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The Suffering Usurper: Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*

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I

I am a nobleman.

The "Diary of a Madman" is not simply the story of a poor insignificant clerk who is driven insane by the frustrations and humiliations received from the ranking figures in a powerful bureaucratic machine.¹ Popriščin is not a passive Akakij Akakievič who can vent his anger only by a fantastic return from the dead. His evenings are spent not in copying documents for his own pleasure, but in writing a diary to justify himself and wreak his vengeance upon the world. Popriščin dominates the story as no other Gogolian hero does. The whole meaning of the diary is intimately connected with the personality of its author. The "Diary of a Madman" is psychological, rather than social or moral, in focus, almost unique in Gogol's work. It is the only first-person narrative the creator of *Dead Souls* wrote. We are asked to enter into the workings of a deranged mind, and we must do this through the words produced by that mind. The story falls into two parts, before and after the madman's ascent to the throne. There is little change, however, in the patterns of the insane clerk's personality.² Let us now look at the author of the diary, the creator of this mad world, Aksentij Ivanovič Popriščin.

Popriščin is angry. The world, he thinks, has done him wrong. All are against him, existing only to insult and injure him. He sees himself as a victim, suffering from the torments of an inhuman world. The chief of his section at the office does nothing but harass him; the cashier will not give him an advance on his salary out of sheer stinginess; even the lackeys treat him with disdain. The madman sees a menace in everyone, of high or low rank. And to all he responds with anger. This anger usually takes the form of an aggressive attack. The section chief is reduced to something less than a human being; he has a face like a druggist's bottle (457)³ and is called a "damned heron" (453). The cashier is attacked by rumor; the madman reports that at home his cook beats him. "Everybody knows it" (453). To the lackeys' failure to recognize him as a man of "noble birth" (457), he responds with an indignant and dramatic departure from their presence. The clerk's only enjoyment in life comes from the theater, where

he laughs at "amusing plays" in which the authors make jibes at lawyers, collegiate registrars, merchants, and journalists (458). Even his sense of humor is aggressive.

Of course, the madman is caught in the vicious circle of paranoia. He blames his feelings of frustration on others and sees threats even where there are none. The aggression he feels toward all becomes projected onto others. Underneath the aggression, however, lies envy. He covets a position of authority or at least the feeling of superiority he senses in the lackeys. Typically he projects his envy onto others. The section chief, he believes, envies his alleged favored position as head pencil-sharpener for the director (457). Even the dog Medži is jealous of him (464).

Popriščin's need for dignity and authority is accompanied by a compensatory fantasy of dignity and authority. He insists upon his own nobility and associates himself with glorified figures of authority. His initial reaction to the director is awe: "And just look into his face! Aie! what importance in his eyes!" (456.) The clerk imagines that he has a position of special importance to the director, acquiring dignity, as it were, by associating with it. Most important of all, however, is the fantasy "newspaper world" in which he lives. His own life, even in the first half of the story, is intimately associated with the great rulers and governments of Europe: France, England, Austria, Spain. He reads the news of the world in *The Northern Bee* and projects his own life into the historical events of the day (456). The Emperor of Austria, Polignac, and the Dey of Algiers are his fantasy associates. The transformation into the King of Spain takes place after the clerk has read of the vacant Spanish throne in the newspapers. In solving this political problem, he solves for a moment his own personal one.

Associated with the fantasy of power is the imagined love quest. Popriščin is a knight errant in search of his beloved. Sofi is wondrously idealized. She is a dazzling beauty, dressed sumptuously in white, as are most Gogolian women. She carries a handkerchief which exudes the aroma of nobility. Her lips are sugary sweet, her eyes flash like the sun. She is a swan, a canary. She lives in elegance; her rooms are filled with mirrors and china and bottles of perfume scenting the air with the fine fragrance of femininity. In her boudoir, as Popriščin imagines, "there must be marvels . . . a paradise, such as is not to be found in the heavens" (459). To this paradise the madman has no entrance. Sofi is unattainable, as courtly ladies should be. All Popriščin can do is gaze upon her (the Gogolian theme of voyeurism), lie on his bed dreaming of her (the repeated entry, "for the most part I lay on my bed," with its suggestion of masturbation), and remain silent (the repeated entry, "aie! aie! never mind, never mind . . . silence"). Sofi is literally beyond words.

The political and erotic fantasies are both compensatory. They arise from Popriščin's need to bolster his ego, to prove himself. Humiliated by the drab realities of his everyday existence, the clerk attempts to correct them by associating himself with a dignified world and, when that fails, by proving himself sexually, if only in fantasy. Throughout the story the madman tends to alternate between these two fantasy worlds. Reality is assiduously avoided.

However hermetically sealed the first-person world of the madman is, reality has a way of creeping in. In his naiveté Popriščin has a penchant for quoting the derogatory statements of others. For example, he reports in his diary the following unflattering words of his section chief:

Come, think what you are about! Why, you are over forty. It's time you had a little sense. What do you imagine yourself to be? Do you suppose I don't know all the tricks you are up to? Why, you are philandering after the director's daughter! Come, look at yourself, just think what you are! Why, you are a zero and nothing else! Why, you haven't a penny to bless yourself with. And just look at yourself in the mirror—how could you think of such a thing! (457.)

Popriščin takes this assessment as an aggressive attack and responds with his own assault ending with "I spit on him" (457). The difference between the director and the section chief lies in the fact that the director remains silent and the section chief speaks out. The director is awesome in his distance, the section chief menacing in his penetration into Popriščin's world.

The most striking exposure of reality comes in the dog's letters which the madman copies into his diary. Here the clerk learns that his great idol, the director, is no different from the rest of God's grovelling creatures; he too is ambitious. Once exposed, the idealized figure of authority becomes menacing and is attacked: he is a Mason, a cork (465, 468). Of course, for Popriščin ambition is the greatest sin; this one fault taints the image of his idol, because it makes him resemble the madman. It is the clerk who is truly ambitious and who, in the second half of the story, projects his own ambition upon the whole world (468). Sofi, too, is exposed. She, we learn, is in love with a court chamberlain and finds Popriščin ridiculous. To the madman, this news is unbearable, and in revenge he tears up the letters.

The destruction of the dog's letters is a highly symbolic act. Popriščin associates dogs with a certain form of knowledge or intelligence unavailable to men: "I have long suspected that dogs are far more intellegent than men. . . . They are extremely politic (*politik*): they notice everything, every step a man takes." (459.) This special knowledge of the dogs is always associated with the political theme: "Dogs are clever creatures, they understand all diplomatic (*političeskie*) relations" (460). Popriščin hopes to discover himself in the midst of the political world the dogs know so well. Ironically,

he does, but it is not the world he wants or needs. Rather Medži, in telling of her own amorous life, speaks in terms which seem to be a grotesque of the madman's fantasy affair with Sofi: "I must confide to you that I have a number of suitors. . . . One is a very clumsy mongrel, fearfully stupid, stupidity is painted on his face; he walks about the street with an air of importance and imagines that he is a distinguished person and thinks everybody is looking at him." (463.) The clumsy mongrel resembles the clerk, just as his title (*dvornjaga* 'mongrel') resembles Popriščin's own (*dvorjanin* 'nobleman'). In the reality of the dog world the madman is a mongrel. Popriščin's response to this letter is ironically revealing: "How can anyone fill a letter with such foolishness! Give me a man! I want to see a man. I want spiritual sustenance—in which my soul might find food and enjoyment." (463.) He refuses to accept the truth and attempts to destroy it by tearing up the letters of the "stupid dogs."

In reality, we must assume, the letters never existed. They are a figment of the madman's mind, part of him, just as they are part of his diary. But they proceed from that area of his mind which has still retained some touch with reality. After all, in part one the mad clerk still functions in the real world: he works at the office, attends the theater, and keeps track of the days. When Popriščin destroys the letters, he destroys his one last bit of sanity.

The destruction of the truth-revealing letters is followed immediately by Popriščin's so-called rebellion:⁴

It's always a court chamberlain or a general. Everything that's best in the world falls to the court chamberlains or the generals. If you find some poor treasure and think it is almost within your grasp, a court chamberlain or a general will snatch it from you. God damn it! I'd like to become a general myself, not in order to receive her hand and all the rest of it; no, I should like to be a general only to see how they would wriggle and display all their court manners and *équivoques* and then to say to them: I spit on you both. Oh, damn it! (465.)

But is this a rebellion against the system? Is this Popriščin's attempt to assert his humanity in the face of bureaucratic oppression? First of all, Popriščin merely wants to find a better station within the system; there is no Dostoevskian rebellion against the whole order of things. Secondly, the madman ostensibly rebels because he has lost Sofi's hand to the court chamberlain. Surely, however, Popriščin, as a human being, had little to offer a young lady of society; his protest is one of sour grapes. Finally, in his anger the clerk forgets himself. He wants to become a general "not in order to receive her hand." He wants revenge. Popriščin wants to wield his power over those who he imagines are oppressing him. The victim wants to be the victimizer. The madman's interest in Sofi was never really amorous.

His erotic desires were aroused by his feelings of humiliation and his need to assert himself. Sofi was his one last chance to prove himself a man.

Once the erotic fantasy fails, Popriščin turns back to his newspaper world. He begins to wonder whether his dreams of power and glory might not have some foundation in reality:

Why am I a titular councilor and on what grounds am I a titular councilor? Perhaps I am not a titular councilor at all? Perhaps I am a count or a general, and only somehow appear to be a titular councilor. Perhaps I don't know myself who I am. How many instances there have been in history: some simple, humble tradesman or peasant, not even a nobleman, is suddenly discovered to be some sort of powerful personage (*vel'moža*) and sometimes even a ruler (*gosudar'*). If a peasant can sometimes turn into something like that, what may not a nobleman turn into? (465.)

The dividing line between reality and fantasy begins to fade: the madman no longer knows who he is. The stage is set for the metamorphosis. Popriščin has only to turn to the newspapers and discover that the Spanish throne is vacant. Interestingly enough, the insane alternation of the political and erotic fantasies comes to the fore in Popriščin's pondering of the Spanish problem: "It seems to me extremely peculiar. How can the throne be vacant? They say that some Donna is supposed to ascend the throne. A Donna cannot ascend the throne, she cannot possibly. There ought to be a king on the throne." (466.) The clerk spends the next few days *lying on his bed* and thinking about the Spanish question: the sexual motif is replaced by the political one. Only in part two of the story will the two fantasies merge.

Popriščin is concerned for his social image and his self-image. He feels alienated both from the world and from his own being. His fantasy quests for power and love represent his search for a public and private identity. His inability to achieve these, he believes, arises from his social status. He remembers that he is a titular councilor (ninth rank); his section chief is a court councilor (seventh rank). Popriščin is lower down on the scale of being. Like most Gogolian heroes, the insulted and injured clerk sees the assigned ranks in the service as symbols of real value, a way of defining a person. They are an absurd categorizing of humanity into good and bad, a menacing judgment of men. That the madman thinks this way is clear from his treatment of the male figures: none is named, but everyone is given a title, a state in life above or below Aksentij Ivanovič Popriščin, titular councilor, nobleman. He dreams of being a collegiate councilor (sixth rank, higher than his section chief), a general (second to fourth rank), or "even something higher." He wants to raise himself on the ladder of being. But in doing so his anger comes forth: he seeks revenge. Unlike the Underground Man, Popriščin does not see that in attempting to gain revenge he is asserting the very values of the system which he believes is so oppressive. He cannot

rebel against the system because he knows no other. He is caught in his own self-centered, solipsistic world of diaries, masturbation fantasies, and dreams of glory. The steady drum beat of the first-person pronoun, often accompanied by the obsessive phrase "I am a nobleman," becomes his death knell.

II

That king am I.

Part one progressed in three stages marked by the month in which the entries were written. The October entries treat Popriščin in his noble job, dreaming of his love for Sofi. In November the dreams and the fantasy are shattered: the section chief speaks out the truth and on 13 November the letters appear. The December entries mark the period of adjustment to this intrusion of reality. The movement is toward the end of the year.

Part two, which opens with a statement verbally reminiscent of the opening of part one,⁵ begins with the entry 43 April 2000. The other entries are progressively more fantastic, including days with no dates and months that do not exist. It is significant to note, however, that the entries jump to spring (Medži sensed that spring was coming) and that they move backwards to February and January. The delusion of grandeur ends in failure, and in the last entry, which hovers between February and January, Popriščin is overwhelmed by the reality he neatly avoided in the December entries. Part two moves backward to the point where the madman made his strange adjustment; it ends with his pathetic plea for mercy.

Much has been written about the fantastic headings, trying to interpret their significance. Professor Ermakov, in his fascinating Freudian analysis of Gogol's works, claims that the entry 43 April 2000 refers to the second (2) role Popriščin will play when the former Oedipal triangle (000) is nullified. The 43 April he interprets as an avoidance of 13 May: *maja* in Russian, he says, suggests *majat'sja* 'to suffer, toil.'⁶ Ingenious as this analytic approach to the insane babblings is, we must be guided by the terms of the story itself. For example, 43 April obviously does stand for 13 May, but Popriščin avoids this date not because of some play on words, but because of his growing triskedekaphobia: the letters which exposed reality were presented exactly one half year earlier on 13 November, and now in the second half of the story (the year 2000?) the number thirteen must be avoided at all costs. We should remember also that it is Popriščin's forty-third year of life. The remaining entries in part two either have no date or are further disguised variations of 43 April (43-86-34). The only exceptions are the two consecutive entries which have the dates 1 and 30 (the necessary addition and reversal are simple) and the last two entries with 25 and 34 in

the year 349 (an insane orgy of reversal where 43 becomes 34 and the left over numbers 25 and 9 add to 34). The unlucky number thirteen seems to pursue poor Popriščin and becomes the organizing principle of time in his mad universe.

The clerk's first task as King of Spain is to complete the miracle of metamorphosis by a suitable disguise. In the beginning he is obliged to go around incognito, because he does not yet have the appropriate royal attire. Popriščin, like many Gogolian heroes, believes that clothes literally make the man.⁷ In part one he asserted, addressing himself in his mind to the section chief: "Give me a fashionably cut coat and let met put on a necktie like yours—and then you wouldn't hold a candle to me" (458). Once king, therefore, the madman sets out to get himself a proper mantle. The tailors, it turns out, however, are asses involved in all sorts of shady deals, so Popriščin, unlike his counterpart Akakij Akakievič, sits behind locked doors and sews his own overcoat: he secretly fashions his own image. Once attained, the new mantle disguises the real Popriščin: "the style has to be completely different" (469). He is the King of Spain because he dresses like him. The theme of the disguise, the mask over reality, I need not mention, is common in Gogol', and usually is associated, as here, with illusions or delusions of grandeur.

In a notebook, under the title "Comedy—general materials," Gogol' jotted down the following "old rule": "Already wishes to attain, to seize with his hand, when suddenly an interference and the removal of the desired object to a great distance. . . . A quick and unexpected discovery (*otkrytie*), suddenly giving everything a new twist or revealing it in a new light."⁸ Like Kant, Gogol' saw the comic in desire frustrated. This theme runs through many works by Gogol'.⁹ However, in the "Diary of a Madman," where the above old rule is repeated almost verbally in the "rebellion" speech, the rule supplies the organizational principle of the story. In part two, Gogol' leads Popriščin through a series of discoveries; some form of the word "discovery" (*otkrytie*) is repeated each time. Part two, one should note, opens in a "new light": "it burst upon me like a flash of lightning" (466).

The first discovery is Popriščin's new identity. Once the simple clerk becomes the King of Spain, a whole new world is opened up to him; he believes that formerly he was living in a fog, but that "now everything has been revealed (*otkryto*) to me" (467). Of course, only Popriščin knows of his new identity; the humor in the second half arises from the madman's knowledge of this miracle and ignorance of the truth coupled with the world's apparent incredulity or simple ignorance of the metamorphosis. But from Popriščin's point of view all is well, as he has succeeded in remaking his public image.

Having gained his dignified status, Popriščin seems to dismiss his erotic interests by his second discovery. After making a quick visit to Sofi's rooms and telling her of the great happiness that awaits her, the King of Spain observes:

Oh, woman is a treacherous creature! I have discovered now what women are. So far no one has found out with whom Woman is in love: I have been the first to discover it. Woman is in love with the devil. Yes, joking apart. Scientific men write nonsense saying that she is this or that—she cares for nothing but the devil. You will see her from a box in the first tier fixing her *lorgnette*. You imagine she is looking at the fat man with the medals. No, she is looking at the devil who is standing behind his back. There he is, hidden in his medals. There he is, beckoning to her! And she will marry him, she will marry him. (468.)

As in the first half of the story Sofi is not blamed for her failure to love the clerk. She is lured away from him, the victim of the devil's devices. Sofi's "paradise" has a serpent lurking in it. It is important to notice that Popriščin's hidden guilt about sex comes to the surface: he associates sexual attraction with evil, with the devil himself. He self-righteously dismisses his "canary." Significantly enough also, the apparent dismissal of amorous interests comes at the beginning of Popriščin's reign as King of Spain. At the point when the frustration of his ambitions has been temporarily alleviated by his fantasy of political power, he can reassess his erotic needs. As the new fantasy advances, however, the erotic impulse will reappear, but as befits the second part of the story, in a "new light."

The fantastic anxiety vision—the devil lurking in the medals—is followed by many more such visions as Popriščin becomes more and more deranged. The diary entries now demand interpretation. The third great discovery, which is again an anxiety vision, is that China and Spain are really the same place: if you just write Spain on a piece of paper, you will see that it turns out to be China (470). Popriščin's newspaper world gets the best of him; this discovery marks his complete estrangement from reality. The entry headings with their distorted dates underline the loss of touch with time. This new discovery emphatically stresses his loss of touch with space. Insane asylum equals Spain, Spain equals China. Of course, we are never told that the madman is in an asylum; we might interpret his move to Spain as a figment of his imagination, a fantasy of travel. But we do know that what Popriščin describes as his life at the royal court takes place in a madhouse. Perhaps the hero's own ironically naive words, which appear right at the moment he discovers his new identity, suggest this to us: "It's a good thing no one thought of putting me in a madhouse" (467). This hint is supported by the increasing number of references to people of scientific authority: scientific men (*fiziki*, 468), barber (*cyrjul'nik*, 468), midwife (*povival'naja babka*, 468), pharmacists (*aptekarj*, 469), and chemist (*ximik*,

470). Popriščin is under treatment. Like Kafka, Gogol' knows how to sustain the one point of view, to see everything from his hero's eyes.

The new discovery is closely associated with Popriščin's next anxiety vision: "Tomorrow at seven o'clock a strange phenomenon will occur: the earth will sit on the moon" (470). Popriščin replaces the common-sense view of spatial relations with his own. His reaction to this sad event is significant: "I must confess that I experience a tremor at my heart when I reflect on the extreme softness (*nežnost'*) and fragility of the moon" (470). The moon is traditionally associated with many things, one of which is love (here intimated by the tender, poetic, even amorous associations of the word *nežnost'*) and another is insanity (as the English words lunacy and lunatic suggest or as the Russian word *lunaticizm* shows). The sensitive and fragile moon at the moment of eclipse is a symbol for Popriščin himself, the insane lover eclipsed by court chamberlains and generals. But what does the earth stand for? Is it the menacing world in which the madman believes he lives or that reality he fears but refuses to accept? As the language becomes more symbolic, the two images of the hero become more entwined.

The anxiety vision continues:

You see the moon is made in Hamburg, and very badly made too. I am surprised that England hasn't taken notice of it. It was made by a lame barrel maker, and it is evident that the fool had no idea what a moon should be. He put in tarred cord and one part of lamp oil; and that is why there is such a fearful stench all over the world that one has to stop up one's nose. And that's how it is that the moon is such a soft globe that man cannot live on it and that nothing lives there but noses. And it is for that very reason that we can't see our noses, because they are all in the moon. And when I reflected that the earth is a heavy body and when it falls may grind our noses to powder, I was overcome by such uneasiness that, putting on my shoes and stockings, I hastened to the hall of the Imperial Council to give orders to the police not to allow the earth to sit on the moon. (470-471.)

The moon is the abode of noses. The nose, of course, is a common image in Gogol'. In the "Diary of a Madman," however, the image recurs throughout the work in a particular complex of associations. In a December entry, as the clerk reacts to the imminent marriage of Sofi to the court chamberlain, he remarks: "You don't get a third eye in your head because you are a court chamberlain. Why, his nose is not made of gold but is just like mine and everyone else's; he sniffs (*njuxael*) with it and doesn't eat with it, he sneezes (*čixaet*) with it and doesn't cough with it. I have often tried to discover what all these differences come from." (465.) The nose is something essential to a human being; it defines him as such. It is, if you wish, a least common denominator of all men. When it comes to such a basic thing as a nose, all men are equal, or at least they should be. But in the above quotation, because of the context, the nose is associated with Popriščin's erotic interests. His nose is as good as the court chamberlain's, and yet Sofi wants to marry the court chamberlain, not him. The nose is often associated with

sexuality in Gogol', as many scholars have shown.¹⁰ But here (and elsewhere, I believe) the erotic themes and images are themselves symbolic: Popriščin's fear that the noses will be crushed, the obvious symbolic castration fear, suggests the fear for his own identity. The one thing that makes him a man may be destroyed.

The above quotation about the court chamberlain's nose appears in part one where the dominant theme is Popriščin's erotic fantasy quest for Sofi. An excellent example of the obsessive madness of the diary can be seen in the repetition of this passage in part two. In the second half the dominant theme turns from the erotic to the political fantasy. Consequently this reworking of the above passage: "An Englishman is very politic (*politik*). He pokes his nose into everything. All the world knows that when England takes a pinch (*njuxaet*) of snuff, France sneezes (*čixaet*)." (471.) The total effect is the gradual merger of the two fantasies.

In the vision of noses crushed into powder, Popriščin reveals his greatest fear: the search to prove himself may end in failure. But something else also comes through his words. Earlier the madman associated the erotic impulse with evil: woman is in love with the devil. Here Popriščin ostensibly protests this order of things. Why, he asks, has the lame cooper failed to make the moon correctly? Why is there such a horrible stench that the nose is offended and must be stopped up? The moon now seems to stand for the female sexual organ. Again Popriščin finds something wrong with women. In part one, where the erotic fantasy plays the major role, women are idealized: they are associated with cleanliness and aromatic scents. In the first entry Mavra brings Popriščin cleaned boots and later Sofi exudes exotic perfumes. In part two, however, this imagery is reversed. In the first entry Mavra is said to clean boots poorly and the symbolic moon stinks. In his protest Popriščin reveals a disgust with sex,¹¹ a sign of his fear of women, his fear that the one last chance to prove he is a man may end in failure. He would rather condemn women and sexual relations as evil and dirty than face the test. It is significant that the erotic theme, seen in a new light, reappears in the very entry where Popriščin records his arrival in Spain, that is, in the insane asylum. As the political fantasy begins to fail, as the humiliations of the royal state become clear, the erotic impulse recurs.

To some it may seem too far-fetched or too Freudian to say that Gogol' uses the nose and the moon as sexual symbols or that he underlines this suggestion with the erotic overtones in the phrase "the earth will sit on the moon." However, the erotic impulse, as we have seen, runs through the whole story. Furthermore, Popriščin himself will not let us rest with an easy dismissal of the question. Shortly after this anxiety vision, the madman makes one final discovery: "However, I was rewarded for all this by the discovery I made today. I found out that every cock has a Spain, that it is under his wings" [not far from his tail]. (472.)¹² The realm of torment (insane asylum, Spain, China, moon) is here clearly associated with the sexual

organs. This last discovery, couched in the symbolic statement of the insane man, is Popriščin's undoing. Since the nose—or the phallus itself—stands in the madman's mind for the basic value or worth of the individual, his discovery is that the tortures (Spain) are located in the real self. He, and no one else, is the cause of his own failure. Public and private image cannot be separated. The final irony, perhaps, is the most telling, for the rooster, the bird which appears in Popriščin's insane babblings, has almost no phallus at all. The poor clerk learns the horrible and pathetic truth: he has nothing to give. The political and erotic fantasies collide and collapse. Popriščin is a zero.

It is significant that this entry, the next to the last, begins with the clerk's refusal to respond to the Grand Inquisitor's call: "At first he shouted 'Popriščin!' I didn't say a word. Then: 'Aksentij Ivanov! Titular councilor! Nobleman!' I still remained silent. 'Ferdinand VIII, King of Spain!'" (472.) And still Popriščin remained silent. He answers to none of his titles; his true identity, he has discovered, lies elsewhere. This last discovery, however, destroys the delusion. The hero is unmasked. Of this Spain he is no king.

The final discovery, that the source of torment rests not in the world but in the self, leads directly to the last entry in the diary, the lyrical outburst of anguish. The completely insane clerk is crushed by the failure of his delusion. The desired object, now the glorious public image of king rather than the enticing Sofi, is again removed to a great distance. The last entry will once more present the situation in a new light. The "old rule" functions twice in the story.

The lyrical outburst dramatically draws the story to a close. With the pointedly rhythmical prose coupled with poetic inversions and repetitions, the language itself moves forward and upward, just as Popriščin begs to be wafted away from this world: "Save me, take me away! Give me a troika and horses swift as a whirlwind! Take your seat, my driver, ring out, my bells, fly upward, my steeds, and bear me away from this world! Far away, far away, so that nothing can be seen, nothing." (472.) The Gogolian troika which appears in *The Inspector General* and *Dead Souls* comes again on the scene, bearing the hero away from the realm of torments. But the haunted and humiliated hero who realizes his failure has nowhere to go but back to mother. His last desperate plea is addressed to the one person, the one woman, who will not subject him to the test.

The crushed hero seems to turn from aggression to supplication. In fact, however, the last entry illustrates perfectly the manner of this diary, written to justify the ways of the man named Popriščin and to get revenge on the world. The madman tries to capture our sympathies; his language is designed to manipulate our emotions. The latent self-pity, seen in the clerk's

distorted image of himself as victim, now comes to fore. But the insane clerk undermines his whole effort with the final question which he spurts out almost unintentionally (after a pause marked by two periods): "And do you know that the Dey of Algiers has a boil just under his nose?" (473.) Our feelings are brought back into focus, as we are reminded that this tear-jerking plea to mother is in fact part of the insane babblings of the madman. In a typically symbolic manner, the hero makes one final and most telling aggressive jab at a menacing figure of authority. Even the Dey of Algiers' nose is not perfect. At the height of our emotional sympathy for the tormented clerk, we are reminded of the petty, petulant, proud, and pretentious usurper, Aksentij Ivanovič Popriščin, titular councilor, nobleman, Ferdinand VIII, King of Spain.

III

You are a zero.

There are two Popriščins, the suffering clerk frustrated and humiliated by man's inhumanity to man, symbolized for him by the system of ranks, and the pretender who usurps a fantasy throne to make his dreams of power and glory come true. Both Popriščins take their origin in traditional literary types: the insulted and injured clerk (*činovník*), the farcical braggart (*xvas-tun*), and the pretender (*samožvanec*). But from these types the author creates a character which is truly his own. Popriščin is a typical Gogolian hero, a dehumanized, depersonalized pathetic being who exists and is content with life until bitten by the bug of desire to be someone. The habit (*privyčka*) of life is broken by the passion (*strast'*) to prove oneself. Popriščin wants to find his place in the world, to establish his ontological identity. However, he knows only the false rational ordering of humanity symbolized by the ranks. He thinks in terms of this system. His attitudes and reactions are inappropriate to the real situation. He is caught in his own self-centered view of the universe and seeks his identity where it does not exist. Unlike Dostoevskij, Gogol' does not portray characters who rebel against the false values of the rationalistic ethic itself. Popriščin's attempt to establish his identity is doomed from the outset. Alienated from the world and from himself, he remains ignorant of any set of values which would recognize, in Dostoevskij's phrase, "the human being in the person" (*čelovek v čeloveke*). The first effect of the madman's failure is guilt, expressed in this story in sexual terms. The diary ends with the loss of the concrete existence of the hero: Popriščin is wafted off in a troika into the void, where there is nothing, nothing. Gogol's works often close with a sense of nothingness or death: a frozen tableau, a jump through a window, a paroxysm of death at the sight of a monster's eyes, the jingle of bells on a troika going nowhere. The work

may end where it began, so that life is presented as a vicious circle, ever turning but staying in the same place. Gogol's hope for a reordered existence does not enter his fiction. Beyond the false world of ranks and rationalistic ethics there is only the void. In this shock of nothingness lies the terror of Gogol's vision. Man's search, however sympathetic, is ridiculed because it is in vain: everything is inappropriate because no true values exist.¹³

NOTES

- 1 This is the most common interpretation of the story. Two recent studies illustrate this approach: see Н. Л. Степанов, «Н. В. Гоголь: Творческий путь» (М., 1959), 267, and David Magarshack, *Gogol: A Life* (London, 1957), 119.
- 2 It is often assumed that the diary, because of the sequence of entries, represents a *history* of a disease, from sanity to insanity. For such an approach see Г. А. Гуковский, «Реализм Гоголя» (М., Л., 1959), 300–329; К. Мочульский, «Достоевский: Жизнь и творчество» (Париж, 1947), 42.
- 3 All citations from Gogol's works come from Leonard J. Kent, ed., *The Collected Tales and Plays of Nikolai Gogol* (N. Y., 1964). I shall give only the page number in parentheses. In certain cases the translation has been altered slightly to draw it closer to the original.
- 4 See L. P. Grossman's introductory article in Н. В. Гоголь, «Повести» (М., 1935), and Gukovskij, loc. cit.
- 5 Part One: «Сегодняшнего дня случилось необыкновенное приключение.» Part Two: «Сегодняшний день—есть день величайшего торжества.»
- 6 И. Д. Ермаков, «Очерки по анализу творчества Н. В. Гоголя» (М., Петроград, 1924), 224–234. A more credible interpretation of the year can be found in Gukovskij (p. 302): The year 2000 stands for the insane man's desire for grandeur, his attempt to go beyond the real world of 1833.
- 7 Leon Stilman, «Afterword,» in *The Diary of a Madman and Others Stories*, tr. Andrew R. MacAndrew (N. Y., 1961), 231–235.
- 8 Н. В. Гоголь, «Полное собрание сочинений» (14 тт.; Л., 1937–1952), IX, 18–19.
- 9 Leon Stilman, «Gogol's 'Overcoat'—Thematic Pattern and Origins,» *ASEER*, XI (1952), 139–142.
- 10 See especially Ермаков, *Očerki*, 167–216, and В. В. Виноградов, «Сюжет и композиция повести Гоголя 'Нос,»» «Начала,» 1921, N° 1, стр. 81–105.
- 11 Medži's letters have also been interpreted as an expression of Popriščin's «feeling of disgust for the system of sexual attraction.» See Sylvia Juran, «Zapiski sumasšedšego: Some Insights into Gogol's World,» *SEER*, IV (1961), 333.
- 12 The phrase in brackets appears in the Tixonravov edition, but not in the Academy one or in any of the reprints from it. See Н. В. Гоголь, «Сочинения,» ред. Н. Тихонравов, 10-е изд. (7 тт.; М., 1889), V, 364, 617. Kent, in his excellent English edition of Gogol, is misleading in his footnote to this phrase. The phrase belongs to Gogol, but it is not certain that he wanted to retain it in the final edition. Tixonravov read the evidence one way, the Soviet editors another.
- 13 This essay, in a somewhat different form, was first delivered as a lecture to the Yale Russian Club on 6 March 1963.