redemption. It is in the latter stages of the work especially, though not exclusively, that the narrative voice and the authorial voice become intertwined, an effect that conveys the burgeoning moralistic and homiletic approach with which Gogol was experimenting and soon to adopt whole heartedly.

In his *vorgeschichte* of the protagonist, the narrator first acknowledges Chichikov’s shortcomings, suggesting initially that he may simply be a scoundrel (“подлец”): “Кто же он? Стало быть, подлец?” (PSS VI, 241) Almost immediately, though, the narrator concludes that this possibility is too simplistic. Instead, he decides that Chichikov is more appropriately classified as an “acquirer” (“приобретатель”), which is worse than a scoundrel, for “acquisition is the root of all evil; because of it deals have been put through upon which the world has bestowed the description of being ‘none too clean’” “приобретение—вина всего; из-за него произвелись дела, которым свет дает название *не очень чистых*” (242-3; PSS VI, 242). As already suggested, these qualities could just as legitimately be applied to the townspeople and landowners of *Dead Souls*, as well as to Chertokutskii. That Chichikov is motivated by equally insignificant desires, though, would not determine his fate.

While Chichikov is formally linked to these negative identities (“scoundrel” and

“acquirer”), the narrator simultaneously looks to absolve him of responsibility for this connection, suggesting that: “[...] there are passions the choice of which is not of man’s volition, for they were already born with him at the moment of his being born into the world, and he has not been given the strength to deviate from them” “[...] есть страсти, которых избрание не от человека. Уже родились они с ним в минуту рождения его в свет, и не дано ему сил отклониться от них” (243; PSS VI, 242).<sup>50</sup> By excusing Chichikov’s principal flaw in this manner, Gogol exposes his own evolving conception of an inherent degree of potential in mankind.

Before applied to Chichikov, these words suggesting the predetermination of mankind’s passions are used to describe an entirely different group of individuals, those who, according to Gogol, “are fated to perform a great earthly course, ...whether in a somber guise or flashing by as a radiant phenomenon that makes the world rejoice [...]” “земное великое поприще суждено совершить им, в мрачном ли образе или пронестись светлым явлением, возрадующим мир [...]”(243; PSS VI, 242). Regardless of the subset to which these individuals belong, Gogol indicates that “they are equally called forth for a good that man is ignorant of” “одинаково вызваны они для неведомого человеком блага” (243; PSS VI, 242). They are all “guided by designs from above” “высшими начертаньями они ведутся” (243; PSS VI, 242).

Despite his apparent belief in this lofty, idealistic notion, Gogol certainly had produced few, if any, concrete examples of individuals whose passions amounted to the purely good in his works up to and including *Dead Souls*. His most concerted effort to depict characters guided by a higher good (as opposed to evil) came in *Dead Souls: Part II*. Rather

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<sup>50</sup> It is important to point out, I think, that this statement resounds familiarly with the Orthodox “theology of place,” which indicates that man’s place is dictated from time eternal.

than convincingly or poignantly embodying proper existence, though, these supposedly positive characters (such as the landowner Kostanzhonglo and the official Murazov) come across as clumsy and heavy-handed tools of a proselytizing author. The evocation of a positive ideal in *Dead Souls*, though, points further to Gogol's shift toward the recognition of good in man and his potential for redemption, even if he is carried away by the sentiment in *Dead Souls: Part II*.

For Chichikov, the passion that drives him also “is not of his choosing”; however, as opposed to God directing his path, the implication is that he is lured by evil, and specifically the Devil, just like so many of Gogol's characters. Chichikov, unlike these prior characters, though, is not doomed to the endless repetition of their petty existences. Ultimately, the reason for this divergent treatment is that Chichikov's purpose was to verify the author's belief in the “possibility of morally transforming each man” (Chizhevsky 562). Gogol apparently recognized the contradiction of using a character like Chichikov for this lofty purpose, acknowledging that his protagonist had indeed forgotten his “great and sacred obligations and [saw] something great and sacred in insignificant gewgaws” “великие и святыя обязанности и в ничтожных побрякушках [видел] великое и святое” (243; PSS VI, 242). Nevertheless, Chichikov still could be counted among men “born for great deeds” “рожденн[ый] на лучшие подвиги” (243; PSS VI, 242).

Despite the obvious paradox of Chichikov's usage as a hero and his overt connection to the realm of evil, he was the only choice the author had for the hero of his epic. Utilizing a virtuous hero was not an option. The usefulness of such characters had long ago been exhausted, as Gogol claims in *Dead Souls*:

The man of virtue has been turned into a hack and there isn't a writer who doesn't ride him hard, urging him on with a whip or whatever else comes

to his hand; because they have overworked the man of virtue to such an extent that now there isn't even a shadow of virtue about him, and there is nothing but skin and bones left of him instead of flesh and blood; because it is only through hypocrisy that they trot out the man of virtue; because the man of virtue isn't held in much respect. (223-4)

[О]братили в рабочую лошадь добродетельного человека, и нет писателя, который бы не ездил на нем, понукая и кнутом и всем, чем попало; потому что изморили добродетельного человека до того, что теперь нет на нем и тени добродетели, и остались только ребра да кожа вместо тела; потому что лицемерно призывают добродетельного человека; потому что не уважают добродетельного человека. (PSS VI, 223)

This proclamation, I think, should be taken with a grain of salt, for in many ways it betrays Gogol's struggle to conceive of or depict such heroes, not simply that they cannot be portrayed convincingly. This point was essentially moot in Gogol's fiction between 1835 and the publication of *Dead Souls*, though. Gogol rarely sought to present mankind's existence positively over this period.

However, by the time Gogol was concluding his epic, it was no longer sufficient to expect mankind to reform his misguided ways by, of his own awareness, recognizing himself in characters depicted as paradigms of petty existence (think Chertokutskii, Pirogov, Kovaliov, etc.). In a manner that echoed his growing religious fanaticism, albeit softly, Gogol asks his audience: “[W]hich one of you, filled with Christian humility, not aloud, but in silence, when you are all alone, [...], will let sink deep into the inward recesses of your own soul this onerous question: ‘Come, now, isn't there a bit of Chichikov in me, too?’” “[К]то из вас, полный христианского смиренья, не гласно, а в тишине, один, [...], углубит во внутрь собственной души сей тяжелый запрос: ‘А нет ли и во мне какой-нибудь части Чичикова?’” (246; PSS VI, 245). The same religious underpinnings that motivated this question also influenced Gogol's use of Chichikov to bring “man down into

the dust and on his knees before the wisdom of the heavens” “повергнет в прах и на колени человека пред мудростью небес” (243; PSS VI, 242). The application of this lofty, religiously-tinged language to Chichikov, the con-man and scoundrel, further reflects Gogol’s intent to find good in this character, and by extension, mankind.

Only by disassociating Chichikov from any specific environment, in this case the stagnant provincial setting, could Gogol begin his effort to deliver “the wisdom of the heavens.” As a hero of the road Chichikov was a legitimate vehicle through which to convey this message, because “the hero in motion has a goal. And even if it is a petty, self-interested goal...he is still not frozen into immobility [...]” (Lotman 236). To Gogol’s frustration, though, he could not convey the positive message he hoped to deliver by using Chichikov. The problem Gogol encountered was that his message was entirely theoretical, based on ingrained religious notions from his youth and a nascent theological quest that was burgeoning as the result of newer spiritual influences. By the time he completed *Dead Souls*, he certainly had not formulated a unified notion of proper existence, nor had he devised a means for redemption.

### **The Significance of a Carriage and the Road**

While touched upon in passing throughout this analysis, one aspect has not yet received the full attention that it deserves, and that is consideration of each protagonist’s relationship to his carriage and the inherent function, purpose, and significance of this vehicle for Gogol. Superficially, the image of a carriage may appear inconsequential, for these vehicles were certainly a primary mode of conveyance during the period in which Gogol wrote and in which his fiction was set. However, to merely dismiss as coincidence



Chertokutskii's concealing himself in this type of vehicle in the final scene of "The Carriage" and Chichikov's usage of his carriage throughout *Dead Souls* (and particularly in the closing chapter), would be shortsighted. Gogol's focus on carriages and the specific manner in which they are occupied is quite significant. It is also symbolic, and therefore deserving of special attention.

To be sure, in each work the Russian distinguishes between several manifestations of the catch-all English term "carriage." However, as Maguire observes, in the first chapter of *Dead Souls*, Chichikov's carriage "acquires three different names: *brichka* (registered three times), *koleso* (twice), and *ekipazh* (twice)" (*Exploring Gogol* 214). Given this inconsistency, Maguire concludes that "implicitly raised in this first paragraph is the question of the adequacy of any one word to account for one object" (*Exploring Gogol* 215). While it is important to recognize the clear terminological distinctions, I see no reason to dispute the larger symbolic function of this image, one associated most basically with the facilitation of movement, but also with the more symbolic notions of progress and potential.

Although the protagonists of these works are both connected to similar conveyances, the manner in which each occupies his vehicle is significant, for it is not completely identical. Chertokutskii's typical use of his carriage consists of traveling about the province visiting one fair after another, which represents circuitous, undirected motion. In the end, he infamously occupies his carriage in a way completely contrary to its function. However, given the fact that Chertokutskii is a static hero, one effectively immobilized within his environment, there is little surprise that his utilization of a carriage would so contravene logic

and function.<sup>51</sup> As such, this perversion of a carriage's primary function should primarily be seen as a reflection of the author's typical treatment of his characters at this time, one that suggested no potential for redemption.

If Lotman is correct in his conclusion that the road can serve as a path toward progress and the realization of goals, it is only natural that a carriage would be an indispensable mechanism to reaching such ends. Hulanicki has noted, though, that in general the carriage is merely a "banal utilitarian object" (67).<sup>52</sup> This conclusion, I believe, is fallacious. Gogol, in fact, quite valued this type of vehicle, appreciating it especially for the access it afforded him to the road, as he revealed in a letter to S. T. Aksakov from 1840: "I kept wanting to throw myself either into a stagecoach or even a post chaise" "мне хотелось броситься или в дилижанс или хоть на перекладную" (Proffer 97; PSS XI, 315-316). The reason for this sentiment is particularly telling, for it was not just Gogol's desire to be on the road, but "the road in the rain, the muck, through forests, through the steppes, to the end of the world" "дорога, в дождь, слякоть, через леса, через степи, на край света" (Proffer 97; PSS XI, 315-316). While the carriage was certainly an essential to realizing the grandeur of the road, for Gogol it really was the sense of freedom and distance, which the carriage afforded, that most attracted him to the road.

As briefly touched upon earlier, by 1836 Gogol felt that he was stagnating and languishing in Russia: "after various anxieties, vexations, and such, my thoughts are so confused that I cannot gather them into harmony and order" "после разных волнений,

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<sup>51</sup> Hulanicki has astutely observed that Chertokutskii's choice of his carriage as a refuge is remarkably illogical, particularly given the fact that it represents the principal reason his guests have come to visit, thereby making it somewhat likely that they would choose to inspect it (66).

<sup>52</sup> It should be considered, too, that within "The Carriage" are numerous references to this general type of vehicle, none of which are related to Chertokutskii's mythical carriage. Perhaps the dominance of such vehicles is merely a repetitive device that happened to have caught Gogol's fancy. It seems more likely, though, that it is a precursor to the prominence this vehicle would have in *Dead Souls* and in Gogol's own travels.

досад и прочего мысли мои так рассеяны, что я не в силах собрать их в стройность и порядок” (Proffer 55; PSS XI, 41). To address this condition, Gogol took to the road “to gain distance, to collect his thoughts...to look at Russia from a distance, a distance that would clarify his thoughts about his vocation” (Setchkarev 48-9). From this distance, Gogol imagined that he would be able to “think [his] future works over thoroughly [...] to create with greater reflection” “обдумать хорошенько труды будущие [...] творить с большим размышлением” (Proffer 56; PSS XI, 41).

That travel upon the road was an important component of Gogol’s transient existence is captured in several letters to his friends. In one letter to S. T. Aksakov from 1841 Gogol comments: “now the road and a journey are absolutely essential for me; they alone [...] restore me” “теперь мне нужны необходимо дорога и путешествие: они одни [...] восстанавливают меня” (Proffer 102; PSS XI, 330).<sup>53</sup> *Dead Souls* itself can be seen as a reflection of these perceived benefits, as evidenced by this abridged excerpt:

How much of the strange, and of the alluring, and of that which carries you away, and of the wonderful there is in the words “the road”! And how wondrous it is itself, this road! [...] Muffle yourself closer in your traveling cloak, pull your cap down over your ears, and let us settle down more closely and snugly in the corner of the carriage! [...] God!...How good thou art for one at times, thou long, long road! How oft, like one perishing and drowning, I have clutched at thee, and every time thou hast magnanimously delivered me and saved me! (221-222)

Какое странное, и манящее, и несущее, и чудесное в слове: дорога! и как чудна она сама, эта дорога: [...] покрепче в дорожную шинель, шапку на уши, тесней и уютней прижмешься к углу! [...] Боже! Как ты хороша подчас, далекая, далекая дорога! Сколько раз, как погибающий и тонущий, я хватался за тебя, и ты всякий раз меня

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<sup>53</sup> In another letter to Aksakov from 1840, Gogol states: “Oh, if only I had the opportunity to take some distant road every summer! The road is amazingly salubrious for me...” “О, если б я имел возможность всякое лето сделать какую-нибудь дальнюю дорогу! Дорога удивительно спасительна для меня...” (Proffer 99; PSS XI, 323). Just after publication of *Dead Souls*, Gogol wrote that “travel and changes of scenery are as essential for me as daily bread [...]” “путешествие и перемены мест мне так же необходимы, как насущный хлеб” (Proffer 124; PSS 145-6).

великодушно выносила и спасала! (PSS VI, 221-2)

The language and tone of this excerpt hardly differ from Gogol's voice in his correspondence to friends about the same subject. In addition to reflecting the sincerity of Gogol's fondness for the road, another important aspect of this excerpt is that the style of narration differs fundamentally from that typical of Gogol's earlier works like "The Carriage." The voice of a more sophisticated and sincere narrator comes through in these lines. The irony that so often permeated Gogol's earlier texts is not evident here.

Like his protagonist Chichikov, Gogol must himself be seen as "of the road", someone who never truly belonged to any environment. Maguire recognizes that Gogol, "while convinced that people must find their proper place, seemed unable to do so himself, and became in effect a wanderer, even a beggar" (*Exploring Gogol* 90). Nabokov concluded that "while needing constant movement to prompt inspiration, this movement physically prevented [Gogol] from writing" (116). The salubrious benefits Gogol perceived in the road do not seem to have corresponded to his reality.

Nevertheless, Gogol's belief in the road remained strong, which is overtly evident in *Dead Souls*. In contrast to the final image of Chertokutskii, Gogol leaves Chichikov with "a long road lying ahead" "много пути предстоит" moving forward down this road in "a light carriage of the sort that bachelors prefer to drive about in [...]" "брички в которой ездят холостяки" (242, PSS VI, 241).<sup>54</sup> At this point, Chichikov is entering a space entirely opposed to that which he had just left behind, "a world not fixed, but in flux, in which anything can turn into anything" (Lotman 226). In this final image of Chichikov in his

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<sup>54</sup> Guerney's translation of "пути" as "road" and not "path" is important to note, for it supports Lotman's claim that Gogol distinguished very little, if at all, between these terms, despite the fact that the idea of a "path" almost presupposed a definitive end point, whereas a "road" was almost always an open-ended space. This failure to distinguish clearly between these two concepts plagued Gogol, for whether Chichikov (or himself, for that matter) was on a road or a path, the journey was endless.

carriage, the protagonist and his vehicle transform at once into a bird troika and then into Russia herself, thundering across bridges and eventually soaring away into boundless space.<sup>55</sup> To most critics, this image signifies, and I think accurately, “the notions of Russia’s ‘manifest destiny’—a glorious future vouchsafed by her boundless expanse—of her distinctive mission, of her turbulent, unfathomable essence” (Fanger, *Creation* 129-30).

These qualities that Gogol saw in Russia, and particularly the notion of unbridled potential, are consistent with the messianic thinking that influenced the author in his later years, and that were beginning to emerge as he was writing *Dead Souls*. Gogol seems to have recognized that Russia’s manifest destiny could never be realized as he had so often depicted her, as a conglomeration of various static spaces in which there was no capacity for change. For this reason, Gogol had to elevate his depiction of Russia, which he did literally in the closing lines of *Dead Souls*. However, as noted by Lotman, “in order to become elevated, space must be not only vast (or infinite), but also directional [...]” (235-6). While Gogol’s transformation of Russia into a bird troika certainly constitutes an elevation, Gogol struggled to imbue this space with a sense of directionality.

By the same token, even though Chichikov is depicted in an elevated manner, soaring along in his bird troika, Gogol never manages to make direction a part of his protagonist’s existence, either in the first part of his epic, or the subsequent second volume. This inability to capture a sense of purposeful motion renders Gogol’s hopeful depiction of Chichikov ultimately unconvincing, for as Lotman noted, the hero who occupies directional space “must move towards a goal” (235). Gogol ultimately depended on the notion that while on the road, regardless of its directionality, there was hope for mankind to reject the allure of

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<sup>55</sup> It should be observed in this context that whereas Chertokutskii occupies his carriage in a most absurd and inappropriate manner, Chichikov instead occupies his to the vehicle’s fullest potential, one that it can only be assumed Gogol sought to experience in his own travels.

insignificant and petty concerns. Through Chichikov, Gogol attempted “to turn temporary and egotistical motion into continuous and organic motion” (Lotman 237). This attempt proved unsuccessful, for although Chichikov’s motion was continuous (he managed to escape), it was not organic, for there is no specific hint that redemption was in his future.

The continuous motion that carries Chichikov away, while capturing Gogol’s understanding of potential within boundless space,<sup>56</sup> at the same time illustrated that the author subscribed to a notion contrary to the “Enlightenment...idea [that] the path cannot be endless” (Lotman 237). Gogol’s conception of boundless space, while associated with potential and apotheosis, did not allow for the hero in motion ever to stop, which as Lotman observes, is an integral necessity for this type of hero (237). In the end, though, this open-ended “solution” was the best Gogol would ever produce.

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<sup>56</sup> This idea of potential within boundlessness resonates with Lotman’s observation about boundary transgression in Gogol’s “Taras Bulba,” which constituted not so much a “violation [...], but an act of liberation” (222).

## CHAPTER II

### CONCLUSION

It has been my intent with this analysis to show that despite the already considerable criticism of Gogol's fiction from 1835 to 1842, there is still potential to provide a new perspective on these works. To accomplish this task, I have explored Gogol's use of artistic space and the characters that occupy it in two works from this period that have largely escaped extensive critical comparison. I have concluded that "The Carriage," as a paradigm of Gogol's static space, can be seen as a standard from which to measure *Dead Souls*. For this reason, I have been able to make productive comparisons between these works, illustrating both Gogol's consistent reliance on the themes and techniques that had always dominated his fiction and his struggle to provide an alternative to the negative picture he so frequently portrayed.

As I have attempted to demonstrate, this seven year period is particularly significant because it was during this time that Gogol came to envision the possibility of mankind's redemption, a belief that stemmed from his increasing reliance on religion for personal and creative inspiration. Gogol forced himself to reconcile the purpose and significance of his early fiction with the course he envisioned for his epic. By his own reckoning, he had to move past "the carelessness and laziness" "нерадение и лень" typical of earlier works like "The Carriage" and "to do something serious" "заняться делом" (Proffer 57-8; PSS XI, 48). *Dead Souls* was the tool with which Gogol hoped to accomplish this objective. It hints at the

possibility that “one can be far *better* than man is, that there are means [...]” “можно быть далеко *лучше* того, чем есть человек, что есть средства [...]” (Proffer 160; PSS XII, 504). This suggestion of mankind’s potential for prodigious change distinguishes *Dead Souls* most significantly from “The Carriage.” In the end, though, Gogol’s attempt to project a positive course for mankind proved unconvincing.

Gogol’s failure stemmed from the fact that he simply could not find a plausible counterbalance to the evil that he so skillfully presented. Lotman has recognized this inability, observing that “when, according to his plan, the time came to create a beautiful world alongside the horrible one, Gogol felt abandoned by his magical ability to create what had not yet existed...[he] had the courage to take on this responsibility, but not the strength to endure it” (Lotman, “The Truth as Lie” 39). Erlich has similarly observed that “Gogol’s attempt to feature virtue alongside vice seems to have been frustrated by the inherent lopsidedness of his moral vision. It was noted by both friend and foe that his imaginative grip was much firmer on evil than on good. The Devil was always an immediate presence to him, God an ever-receding goal of an arduous spiritual journey” (178).

Indeed, evil remained the primary actor in his work, and despite his desire to elevate goodness in *Dead Souls*, Gogol’s greatest ability was to make “the negative so compelling and convincing that no alternative seemed possible” (Maguire, *Exploring Gogol* 89). In his attempt to reverse course and focus on mankind’s potential for redemption, “Gogol was forcing himself into a style and a manner that went against his grain” (Fanger, *Creation* 179).

That his attempt would consist of associating Chichikov with the road, the least concrete environment possible and a foil to the stagnant provincial town, is unsurprising. As Gogol took to the road himself, the transference of potential to this space was indeed logical,



for it was only an individual of the road who “could escape from his environment” (Lotman 236). Escape, however, proved not to be a solution, but only a prolongation of the period in which Gogol strove to actually remedy the problem. The road, therefore, was only an intermediary step. It facilitated movement away from the stifling existence that Gogol depicted in his fiction, but it offered no further guidance about how to complete the mission that he believed “God had charged him [...],” one that “amounted to no less than the spiritual regeneration of Russia and purification of mankind” (Putney, *Russian Devils* 226).

Although lofty ambitions motivated his personal and literary efforts, Gogol simply could not “conclude the program—he preaches movement into infinity” (Lotman 238).<sup>57</sup> Despite the overtures he made to a hopeful outcome, Gogol had no concrete ending in mind for the trilogy (at least) that was to have been *Dead Souls*. Neither in the complete first volume of *Dead Souls*, nor the incomplete second volume, does Chichikov remedy his misdirected ways.<sup>58</sup> As a result, he never even approaches redemption. It is for this reason that Erlich claims that Chichikov possessed “a grotesque unsuitability for the role of the chief protagonist in an emerging morality play [...]" (179). As Fanger suggests, “by setting out to redeem the obviously unredeemable, by using a suavely sinister scoundrel as a test of Everyman’s potential for moral regeneration, Gogol hopelessly stacked the cards against his intrinsically precarious enterprise” (*Creation* 179).

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<sup>57</sup> Bakhtin offers a similar observation, noting that despite Gogol’s efforts to present Russia’s potential, in actuality “he was unable to transfer into this sphere distanced and positive images [...] [Gogol] lost Russia, that is, he lost his blueprint for perceiving and representing her; he got muddled somewhere between memory and familiar contact—to put it bluntly, he could not find the proper focus on his binoculars” (28).

<sup>58</sup> Some scholars suggest that there is reasonable evidence in the fragments of *Dead Souls: Part Two* indicating that Chichikov is indeed on his way to redemption. I disagree with this assessment, noting that most of the existing information about Chichikov points to his continued travel down a misguided path. When he purchases an actual estate, he immediately contemplates mortgaging it and its dead serfs. He then ponders defaulting on a loan from the landowner he supposedly respects more than any other. He is involved in the forgery of a will (for, unsurprisingly, financial gain). Even his proclamation that he is ready to take a new road (after being bailed out of prison) is tempered by his final priority before departure, purchasing a new suit (for which he pays extra to expedite its completion).

In spite of his determination to save this character, Gogol seemed to recognize the limitations of his vision, acknowledging specifically that *Dead Souls* was a “rather pale threshold of the great poem which [was] being *formed* within me” “преддверие немного бледное той великой поэмы, которая строится во мне” (Proffer 113; PSS XII, 58). Gogol confirms this sentiment in a letter to Zhukovsky from 1842 in which he states that:

There is much labor and road and spiritual education ahead yet! My soul must be purer than the celestial snows and more radiant than the heavens, and only then will I acquire the strength to begin heroic deeds and the great pursuit, only then will the riddle of my existence be solved. (Proffer 115)

Много труда и пути и душевного воспитанья впереди еще! Чище горного снега и светлей небес должна быть душа моя, и тогда только я приду в силы начать подвиги и великое поприще, тогда только разрешится загадка моего существованья.<sup>59</sup> (PSS XII, 69)

If anything, this excerpt captures the limitlessness of Gogol’s vision, which would ultimately seal his own fate, for he would never be able to realize his lofty objectives.<sup>60</sup> Following *Dead Souls*, Gogol would never complete another work of fiction, and most of his subsequent non-fiction was considered overly moralistic and only a pale shadow of his former excellence.<sup>61</sup> In an almost ironic turn, the very means by which Gogol sought to redeem himself and mankind—his adoption and depiction of the mobile, forward moving road as the path to redemption—led to his creative immobilization, for his vision was limitless and, as a result, unrealizable.

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<sup>59</sup> This sentiment is also conveyed in the final chapter of *Dead Souls* when the narrator/author recognizes that the reader “still has to travel quite a long path and road arm-in-arm with [Chichikov]; there are still two long parts ahead of us, which is no trifling matter” “еще не мало пути и дороги придется им пройти вдвоем рука в руку; две больше части впереди—это не безделица” (247; PSS VI, 248).

<sup>60</sup> Putney has calculated that “according to Gogol’s figures, he will require roughly fifty years to complete only the second third of [*Dead Souls*]” (*Russian Devils* 226).

<sup>61</sup> Fanger cites the well-known criticism of Gogol’s *Selected Passages from Correspondence to Friends*, in which Belinskii “branded [Gogol] as a ‘preacher of the knout, apostle of ignorance, defender of obscurantism and darkest oppression’” (*Creation* 186). This sentiment was widespread among critics.

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