

On Laughter and Dreaming in Pushkin

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Abstract: This article argues that the dreams depicted in Alexander Pushkin's poems, plays, and stories often concern the nature of social relations, and the dynamics of social power and social impotence. It argues that moments of scornful dream-laughter and merriment are central to Pushkin's negotiation of intersubjectivity: in the moment of being laughed at, the dreamer is made aware of how powerfully he or she has internalized the opinions and attitudes of others. This article argues that Pushkin's dreams follow a distinctive schema, in which laughter engenders a simultaneous alienation and envelopment in a dream, and that this in turn causes a state that resembles what sociologists call social death. This article treats dreams throughout Pushkin's corpus, and relies on Bakhtin, Max Scheler, Orlando Patterson, and Plato to offer a theoretical model for the perils and powers of social life depicted in Pushkin's work.

Key words: Pushkin, dreaming, laughter, social death, intersubjectivity, carnival, Bakhtin.

I. Malicious Laughter in Pushkin's Dreams

This essay will argue that moments of malicious laughter play a central role in the dreams described in Alexander Pushkin's plays, poems, and stories. These outbursts of cruel laughing or grinning, almost always directed at the dreamer, precipitate a vertiginous loss of control and, at the same time, a paralysis. They cause the dreamer to be at once isolated from and trapped within his dream. It is my contention that the stratifying effect of this laughter—emerging from the mouths of dream characters and battering the dreamer—is one of Pushkin's most complex and melancholy commentaries on the intersubjective nature of our existence.

Mikhail Bakhtin ended *Rabelais and His World*, his great study of laughter and social life, with one of Pushkin's dreams:

Внизу народ на площади кипел
И на меня указывал со смехом;
И стыдно мне и страшно становилось...¹

¹ Alexander Pushkin, *Boris Godunov*, quoted in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo Pushkin Review/ПУШКИНСКИЙ ВЕСТНИК* 18–19: 1–23, 2015–16.

This is Grigory Otrepiev's voice from *Boris Godunov*, recounting his prophetic dream while still a novice in the monastery. Bakhtin understood the passage as a kind of mystical historiography of carnival: "Every act of world history was accompanied by a laughing chorus," he glosses. But it is very important to recall that the dreamer here is being laughed at by the Muscovite people. He is perhaps a participant in the carnival of world history, but, if so, he stands outside the stratum of laughter (in Bakhtin's largely positive account of carnival, it is precisely the indiscriminate ubiquity of laughter that makes it so liberating and restorative; the butt of the joke laughs with the joker). Bakhtin considered the carnival a kind of exaggerated negative image of society, a moment when all of its structures were revealed by being dissolved and turned on their heads.² If we extend this reading to Otrepiev's dream, it seems that Otrepiev's position in the social world has been turned upside down by the carnival. Yet in some sense, the carnival has also prefigured his ultimate demise in the non-carnival world. Bakhtin's reading of this dream suggests that in this case carnival not only mocks social structures but also predicts their final consequences (in this case, deposition and death). Malicious dream-laughter becomes the index of an individual's relation to the society around him. A laughing dream is a carnival that enforces social discipline rather than relieving it.³

Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekov'ia i Renessansa, in *Sobranie sochinenii* 4, pt. 2 (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kul'tur, 2010), 508. English references in the text are to *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1965), 474. All further references to Pushkin in the Russian are taken from *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh* (PSS), ed. B.V. Tomashevskii (Leningrad: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1978).

² "This experience," writes Bakhtin, "opposed to all that was ready-made and completed, to all pretense at immutability, sought a dynamic expression; it demanded ever changing, playful, undefined forms. All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the 'inside out' (*à l'envers*), of the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 11). It is interesting to note that the transformations and travesties of carnival bear a marked resemblance to the metamorphoses and incongruities we associate with dreaming. It seems crucial, then, that dreaming should differ from carnival in the quality of the laughter so often present.

³ It is possible that the full implications of Otrepiev's dream for carnival eluded Bakhtin. In the study of Dostoevsky, Bakhtin makes reference to this passage as well, this time interpreting it as "the same carnival logic of self-appointed *elevation*, the communal act of comic *decrowning on the public square*, and a falling *downward*" (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. and ed. Caryl Emerson [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984], 169). But Otrepiev is not a

Dream-laughter (sometimes also manifested as dream-grinning and dream-pointing) occurs in many of Pushkin's works, among them *Evgenii Onegin*, *Pikovaia dama*, *Ruslan i Liudmila*, and *Grobovshchik*. His uncanny dream sequences and their strange laughter owe a direct debt to the gothic movement of the preceding generations in England, France, and Germany. R. L. Busch reminds us that the école frenetique, or the gotho-freneticist tradition—Hoffman, Byron, the early Hugo, the fantastical Balzac—came to have an important influence on Russian literature of the 1820s and 1830s. It was a school that “sought to captivate or jar the reader by foregrounding features such as suspense, terror, horror, and crime.”⁴ In many cases, Russian writers expanded the gothic idiom to color their attempts at realism, as Katherine Bowers has persuasively argued.⁵ Pushkin had a more ambivalent relationship to this school than did Gogol or Lermontov, and he used it sparingly.⁶ Nevertheless, the dreams in his works are concentrated pockets of the gothic, especially in their use of an unsettling, menacing atmosphere (occasionally they are also encased within larger gothic narratives, but often not). The influence of Hoffman in these moments is particularly to be noted, as has been discussed at length by Norman Ingham.⁷ We can see an antecedent to Pushkin's dream-laughter in the way Hoffman punctuates his stories with moments of malicious and terrifying laughter (though not necessarily in dreams), as in this passage from “The Choosing of the Bride”: “On the street outside he heard his two uncanny acquaintances burst into a piercing shriek of laughter behind him that froze the blood in his veins.”⁸

But while the malicious laughter of Pushkin's dreams can be situated historically within the gothic, it is my belief that Pushkin makes use of dream-laughter in order to advance a set of philosophical ideas

willing participant in the carnival; this is merrymaking in its violent and fateful guise. He is, if anything, part of the “ambivalence” of carnival laughter that Bakhtin elsewhere discusses, how its joy is coupled with (or engendered by) a perception of crisis. The looming sense of crisis may, by the time of the Rabelais book, make the reading of *Boris*—short and elliptical though it is—more ambiguous. The “laughing chorus” of history is a joyous, but also awful, force.

⁴ R. L. Busch, “Pushkin and the Gotho-freneticist Tradition,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 29: 2/3 (1987): 165.

⁵ Katherine Bowers, “Through a Glass, Darkly: Use of the Gothic in Early Russian Realism,” *The Modern Language Review* 108: 4 (October 2013): 1237–53.

⁶ Busch, “Pushkin and the Gotho-freneticist Tradition,” 178–79.

⁷ See the chapter on Pushkin in Norman Ingham, *E. T. A. Hoffman's Reception in Russia* (Würzburg: Jal-Verlag, 1974), 118–40. Though anecdotal evidence suggests Pushkin enjoyed reading Hoffman, Ingham finds that the one decisive sign of Hoffman's influence appears in *Pikovaia dama*, of course a very important dream-text.

⁸ E. T. A. Hoffman, “The Choosing of the Bride,” in *Tales of Hoffman*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1982), 353.

that transcend the generic requirements of the gothic. These ideas concern the relationship of dreaming to social life and what dreaming can reveal concerning social relations in our waking lives. The philosophical meanings behind Pushkin's dreams have been much explored in scholarly literature. For Michael Katz, many of Pushkin's dreams can be explained by the tension between the two Russian words for dreaming: *mechta* and *son*, that is, the dream as wish and the dream as nocturnal vision.⁹ In other words, a Pushkinian night-dream is at once a vision and a desire, and the vision often upsets the desire manifest within it. David Bethea, on the other hand, has recently read at least one of Pushkin's dreams as an exposition of a Freudian family romance.¹⁰ Richard Gregg thinks of dreaming in Pushkin as a strategy for characters to consider their alternatives within waking life (Tatyana, for example, deciding whether to embrace an "unwanted spouse" or a desired, "demonic lover").¹¹

All of these interpretations in some ways accord with my central contention in this article, which is that dreams in Pushkin are concerned above all with social relations. His dreams *do* concern family conflict, reality and desire, the alternatives available to characters in the world—but they do so as part of a somewhat broader project, namely giving an analysis of the constraints and pressures of intersubjective life on the individual. Pushkin was of course deeply concerned with the pressures of social life, both in his writing and in his ambivalent relationship to the Imperial Court and the political life of the nation. In his study *Puškin and Social Ideas*, Sam Driver reminds us that the "idea of the poet as alienated from society" is an anachronism when applied to an early 19th-century courtly milieu.¹² In fact, Pushkin's life and art were deeply caught up with the currents of social life surrounding him. As Caryl Emerson has succinctly written, in Pushkin's time, "most took for granted that poets could serve both Caesar and God."¹³

In this article it will be my hypothesis that dreaming serves as a key location for the concentrated exploration of social anxiety. I will

⁹ Michael R. Katz, "Dreams in Pushkin," *California Slavic Studies* 11, ed. Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, Gleb Struve, and Thomas Eekman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 85–88.

¹⁰ David Bethea, "Taboo and the Family Romance in *The Captain's Daughter*," in *Taboo Pushkin: Topics, Texts, Interpretations*, ed. Alyssa W. Dinega (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 321–49. See also in this regard another important Freudian family-oriented reading in Caryl Emerson, "Grinyov's Dream: The Captain's Daughter and a Father's Blessing," *Slavic Review* 40: 1 (1981): 61–62.

¹¹ Richard A. Gregg, "Tat'yana's Two Dreams: The Unwanted Spouse and the Demonic Lover," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 48: 113 (1970): 492–505.

¹² Sam Driver, *Puškin and Social Ideas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), ix.

¹³ Caryl Emerson, "Pushkin, Literary Criticism, and Creativity in Closed Places," *New Literary History* 29: 4 (Autumn 1998): 656.

more specifically argue that Pushkin carries out a very distinct act of social mimesis, reimagining relations between dreamer and society in terms of rejection and thus of interdependence. The dream can serve as a form of self-knowledge in which the self comes to understand its relation to others. In particular, I believe that dreaming in Pushkin often carries out a rehearsal of what sociologists (especially Orlando Patterson) have called *social death*, the moment when a person is utterly discredited in the eyes of others and, as a result, made patently aware of their influence over him or her. The term *social death* is most commonly used to describe slavery and other forms of culturally-imposed bondage, in which the slave is at once cast out from the community and tightly bound to it—a being forced to play a non-being while still alive.¹⁴

We will see that this simultaneous alienation and entrapment plays out in Pushkin's dreams, and that the symbolic trigger is laughter—the combination of laughter and dreaming transcends the use of either in separate contexts in other gothic works. Why laughter is the key trigger for this mechanism can be partially explained by some of the oldest philosophical accounts of its purpose. Laughter has long been seen by Western philosophers as primarily derisive: Plato says in *Philebus* that someone ridiculous is ignorant of himself, and that when we laugh we draw attention to the vice of self-ignorance.¹⁵ Thus it is that laughter directed at a person serves to deflate and damage that person, to put him in his place. It is for this reason, in part, that Plato suggests only slaves should be allowed to play in comedies.¹⁶ A certain kind of laughter has long played a locking or securing function, a kind of metaphysical manacle which serves to lower a person, and in many cases render him or her socially impotent (there are of course other, gentler kinds of laughter, but these are in short supply in Pushkin's dreams).

Bakhtin repeatedly draws attention in his study of Dostoevsky to the laughter of the old crone in Raskolnikov's dream. He says that this is the

¹⁴ The phrase is best known from Orlando Patterson's seminal *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), although Patterson himself comes to the term via two other anthropologists of slavery, Michel Izard and Claude Meillassoux, especially the latter's *L'esclavage en Afrique précoloniale* (Paris: François Maspero, 1975). Patterson explains that social death means a kind of paradoxical status of non-status: the slave is kept in a liminal state, bound fast to the society he serves, but also banished from it. Social death is an internal exile, a paralyzing expulsion. In many cultures slaves were (and, sadly, are) inducted into their masters' households through a series of humiliating rituals meant to imitate death and a perverse form of resurrection as chattel. See Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 35–76.

¹⁵ Plato, *Philebus*, in *The Statesman. Philebus*, trans. Harold North Fowler and W. R. M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), 48–50.

¹⁶ Plato, *Laws*, 2: *Books VII–XII*, trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 7: 816.

intersection of the social wisdom of carnival with the psychology of the dream, that laughter is a bridging mechanism between pleasure and pain, life and death: “this same dream logic made it possible to create here the image of a *laughing murdered old woman, to combine laughter with death and murder*. But this is also made possible by the ambivalent logic of carnival.”¹⁷ In his discussion of Raskolnikov’s dream, Bakhtin explicitly signals Pushkin as a forerunner; it is from Pushkin that Dostoevsky came to learn about the dream-logic which combines death with laughter, entrapment with merriment.¹⁸ For all of the above reasons, I believe it is not at all hyperbolic to compare the bondage of dream-laughter in Pushkin to social death and to assert that it is an important vehicle for Pushkin’s account of psychology. The demoting effect of dream-laughter constitutes one of Pushkin’s most important demonstrations of the spiritual power and attendant tragedy of social relations. In what follows we will see how the paradigm of laughter and social death plays out in dreams across Pushkin’s oeuvre.

II. The Pattern of Unexpected Laughter and Social Death in Pushkin’s Dreams

In all but one of the dreams in Pushkin’s corpus, a laughing voice is heard, or as a metonymy, a smirking face is seen.¹⁹ Laughter (or a scornful grin, highly continuous with laughter) in all of these cases engenders a terrible upset for the dreamer. It is the moment at which the reality of the dream turns against him—and by this I mean especially that other people in the dream (or simulacra of people) turn against him. Furthermore, laughter plays the catalytic role in a schema which holds constant in its broad outlines across all of the dreams, although it varies in its individual instantiations. The basic schema is that mocking laughter or a mocking grin (usually within the dream, but occasionally before the dream, inspiring it) engender a paradoxical state in which a sense of alienation is accompanied by its opposite: a sense of entrapment. Thus, like Otrepiev, a character might at once tumble out of the dream and seem to rush headlong into it. We will see characters who are suddenly cut off from the rest of their dream-world and yet, at the same time, find themselves frozen in place, unable to move—trapped within the world that has banished them. This paradoxical state causes a form of social death, that is, when a person assumes a status at once marginal and bonded: an internal exile.

¹⁷ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 168.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ There is, to my knowledge, only one important dream in Pushkin’s corpus without laughter. The dream of Maria Gavrilovna in “The Blizzard” (“Metel”) is a nightmare suffered on the night before a clandestine marriage, which foresees the intended bridegroom’s death on the battlefield. Although it too is concerned with the power and terror of social life, it is, again to the best of my knowledge, the only dream without any echo of malicious laughter in Pushkin’s oeuvre.

This schema is immediately apparent in Otrepiev's dream from *Boris*, in which he climbs a high tower, stares out over Moscow, is mocked by the people, suddenly becomes ashamed and afraid—*stydno menia i strashno stanovilos'*—and then plunges down toward the ground, at once dying and waking in fright (*padaia stremglav, ia probuzhdalsia*).²⁰ The dreamer has ascended to the pinnacle of his dream-world, laid out before him as an empire. But then, at its apogee, the dream turns about and is reoriented; there is a sudden dislocation of the dreaming subject caused by laughter. He is thrown out of place, dropped from his serene position at the center of the universe. He is stripped of his social status, going from king to clown (a *topos* also echoed in many Russian folk-plays, as Sergei Fomichev reminds us).²¹ The double movement we have described is enfolded into the fall: he plunges headlong into the mass of people in his dream; at the same time, it propels him out of the dream, into a startled waking; he goes at once all the way in, and falls all the way out. It is important to recall that, in contradistinction to Bakhtin's exultation of the joyous crowning and uncrowning of fools at carnival, this experience is lived not by a mass of people in the city square, but by a single, agonized consciousness—the nervous, agitated, impatient Otrepiev.²² In the city square, mockery may liberate, but in the confines of a single subjective consciousness, it imprisons.

The same schema is at play in *Ruslan and Lyudmila*. Here the knight Ruslan dreams that his beloved Lyudmila, whom he has just rescued (in waking reality, not in the dream), leaps down an abyss. He quickly jumps after her, not knowing that, as he sleeps, she will be stolen by his rival, Farlaf. He finds himself dreaming of Lyudmila's father's hall, where all are mourning her disappearance. But this somber atmosphere is quickly ruptured—not, as M. O. Gershenzon claims, by Ruslan's falling into the abyss,²³ which actually occurs earlier in the dream, but rather by a smirk.

²⁰ PSS 5: 201.

²¹ It was this demotion from king to fool by means of defenestration that Bakhtin thought so carnivalesque in this passage. It bears a marked resemblance to the medieval ceremonies in which fools were crowned and dethroned as kings of the day, ceremonies celebrated in *Rabelais and His World*. Sergei Fomichev claims that this scene also echoes a tradition of Russian folk plays in which the tsar-character is unmasked as an actor and humiliated or beaten up. It is possible, Fomichev explains, that Pushkin knew one such play, *The Comedy of Tsar Maximilian and His Son Adolf* (Sergei Fomichev, "The World of Laughter in Pushkin's Comedy," in *The Uncensored "Boris Godunov": The Case for Pushkin's Original Comedy*, ed. Chester S. L. Dunning [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006], 147).

²² See Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 126–27.

²³ M. O. Gershenzon, "Dreams in Pushkin" (orig. published 1924), trans. Stephen Aspden and Ray Parrott, *Russian Literature Triquarterly*, no. 23 (1990): 164. This article is an important study of Pushkin's dreams, and addresses primarily the fact that the dreams contain two parts: an in-gathering of perceptual material from

Ruslan turns to see Rogdai, whom he had earlier killed, alive among the guests, drinking with a grin: “*iz openennogo stakana / on, vesel, p’et.*”²⁴ The cheerful presence of a dead man is intended, I think, to be unsettling and uncanny, and Ruslan is shocked. Though Rogdai is not outright laughing, his *veselo* demeanor (coupled with the fact that he should be dead) stands on the verge. As if on cue, Ruslan falls backward and is frozen in place, unable to wake or move. Farláf then steals up and kills him.

Like in *Boris*, the grinning Rogdai triggers the two-fold schema. Ruslan both recoils and is trapped in the dream-reality. He is isolated from the environment of the dream by the shock of seeing the grinning dead man, but he is also paralyzed in mind and body. It is as if the dream has both expelled him from its world and, at the same time, been poured over him like a cast of bronze.

In both of these cases, simultaneous expulsion and entrapment in the dream cause a mimesis of *social death*. The dreamer is, in an almost ritualistic fashion, derided and mocked by those whose approval or submission would otherwise sustain him. His ambitions are blocked by the laughter of others. In both cases, in turn, this social death heralds its truer double. In Ruslan’s case, Farláf’s knife will arrive momentarily. Otrepiev’s plunge into the reality of his dream is also a counterfeit death; and although the intervening time is greater, it, like Ruslan’s dream, also turns out to be a placeholder, a fair copy, of Otrepiev’s true death several years later at the hands of the laughing Moscow mob.²⁵

Pushkin’s short verse-tale “The Bridegroom” (“Zhenikh”) also features a dream sequence at the center of which is an irruption of dream laughter. The Bride narrates a dream of a wedding which is suddenly interrupted by “*krik, khokhot, pesni, shum, i zvon.*” The bridegroom asks what could be so bad about such a cheerful feast and the Bride answers: “*pir veselo bushuet, / Lish’ devitsa goruet.*”²⁶ Once again, the very moment in which laughter appears the dreamer herself is cut off from the rest of the dream. The stakes are high and once again justify our use of the vocabulary of social death, for a moment after the alienation

past memories, and a rearranging of those materials into predictions of the future. In many instances the prophetic aspects of Pushkin’s dreams—which I argue are really to be understood as the moments of *social mimesis*—are triggered by laughter.

²⁴ PSS 4: 67.

²⁵ Engulfment accompanied by deranged laughter also appears in Pushkin’s narrative poem *The Bronze Horseman*. The hero, Eugene, bursts into laughter after seeing his beloved’s house swept away by a flood, and it is this unexpected outburst that signals his estrangement from society and absorption in delusions: “*I vdrug, udaria v lob rukoiu, / Zakhokhotal*” (PSS 4: 283). After this laughter he becomes a paranoid recluse and, as always, this death in the social world prefigures an actual death.

²⁶ PSS 4: 416–17.

comes the entrapment: she dreams she is grabbed and killed by her eldest brother, who then cuts off her hand. Once again the dream proves predictive, although this time more obliquely: in waking, the bride suddenly notices her own ring on the bridegroom's hand, indicating he's the one who years ago kidnapped her. He is then shamed and strung up.

This constellation of events—antagonism between dream and dreamer, entrapment of dreamer in the dream, mimesis of social death and foreshadowing of physical and spiritual death—is also present in two of Pushkin's gothic pastiches, where the gothic structure of the dream is replicated in the gothic structure of the entire story. In these stories, certain parts of the schema are transposed onto waking life, as if to suggest that in the gothic, the dreamlike mode extends beyond the boundaries of the dream itself. But the causality is still quite clear. In "The Undertaker" ("Grobovshchik") from *Tales of Belkin*, an undertaker is humiliated by a joke at a neighbor's party.²⁷ Cowed by what he perceives to be the malicious laughter of the other guests, he returns home in a drunken stupor and tells his servant that he will have a party of his own, inviting all of his dead clients. In the middle of the night, they arrive, filling his home with corpses. One rushes to embrace him, and, in his horror, he is thrown to the ground. He then awakes with a terrible hangover to find the house perfectly in order. Laughter, although transposed into waking life, causes the initial rejection; when its effects are replayed in the dream, it engenders simultaneous imprisonment (the corpse wrapping his arms around the undertaker) and alienation (the fall backwards out of the dream). Both of these are explored through the imagery of death and are clearly symbolic of the destruction (however buffoonish in this case) of social position.

The schema is treated in a more complex fashion in Pushkin's other great gothic semi-parody, "Queen of Spades." As with "The Undertaker," certain aspects of the schema appear in waking life rather than in the dream, but once again, the link between them is made quite clear. In fact, Pushkin's story suggests that his protagonist's madness is an extension of the dream into waking life (in his reading of this story, Bakhtin draws an explicit parallel between madness and the dream).²⁸

When Hermann approaches Countess N.'s open coffin (having been the one to have scared her to death in the first place), he is shocked to see the deceased cast a laughing glance at him: "*mertvaia nasmeshlivo vzglianula na nego.*"²⁹ He reels in surprise, and pitches to the floor. This mocking glance, this intimation of cruel laughter, is a pivot-point for the novella. It is the straight gate through which Hermann passes from reality to a waking dream. Until then, arguably, the uncanny and super-

²⁷ PSS 6: 81–87.

²⁸ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 168.

²⁹ PSS 6: 232.

natural have only been implied and are easily explained away; after that moment, they are unmistakably present on the plane of the story. The laughter of another person, followed by a pitching backwards—a literal alienation—causes the dream to rise up and swallow Hermann.

The fall is the key indication of the onset of the dream and its attendant characteristics. Gershenzon reminds us that the “headlong downward plunge” is the sign of the transition from the mnemonic to the prophetic in Pushkin’s dreams; Michael Katz, too, remarks that Pushkin must have felt a falling sensation often in his own dreams, so ubiquitous is it in his dream depictions.³⁰ At the first appearance of the queen of spades, when the countess’s face screws up into a grin, *Hermann falls backward to the ground*. Even if this does not literally signal the onset of a sleep-dream, it is the Pushkinian marker that we have entered a domain where subject and world are no longer reliably distinguishable. Malicious laughter, social humiliation, and fall are the crucial signs. That the rehearsal for Hermann’s own death also begins at this moment is hidden in plain sight by the fact that the malicious smile belongs—just as in *Ruslan and Lyudmila*—to a member of the already-dead.³¹

That night he is visited by the ghost of the countess, who does in fact reveal the secret of the cards: he is to bet on the three, seven, and ace on three consecutive nights. From then on Hermann’s desire, his dreams, and his waking life are all fused.³² His mind is overdetermined, and his perceptions are pushed towards dreamlike metamorphoses: a pretty girl looks like the three of hearts, a fat man resembles the ace. His actual dreams, too, are made on the same stuff. In his sleep, the three blooms as a “*grandiflora*,” the seven appears as a gothic gateway, and the ace as a huge spider.³³

³⁰ Gershenzon, “Dreams in Pushkin,” 167.

³¹ Incidentally, a person whose own social death has occurred long ago, when she gave herself to the Comte de Saint-Germain in exchange for the secret.

³² For an account of the interwoven nature of dreams and desire in Pushkin’s vocabulary, see Katz’s “Dreams in Pushkin.” For Katz, the key to Hermann’s dream, and to many of Pushkin’s dreams, is the tension between the two Russian words for dreaming: *mechta* and *son*. Hermann’s dreams, according to Katz, are various attempts by his subconscious (although Katz is somewhat coy in using the term) at fulfilling his aspirational dream (*mechta*) of becoming rich. The thrust of “Queen of Spades” for Katz is the fact that the *mechta* is never fulfilled in reality through the *son*. Thus, Hermann is punished by being trapped in reiterating his own, mistaken *son*—which, rather cryptically, Katz calls “a punishment designed to fit the crime.” His conclusion is that Hermann’s “dreams (*сны* and *mechty*) have come to naught. He resides forever in the realm of his deranged imagination”—which although true, seems to ignore the fact that there is a clear continuum in this story (as in countless other cases in the history of literature and in reality) between madness and dream (Katz, “Dreams in Pushkin,” 85–88).

³³ PSS 6: 234.

We see here that the horrible grin has signaled a total immersion of Hermann into his dream—from here on, there is no distinguishing his life from his hallucinations. But for our schema to hold fast, Hermann must at the same time be expelled from the dream. That he is in fact expelled—betrayed—by the dream is only made clear in the final lines when, having placed his bets, he discovers he has accidentally laid money on the queen of spades. The queen screws up her face and grins (*usmekhnulas* [^]) just like the old countess; Hermann screams, “*starukha!*”³⁴ We realize now that, as always in Pushkin, the turning of the dream against the dreamer is exactly the same act as its merging with the dreamer. The prophecy has completely absorbed Hermann, but from the outset it has also *betrayed* him. The phantasm of the old woman consumes him while also misleading his hand.

True to our schema, this double act of becoming and betraying is an instrument of social death. Hermann is ruined financially; he loses his one chance at finding a suitable wife; he is disgraced. Hard on the heels of social death follows psychic death. The last we hear of him, he has lost his mind and is confined to a mental hospital, muttering rapidly: “three, seven, ace; three, seven, queen!”³⁵

The queen of spades is the necessary final term in the sequence: it is only because both ace and queen are drawn by the dealer that Hermann loses all of his money. She seals the envelopment of the dreamer by nightmare; she is the equivalent to Ruslan’s paralysis and Otrepiev’s pitch off of the balcony.

It is important to observe that these dreams, while rehearsing social death, are also more literally prophetic: they tell the future (although perhaps not as clearly as we, readers who already know the ends of Pushkin’s stories, perceive them to).³⁶

Pushkin’s association of dreaming and social death with future prediction can be seen somewhat more clearly in Grinyov’s dream from *The Captain’s Daughter*, but it is important to understand that even in this story, in which a quite obviously symbolic and predictive dream appears, the dream is not *merely* a vehicle for prophecy and symbolism. It is, as always, a highly wrought phenomenon, with the dense texture and schema typical of the Pushkinian dream.

Before the dream even begins, Pushkin goes out of his way to establish, as in “The Queen of Spades,” a world continuous with dream-reality. A snowstorm overtakes Grinyov and Savelich, wiping away the perceptual conventions governing reality and casting the whole world in an estranging light (snow, as Caryl Emerson has shown, and as we will see again in

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 237.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ After all, Hermann’s predictive dream is false; the Undertaker’s is at best a confusion of past and future; and Ruslan’s is about reversal and foreboding but is, at best, not so much a prediction of the future as the enabler of the future (insofar as it permits Farláf to attack Ruslan by paralyzing him).

Eugene Onegin, has special connections to dream life).³⁷ The appearance of the mysterious and metamorphic *muzhik*—the coachman is at first unsure if he is a tree or a bear or a wolf—further contributes an aura of constant, unexpected transformation. All of this prepares the stage for the dream that springs upon Grinyov as the rocking carriage puts him to sleep. He dreams he has emerged out of the storm and returned home, where he finds his mother in distress, a crowd of people, and his father on his deathbed:

Я стал на колени и устремил глаза мои на больного. Что ж?... Вместо отца моего вижу в постеле лежит мужик с черной бородой, весело на меня поглядывая. Я в недоумении оборотился к матушке, говоря ей: «Что это значит? Это не батюшка. И к какой мне стати просить благословения у мужика?» — «Все равно, Петруша, — отвечала мне матушка, — это твой посажёный отец; поцелуй у него ручку, и пусть он тебя благословит...» Я не соглашался. Тогда мужик вскочил с постели, выхватил топор из-за спины и стал махать во все стороны. Я хотел бежать... и не мог; комната наполнилась мертвыми телами; я спотыкался о тела и скользил в кровавых лужах... Страшный мужик ласково меня кликал, говоря: «Не бойсь, подойди под мое благословение...»³⁸

The prophetic quality of the dream is immediately apparent to those who have already read the rest of *The Captain's Daughter*: for the *muzhik* who guides Grinyov through the snowstorm and then haunts his dream will turn out to be Pugachov; he will repeatedly spare Grinyov's life and even play a kind of perverse father-figure to him during his violent rebellion (both Gershenzon and Katz read the dream in this light).³⁹

But once again, the double schema is crucially present, and in fact the prophetic strain must be accessed through its doors (there is much more also going on in the dream, especially having to do with the curious vocabulary of *posazheny*, the stand-in, but that is not of direct concern to

³⁷ For the importance of snow in Pushkin's dreams, see Caryl Emerson, "Grinyov's Dream," 61–62. Furthermore, I note that there are certain natural experiences which, without our completely knowing why, immediately evoke, as if analogically, the dreamlike, especially those which fracture the perceptual field, like flickering leaves, pouring rain, and falling snow. Pushkin makes great use of this fact in *Onegin*. See section 3, below. The dreamlike nature of fractured perception is treated in much greater detail in my essay "The Chimeric Element in Perception: A First Exploration," *Southwest Review* 99: 1 (2014): 92–116.

³⁸ *PSS* 6: 269–70.

³⁹ "The dream in *The Captain's Daughter* provides information about the two main characters, Grinyov and Pugachev, and develops the narrative connection between the personal and historical themes" (Katz, "Dreams in Pushkin," 90). "It is impossible to explain the second part of the dream rationally; it obviously contains prophetic elements" (Gershenzon, "Dreams in Pushkin," 166).

this essay).⁴⁰ The dream catches Grinyov off guard, its logic is suddenly no longer his own when the muzhik looks at him merrily—*veselo*, the same word as in *Ruslan*, once again unsettling for its incongruity with what's about to happen. As the dream catches him off-guard, it also ensnares him deeply: he is trapped in the room with the rampaging Pugachov, he cannot exit and, as in Pushkin's other dreams, he *falls*. Once more, this double motion of isolation from and insertion into a dream-world is coupled with a rehearsal for death: for not only is Grinyov witness to terrible slaughter in his dream, he is also, unwittingly, rehearsing a later scene in the novella when he is pardoned by Pugachov on the way to the gallows.

The muzhik's skullish grin is the gateway not only to the merging of dreamer and dream, but also to projection into the future. This is the moment when the dream shifts from what had been—the home, conflict with the father—to what will be. What can we (or Pushkin) mean, without recourse to mysticism, by the claim that a dream portends the future? Perhaps we mean that dreams are concerned with *future potentials* rather than past events: in a dream, the constituent material of the past is reassembled into a situation that has no parallel in the waking present and thus can be displaced onto the future. Richard Gregg, writing about Tatyana's dream in *Onegin*, says that Pushkin presents, as if for careful analysis, "two distinct possibilities for the future."⁴¹ So too, Grinyov's dream is about distinct possibilities: being killed by the muzhik and being saved by him. The stakes of the Pushkinian dream, as we have repeatedly seen, are social survival and social death—and, following those almost inevitably, physical survival and physical death. In this way, these dreams may suggest that physical survival is almost impossible without social survival, and thus evaluating present chances for the latter are tantamount to unveiling future chances for the former.

The dream in Pushkin (and perhaps not just in Pushkin) affords a privileged window into social relations; amid the confusions and carnage of dreaming, a window into the deep reality of our relationship to others is opened. In the opening sequence of *The Captain's Daughter*, Grinyov depends deeply on Pugachev; without the muzhik, he and his manservant are unable to make it through the snowstorm. This is a fact of his life that is, at that moment, defining of his present options. As far he is concerned, it may even be defining of his future. It is this frightening, identity-upsetting dependence on the muzhik that Grinyov stages for himself in the dream. This is not so much explaining the future to himself as it is working out ramifications of the immediate present, playing with and rearranging its constituent parts (how strange to be lost in a snowstorm where an unknown peasant is more important to your immediate survival than all the fathers and mothers in the world!). Our future (or at least a good part of

⁴⁰ See Katz, "Dreams in Pushkin," on this matter, 90–92.

⁴¹ Gregg, "Tat'yana's Two Dreams," 494.

it) inheres in the social relations available to us, in the allies, dependents, superiors, and enemies we might gain; dreams are a place where we can rehearse our interactions with these figures.⁴² Perhaps Grinyov's dream is like a chessboard on which a player is practicing for his next match. He arranges the many pieces—muzhik-guide, father, mother, servants, and observers—into multiple combinations, acting out possible situations for the play of real life (where of course he will have to play *with* someone and will have to account for unanticipated moves, moves which do not originate in his mind). But why it is that the dream, of all forms of consciousness, allows us to play with the pawns and pieces of our own social future will only become clear in Pushkin's greatest and most elaborate dream.

III. The Laughter of Possession: Tatyana's Dream

This great dream is Tatyana's in the central chapter of *Eugene Onegin*. Critics have almost unanimously agreed on its significance, though they have expressed it in differing language: Dmitri Chizhevsky called it "a revelation of things which lie unperceived in the depths of her soul," while the German scholar Tangl has claimed that every stanza, line, and even word echoes larger structures of the poem.⁴³ It is an immensely complicated aesthetic and thematic achievement, and we will only grasp its full significance by moving slowly through its many layers. The day of the dream, it snows for the first time that year—a late snow on the 2nd of January. The world is thus estranged from itself and made new. It is the second half of the Christmas season, the dark rather than sacred half, the moment for portents and pagan visions. Pushkin gives us, in his prologue to the dream itself, a careful catalogue of folk-divination ceremonies practiced by young Russian women. Wigzell and Ryan (and elsewhere Olga Peters Hasty) have written thoroughly on the relation between these incantations and the dream that follows hard upon them: Tatyana is immersed in the supernatural, exposed to its atavistic vision of a world governed by fate, visible in fragments thrown off by shadows, nighttime reflections, and candle wax.⁴⁴ To their analysis, I will only add that it is not merely the logic

⁴² For the related theory that dreaming evolved as a rehearsal mechanism for danger situations, see Jonathan Winson, *Brain and Psyche: The Biology of the Unconscious* (New York: Doubleday, 1987).

⁴³ E. Tangl, "Tatjanas Traum," *Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologie* 25: 1 (1956): 230 (Chizhevsky) and 231.

⁴⁴ W. F. Ryan and Faith Wigzell, "Gullible Girls and Dreadful Dreams: Zhukovskii, Pushkin and Popular Divination," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 70: 4 (October 1992): 647–69, as well as Olga Peters Hasty's study *Pushkin's Tatiana* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), especially 140–44. Much has been more generally written about the dreamlike nature of folk traditions—the work of Carl Jung, for example, is almost entirely predicated on the seemingly analogous

of this folk divination that mirrors dreaming, but also its phenomenology. For example, the mutation of lumps of wax when poured into cold water for fortune-telling closely resembles the mutability of objects within dream. Looking at the moon through a mirror in order to see your husband's face is much like the oneiric blurring of two friends into a single composite person. Walking out into the street to ask a stranger his name and thinking that this will be your future husband's name too (Tatyana asks and hears in reply the appallingly rustic "Agafon"—a little Pushkinian joke), replicates the experience of the strange being interchangeable with the familiar (an unknown muzhik becoming a father, for example).

But Pushkin's concern with Tatyana's dream is not merely, or even primarily, supernatural. As she lays herself to sleep, having exhausted a compendium of folk rituals, she is transported to a world not of superstitions made real, but of austere, snowbound beauty. Commentators have made much of the interweaving of exact details from other scenes. Nabokov, for example, sees in many lines of the dream-sequence echoes of the verse-forms of earlier chapters, suggesting, for example, Tatyana's disastrous encounter with the object of her desire, Onegin.⁴⁵ Commentators, too, are quick to fixate on the great bear who rises up from the snow almost immediately—perhaps a surrogate bridegroom, a symbol of the corpulent general she will later marry (Nabokov), or some kind of sexual emblem.⁴⁶ But in doing so, they lose sight of the fact that the first four stanzas of the dream (Pushkin devotes a total of eleven to it, or 154 lines of the poem) are primarily a cold, exquisite description of a winter landscape.

Tatyana enters a reality in a state of radiant flux. Neither sublime in the model of a mountain, nor exactly beautiful like a flower, the wintry patterns of starlight, ice, and rushing water which surround her are the torchbearers for a frequentative perceptual state, built of phenomena which constantly renew themselves. She is encircled by a halo of imperfective verbs and trembling adjectives—*shumit*, *klubit*, *siiact*; *khрупkoe*, the misty-gray *sedoe*—which give the impression of a world cracking open, ready to reconfigure at any moment.⁴⁷

Tatyana is surrounded by beauty yet weighed down by fear. The world trembles with multiple valences, extreme fluctuations in potential. We might say that the ambivalence in these first four lyrical stanzas of the dream dramatizes the conflict between Tatyana the gardener of the inner life and Tatyana the maiden thrown into the anxieties of the social world, both by her love for Onegin and by the onrush of courtship and responsi-

modes of operation between dream consciousness and folk tradition.

⁴⁵ Vladimir Nabokov, *Commentary to "Eugene Onegin"* (London: Routledge, 1964), 2: 503.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 504. See also Hasty's chapter on Tatyana's dream.

⁴⁷ See n. 19.

bility that accompanies the arrival of the marrying age in a woman of her social standing. Tatyana is a solitary figure in her waking life—her pose is by the window, alone, or withdrawn into a book. She has no use for gossip or games; as a child, she would not even play with dolls. The tranquil vigor of the imagination—the stillness that shakes, glistens, trembles—is the work of her early life, and she has sculpted a beautiful double for it in her dreams. Her declaration of love and Onegin’s harsh rejection, however, have injected into this tranquil world another kind of urgent trembling, that of desire, both erotic and social, that of a fear of unfulfillment, and also of disgrace and humiliation. That this desire is also part and parcel of Tatyana’s world of aesthetic tension cannot be doubted. Just before her dream, Pushkin explains that in terror, too, Tatyana finds a paradoxical pleasure.⁴⁸

Another archive of mutable images replaces the fluidity of snowfall and escape when the bear, having finally swept her up in its maw, deposits her gently on the threshold of a hut. She peers through a crack in the door and sees a circle of monsters: “*za stolom/ sidiat chudovishcha krugom.*”⁴⁹ The famous list contains all the laughing monsters of the carnival spirit, the strangeness of dream, and the grotesqueries so beloved by Bakhtin: the horns and muzzle of dog, the head of a cockerel, a crayfish straddling a spider, a witch with a goat’s beard. The jovial death’s head, the chimera, the *Mischwesen*—all proportions and figures are outsized, displaced, and conjoined in an edifice of interruption.⁵⁰

A certain element of hilarity manages to suggest itself in spite of Tatyana’s fear. The dancing windmill, the pouting skeleton, the goose-necked death’s head proudly flaunting its red hat—this is a send-up of the vanities, nightmare reduced to mockery and placed in a festal setting. These monsters are engaged in the carnival pursuits of feasting and drinking, making merry and dancing.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Evgenii Onegin*, chap.5, stanza 7; *PSS* 5: 88.

⁴⁹ *EO*, chap.5, stanza 18; *PSS* 5: 93.

⁵⁰ A crucial figure for Bakhtin in his celebration of carnival is the grotesque manuscript illumination: “The free designs [on the border of manuscripts] represent chimeras (fantastic forms combining human, animal, and vegetable elements), comic devils, jugglers performing acrobatic tricks, masquerade figures, and parodical scenes—that is, purely grotesque, carnivalesque themes” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 96).

⁵¹ Nabokov sees the inspiration for the windmill in a burlesque comic opera Pushkin once saw in Petersburg and later adapted into a play; and the skull’s red cap, he claims, might be an echo of the habits of a club of feasting carousers Pushkin once frequented (*Commentary to “Eugene Onegin,”* 2: 507). That there is a carnival satire of the established world in this passage is, again according to Nabokov, further confirmed by the “guffawing, barking, whistles, claps.” This list belongs to a series of grating catalogues of sound, found throughout Pushkin’s poem, which mock the ugly noise made by crowds of supposedly respectable people,

In other words, the dream has the dethroning, intercalating energy of a festival, yet it inspires terror in its only spectator. This terror is compounded when we are given to understand what is at stake. Onegin, we learn, is the host of this feast, and Tatyana, her curiosity piqued by this fact, leans farther into the door, only to send a gust of betraying wind into the room. It is not long before Onegin singles out the pair of eyes behind the door. What happens next I will cite in full, as the following stanza is a unit of poetry devoted to presenting, in its most naked form, the pattern manifest in all of the other dreams we have seen in Pushkin.

И страшно ей; и торопливо
 Татьяна силится бежать:
 Нельзя никак; нетерпеливо
 Метаясь, хочет закричать:
 Не может; дверь толкнул Евгений:
 И взорам адских привидений
 Явилась дева; ярый смех
 Раздался дико; очи всех,
 Копыты, хоботы кривые,
 Хвосты хохлатые, клыки,
 Усы, кровавы языки,
 Рога и пальцы костяные,
 Всё указывает на нее,
 И все кричат: мое! мое!⁵²

This is the moment at which the dream turns decisively against Tatyana (even the bear, as we have seen, had helped Tatyana while menacing her). Onegin pulls open the door, she tumbles into the room, and the dream is flooded with malicious, even hellish, laughter. The dreamer, who has been suddenly rejected by the dream, is equally as suddenly made inseparable from it: the moment of social death. Invisible chains lock her in place; her field of vision is drowned in the list of monstrous appendages crowding the doorway. And then, the monsters shout in chorus—as if they were the pealing voice of the dream itself, confirming what we have learned about laughing dreams in all of Pushkin’s stories—*Moe! Moe! [Mine! Mine!]*.

What follows is an amalgamation of desire and prophecy. Onegin dispels the monsters and declares Tatyana *his* possession—*moe*, he

whether at a name-day party in the country or at a princely ball in Moscow (95). Nabokov also shows us that the combinatory nature of these dream-demons is paramount when he remarks laconically, “Pushkin had considerable trouble in choosing his animals.” In earlier drafts, Nabokov points to “horns and a bear’s muzzle,” “a mouse’s head,” “a donkey’s head,” “tiger’s mane,” “rat paws,” “hawk nose,” “red eye,” “a proud proboscis,” “a fish with feet,” “half crane, half mole” (506).

⁵² *EO*, chap. 5, stanza 19; *PSS* 5: 93.

shouts, in the neuter (as if to say *it* is mine), compounding Tatyana's object-like integration into the dream. The monsters disappear. He takes her to bed and, at this moment, Tatyana's sister Olga and her betrothed Lensky appear, intruding upon the intercourse of the dreamer and dream-projection. Onegin draws a knife and stabs Lensky—an exact foreshadowing of chapter 6 of the novel, except that Onegin's weapon in the duel with his former friend will of necessity be a pistol.

Why does the immense energy of the incongruous and potential turn tragic in Tatyana's dream? The answer, once again, is to be found in the fact that the driving energy behind this dream—and the others in Pushkin's corpus—is social in nature. Dreaming in Pushkin is not primarily sexual or even symbolic per se. It is intersubjective, or to be more precise, it is mimetic of intersubjectivity. Tatyana recreates in her head a map of her relations with others, both specific others, that is with Lensky and Onegin, and also with intentionally obscured figures, monsters and animals whose life force is anthropomorphic but whose actual identities are beside the point (there are hints of Buyanov and other bores, but the anonymity is paramount). For Tatyana confronts here, perhaps for the first time, the fact of others in the world—not just the others she knows, but all others. In other words, she encounters in her dream the unfathomable and, perhaps for her, *unbearable* fact that millions of other consciousnesses, as full as her own, exist, and what's more, are *instrumental in making her exist*. Dreaming is often pointed to as the paramount solitary activity; but this is in some sense a misnomer, for although it is true that no other mind shares our dreams, our dreams are full of placeholders for other minds. The more we become aware of these others' presence in our own minds, the more we become aware of their constitutive role in the creation of consciousness. In dreaming, their presence in our minds becomes explicit, palpable: they take a bodily form and interact with us on the surfaces of the inner life. Pushkin, who died for the sake of honor and the social standing it entails, understood this deeply and made it the center of his literary dream-life. This is why, over and over again in his writing, the moment of separation between the dreamer and the other inhabitants of the dream is also the moment when they cleave together. As we are rejected by others, we become fully aware of how chained we are (for good and for ill) to their expressions of approval and disapproval. Insofar as there exists agency in Pushkin's world, its opposite is clearly the paralysis that follows scornful laughter and public shame. It is perhaps because this shame appears without alternative or exit in dreams (unlike, say, the duel in real life) that they are so associated with a lack of agency.

It might be argued that Tatyana's dream, with its elaborate mimesis of social forces, anticipates the polyphonic Dostoevsky Bakhtin so celebrates. When Bakhtin writes of a "genuine polyphony of fully valid voices," he might be speaking of Tatyana's dream, except that *voices* is not quite the word: instead, there is a polyphony of fully valid *forces*, a sense that each

relation to a person (or, since this is a re-creation of a dream, each image of a relation of a person), creates a valence in the psyche, with its own charge and timbre. If we were to borrow the phenomenological vocabulary of the philosopher Max Scheler, we would say that Tatyana has fully come to understand the power of *Mitgefühl*—fellow-feeling—in precisely the moment when it has been denied to her. If, as Scheler believes, our self is constituted by our various sympathetic (that is, emotional) reactions and interactions to others, then we fall into a psychic abyss when those reactions no longer have traction. Scheler argues that when human relations turn cruel what is actually happening is that *Mitgefühl* has given way to *Nachgefühl*, that is, to mere vicarious feeling, sensing someone else's feeling without accepting any of the responsibilities such an act entails. We sense someone's subjective state, but we refuse to accept (or cannot accept) responsibility for acting appropriately in response to it. Scheler says that a malicious person or torturer refuses *Mitgefühl* in favor of *Nachgefühl*: an aggressor *senses* his victim's pain (in fact, his success as an aggressor is predicated on his ability to know when and how pain is being inflicted), but at the same time he resists the impulse to embrace his inclination to care for a person in pain.⁵³

Tatyana is a voyeur in her own dream, and then a victim; she reaches out for Scheler's *Mitgefühl*, only to be suddenly treated by the other dream-characters with brutal *Nachgefühl*. She watches a feast at which she is not a participant, at which the laughter excludes her. And the power of this exclusion—this alienation and sudden awareness of her status in relation to others—shocks her into clairvoyance. In other words, she sees, as if in a self-hating mirror, her own *Nachgefühl*, and is finally given the impetus to convert it into *Mitgefühl*. Once she has reached this moment of *social death*, the deep nature of social relations, and her duties toward them, suddenly becomes clear to her. Her infatuation with Onegin will implicate Olga and destroy Lensky. The dream has shaken Tatyana from her self-centered romanticism, and in its place comes a moment of terrible and banal lucidity—the pressures of the outside world make her relationship with Onegin impossible and immediately have consequences for all the other wills and minds in her small countryside world. The privacy of dreaming, in other words, is the stage upon which Tatyana unveils to herself the interdependence of her actions, and thus manages to understand their larger implications (which is ultimately not enough to prevent Lensky's death). Dreaming such a dream and confronting the world through its parameters is the most telling sign of the courage and sensitivity embedded within the fabric of Tatyana's character (We can now see to what extent Grinyov's clairvoyance is likewise social in nature. It is a revelation of a true set of social relations, of sincere Schelerian *Mitgefühl*, made clear by the erasure of his self-deceptions: he realizes that he must no longer

⁵³ Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. Peter Heath (Hamden, CT: Archon Books), 1954, see especially 12–36.

seek his father's approval, and that later he must swallow his pride so that Masha can intercede on his behalf to the *Matiushka*-Empress Catherine).

This is not to say that the dream in Pushkin is a symbol for the social world. Rather it is a *mimesis*, an *imitation*—if one that is highly subjective and stylized. Its inhabitants do not *represent* something (we cannot say definitively that the monsters are Buyanov or old Larin or the Id, or for that matter that Lensky or Onegin symbolize something beyond themselves). Rather, taken together, they *embody* the social energies and anxieties that Tatyana refuses to heed when awake, but which in a fundamentally psychic sense make her who she is. If Tatyana truly were prepared to risk everything (including Olga and Lensky and her parents' reputation) for Onegin and suffer the consequences she would never need to dream such a dream. But Tatyana has to rehearse for herself the power of the social world—and she makes a perceptive study of the consequences involved in abandoning it. In this way, the dream and its implications also stand against the romantic (and operatic) interpretation of Tatyana as a helpless, lovesick girl. The woman who dreams this decisive dream understands very clearly the meaning of living outside society: it is no whimsical Byronic adventure. The dream is the chrysalis out of which the adult Tatyana will emerge (and simultaneously, as Richard Gregg suggests, it is the place where Pushkin the romantic poet gives way to “Pushkin the chronicler of contemporary *mores*”).⁵⁴ The new Tatyana will reach her full maturity as the princess who, in the final moments of the book, lectures Onegin from a position of ennobled sadness on duty and honor.

The fundamentally social aspect of dreams for Pushkin (which is laid bare by scornful laughter) also explains why his dreams always vacillate between horror and satire. They are, I believe, meant to be genuinely macabre and frightening (even the dream of the “The Undertaker,” although a ludicrous gothic parody, has something legitimately sinister about it). But, at the same time, all of his dreams have an element of the absurd and mocking, yet another layer of laughter, this one directed at the text. The monsters of Tatyana's dream are buffoons. Grinyov's dream has a plot taken straight from *Commedia dell'Arte*, with a dying father switched out for an imposter just before the final blessing. *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, even at its most serious, borders on farce. “The Queen of Spades” winks at its own melodrama. This is because Pushkin's subject, both in dreams and beyond them, is the problem of social life—a problem which might be phrased as *the tyrannical stranglehold of the quotidian*. Every little thing in Pushkin's social world is blown out of proportion—a nod, a glance, a harsh word, the possibility of an inheritance, a card game—such that

⁵⁴ Pushkin “knew that in real life the alternative to the *mariage d'amour* was neither vows of celibacy nor a pathetic death, but the *mariage de convenance*; and his novel exhibits a sustained awareness of the fact” (Gregg, “Tat'yana's Two Dreams,” 494).

these insignificant daily events do in fact become matters of life and death (the first inklings of the underground man, furious at the officer walking in his way, are felt here). Pushkin's strategy for representing social life is to show up its ludicrous exaggerations, but acknowledge at the same time that its consequences are, if anything, all too often underestimated. It is for this reason, I hope, that my use of the term *social death*, with its attendant connotations of enslavement, will not seem exaggerated when applied to the mental lives of Pushkin's aristocratic dreamers. For they are in a profound sense slaves to social life, caught up in a strange state of being, at the mercy of others even when they most seem alone. It is my belief that Pushkin thought this (ambivalent, painful, necessary, delicious) imprisonment to others was a universal fact of human experience.

Tatyana's dream is the culmination of Pushkin's oneirology. It is, as Nabokov observes, an ingathering of material from across the stanzas of *Onegin*. But it is also the distilled essence of all of Pushkin's other dreams: Grinyov's snow, the undertaker's skeletons, Hermann's spider and wicked hag, Otrepiev's laughing multitude, even (as Sigismund Krzhizhanovsky points out) the very language of *Ruslan*.⁵⁵ It is the clearest and most complex statement in Pushkin's corpus that dreaming is the theater for the private performance of social experience. Chapter 5 of *Onegin* argues that dreaming possesses a certain privileged mystical clarity: that it makes clear the highly spiritual fact that we build our selves from the outside in, by making partial and imperfect (and often ingeniously transformed) copies of materials, affects, and behaviors from those people (and, to a lesser extent, things) we see around us, stitching them together after our own inscrutable logic of synthesis. When we integrate these copies of external forces—primarily shards of the crystal faces of other beings—into our inner lives, we never entirely dispense with the bonds they retain to their originals in the outside world. We examine these bonds—their strength, their weaknesses, their breaking points—every night in our dreams. The absorption of the animating force of the world into the mind is in the strictest sense of the word a sacral experience, and, as with much sacred experience, it is cousin to tragedy.

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⁵⁵ Krzhizhanovsky gives us a quite remarkable schematization of the parallels between the language of Tatyana's dream and Ruslan's dream in "Po strofam 'Onegina,'" as well as an account of the stanza-by-stanza accretion of the monstrous, of the unending raising of the stakes. Sigismund Krzhizhanovsky, "Po strofam 'Onegina,'" in *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 4 (St. Petersburg: Symposium, 2006), 416–19.

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