

## “Maria Ivanovna Was Reclining on a Settee”: Gleb Uspenskii’s Search for a New Optics

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In an often quoted remark recorded by Alexander Kuprin, Anton Chekhov expressed his artistic commitment to the trivial: “Why write about a man getting into a submarine and going to the North Pole to reconcile himself with the world, while his beloved at that moment throws herself with a hysterical shriek from the belfry? All this is untrue and does not happen in real life. One must write about simple things: how Peter Semionovich married Maria Ivanovna. That is all.”<sup>1</sup>

Chekhov’s remark might have been prompted by Gleb Uspenskii, a prominent Populist writer of the 1860s–1880s.<sup>2</sup> At the end of “One on One: A Proposal of a Criminal Trial,” Uspenskii’s critical response to the 1885 murder trial of one Pishchikov, the writer voiced a sharp complaint about excessive attention paid by much of modern literature to the paltry trivia of life. “The isolated little poet (*uedinennyi poetik*),” Uspenskii wrote, “begins to dig a sparrow-like little beak into a tiny flower, sprinkled with drops of dew, and does this business with great thoroughness . . . the isolated belletrist conducts a microscopic study of the psychic state of Peter Petrovich who likes fat Maria Andreevna and has gotten sick of thin Natali’a Ivanovna. . .”<sup>3</sup>

Uspenskii’s literary reputation was first established in the mid-1860s with a series of publications depicting the economic and spiritual desolation of Russian provincial life. Over the next twenty years, Uspenskii grew into a significant figure of the democratic literary scene. As his focus shifted toward representations of the village, Uspenskii became a key source of information

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1. Anton Chekhov, *Anton Tchekhov: Literary and Theatrical Reminiscences*, trans. S.S. Koteliansky (New York, 1965), 80.

2. Chekhov alludes to Uspenskii’s essay in *Sakhalin Island* in connection to visiting Pishchikov’s hut on his travels around the colony. Anton Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v tridsati tomakh*, ed. N. F. Bel’chikov (Moscow, 1974) 14 / 15:190–91. For more on Chekhov and Uspenskii, see M. L. Semanova, “Chekhov i Gleb Uspenskii (K voprosu o tvorchestve Chekhova 1880 godov),” *Uchenye zapiski* (1959): 3–62; Henrietta Mondry, *Pure, Strong, and Sexless: The Peasant Woman’s Body in Gleb Uspensky* (Amsterdam, 2006), 123–29.

3. G. I. Uspenskii, “Odin na odin,” in his *Bezvremenie*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v devyati tomakh* (Moscow, 1955; hereafter SS) 6:372–86, here 385. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own.

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about rural life and was widely acknowledged for shaping the ideas about the Russian peasant in the minds of the educated public.<sup>4</sup> For many of his generation, Uspenskii was something of a cult figure, deeply admired for his humanitarian concerns and for what was presumed to be an unusually compassionate nature.<sup>5</sup>

Among other Populist writers, Uspenskii stood out for his stylistic individuality and generic experimentations. His writings were praised by Tolstoi and Chekhov, and discussed extensively by prominent literary critics of his time.<sup>6</sup> During the Soviet era, Uspenskii was considered a classic in the Soviet literary canon—a status that was conferred to him as much for his artistic merits as for his influence on the radical revolutionary politics of pre-revolutionary decades.<sup>7</sup> The Soviet literary establishment's mobilization of Uspenskii may explain the considerable drop in attention to his works in Russia following the upheavals of the 1990s. More recent years have seen some resurgence of interest in Uspenskii. A stream of republications, including a new edition of Uspenskii's nine-volume collected works in 2011, and a modest uptick in Ph.D. dissertations devoted fully or partially to Uspenskii's oeuvre attest to a gradual shift in attitude. In the west, however, Uspenskii has attracted less attention. With the notable exception of Henrietta Mondry's two recent studies—*Pisateli-narodniki i evrei: G. I. Uspensky i V. G. Korolenko* and *Pure, Strong, and Sexless: The Peasant Woman's Body and Gleb Uspensky*—Uspenskii has been largely neglected in the last few decades.<sup>8</sup>

To help bring Uspenskii out of underserved oblivion, below I reconsider his place in the realist tradition, focusing in particular on his uneasy relationship with the reigning novelistic form. Uspenskii himself never produced a novel. He favored shorter forms such as sketches, notes, and fragments, a preference that he explained by the demands of his subject matter. The conventions of fashionable *belles lettres*, reserved for the depiction of the educated classes—the life of the “*bel étage*”—were not suited to portraying life in a peasant hut, a drinking house, or at a mean provincial shop.<sup>9</sup> The view that Uspenskii's historically new subjects required new literary forms was later

4. Mondry, *Pure, Strong, and Sexless*, 7.

5. O. Aptekman, assistant to B.N. Sinani, Uspenskii's treating psychiatrist in the Kolmov psychiatric hospital, and the Jewish writer S. An-sky (Shloyme Zanvl Rappoport's pen-name designed by Uspenskii) offer examples of this attitude. See O. V. Aptekman, *Gleb Ivanovich Uspensky* (Moscow, 1922). On An-sky's relationship with Uspenskii, see Gabriella Safran, “An-sky in 1892: The Jew and the Petersburg Myth,” especially 57–72, in Gabriella Safran and Steven J. Zipperstein, eds., *The Worlds of S. An-sky: A Russian Jewish Intellectual at the Turn of the Century* (Stanford, 2006).

6. For a useful compilation of responses to Uspenskii's writings by his literary contemporaries, see N. I. Sokolov, ed., *G. I. Uspenskii v russkoi kritike* (Moscow, 1961). Also see A. S. Volzhskii, ed., *Gleb Uspenskii v zhizni: po vospominaniyam, perepiske i dokumentam* (Moscow, 1935).

7. Mondry discusses Uspenskii's influence on such figures as Vera Zasulich, Vera Figner, Georgii Plekhanov and Lenin, *Pure, Strong, and Sexless*, 8; also 26n5–7. Also see “V. I. Lenin o G. I. Uspenskom” in Sokolov, ed., *Uspenskii v russkoi kritike*, 49–56.

8. Henrietta Mondry, *Pisateli-narodniki i evrei: G. I. Uspenskii i V. G. Korolenko (po sledam ‘Dvesti let vmeste’)* (St. Petersburg, 2005); Mondry, *Pure, Strong, and Sexless*.

9. These ideas are expressed in a number of Uspenskii's writings such as “Nakonets nashli vinovatogo,” “Vlast' zemli,” and “Podozritel'nyi *bel étage*.”

echoed by Soviet commentators who argued that the formal features of his creative output that blended fiction with journalism were dictated by the instabilities and contradictions of the post-reform era and by the heightened topicality of his subjects.<sup>10</sup>

For Uspenskii's contemporaries, however, Uspenskii's avoidance of the novel was evidence of his artistic limitations. Even for generally sympathetic commentators like Nikolai Mikhailovsky and Petr Tkachev, it revealed Uspenskii's vulnerabilities as a writer and signified a gap in his oeuvre. For both critics, the novel was the casualty of Uspenskii's peculiar artistic and intellectual inattention. Mikhailovsky's ambiguous characterization of Uspenskii as a writer—"ascetic" referred in part to the lack of traditional descriptive detail that Uspenskii sidestepped in the rush to communicate his idea.<sup>11</sup> Unlike Mikhailovsky, Tkachev did not fault Uspenskii for lack of detail. But the kind of detail Uspenskii does note never accrued, in Tkachev's view, the analytical sharpness needed to reveal "the psychological physiognomy" of his characters.<sup>12</sup> Such indifference to the "inner person" forever forced Uspenskii to "substitute the novel with a sketch."<sup>13</sup>

Together, these readings offer a basis for a new account of Uspenskii's generic choices. This account accepts the explanation of Uspenskii's formal commitments by reference to his historically new subjects. But it also takes seriously his contemporaries' observation that related Uspenskii's indifference to detail, material or psychological, to his perceived lack of success with the novel genre. In the reading I offer, Uspenskii's departure from the novelistic practice figures not merely as a search for form responsive to his subject matter but as a deliberate, principled, if veiled, critique of the novel. This implicit polemic regards the aesthetics of small detail as a symptom of the novel's excessive preoccupation with individual human experience, personality, and interiority, which Uspenskii seeks to replace with an exploration of conditions shaping the destiny of all.

For Uspenskii, the novel's concern with individual experience reflected a larger moral crisis: the growing individual isolation, which he regarded as a key characteristic of his times. In fact, in Uspenskii's view, the novel might even have contributed to the deepening of this crisis by overvaluing the individual and thereby validating a further withdrawal into the personal. The highest expression of Russian literary culture—the culture of "little books" (*knizhki*), "newspaper rags," "pens," and "page proofs"—the novel figures in Uspenskii's writings as a purveyor of false values and a supreme illusionist

10. On the hybrid nature of Uspenskii's form as a blend of journalism and fiction, see D. A. Barabokhin, *Gleb Uspenskii i russkaia zhurnalistika (1862–1892)* (Leningrad, 1983), 137–146; N. I. Sokolov, *Masterstvo G. I. Uspenskogo* (Leningrad, 1958); G. A. Bialyi, *Russkii realism: Ot Turgeneva k Chekhovu* (Leningrad, 1990), 491–537; N. I. Prutskov, *Gleb Uspenskii* (Leningrad, 1971), 47–49; V.G. Korolenko, "O Glebe Ivanoviche Uspenskom. Cherty iz lichnykh vospominanii" in *Stat'i, retsenzii, ocherki* (Moscow, 2014), 12.

11. N. K. Mikhailovsky, "'G. I. Uspenskii kak pisatel' i chelovek," in *Literaturno-kriticheskie stat'i* (Moscow, 1957), 328, 333.

12. P. N. Tkachev, "Iz stat'i 'Nedodymannye dumy,'" in Sokolov, ed., *Uspenskii v russkoi kritike*, 78. Mikhailovsky, too, remarks that Uspenskii's is uninterested in "psychological subtleties." Mikhailovsky, "'G. I. Uspenskii kak pisatel' i chelovek," 328.

13. Tkachev, "Iz stat'i 'Nedodymannye dumy,'" 80.

of the real.<sup>14</sup> To the fabricated reality of the novel, Uspenskii opposed actual reality that he believed fell outside the novel's vision.

To the *narodnik* Uspenskii, such reality was concentrated in peasant life. It is true that Uspenskii's ideas about the peasant did not always coincide with the current iterations of Populism, itself a term of considerable fluidity.<sup>15</sup> It is also true that even after years of proximity and effort to understand it, this life might still have struck Uspenskii sometimes as sordid, often as unintelligible, and nearly always as indifferent to his good will and exertion. But its "non-fictional" (*nevydumannoe*) foundation, grounded in "the permanence and supreme solidity of nature itself," offered a powerful contrast to the frivolity and weightlessness of the constructions of the members of educated culture.<sup>16</sup> Even works that are not centrally concerned with the peasant, such as the ones I consider in this paper, develop their critiques of non-peasant life against the generally-implied comparison with the plenitude and enduring meaning of Uspenskii's peasant ideal.

Taken in a broader context, Uspenskii's anxieties about the value of the individual reverberate with the echoes of the Populist debate on the meaning of personality. (I will return to this point later in the paper.) Besides the collectivist, Populist values, however, Uspenskii's views were also shaped by his inner struggles. The "intelligentsia's chronicler of despair," in Richard Wortman's apt phrase, Uspenskii thirsted for collective and personal regeneration but was never able to find it.<sup>17</sup> Nor was he able to overcome the feelings of guilt for his involvement in the oppressive old order that no amount of social reform or personal striving could ever fully purge. Uspenskii's acute desire for personal expiation and penance resonated with the spirit of his age. But the disappointments and troubles of Russian collective history were unusually and painfully magnified in Uspenskii's life by private suffering: a life-long mental illness—further aggravated by the syphilis Uspenskii contracted in his early twenties—that ultimately took his reason and life.<sup>18</sup> Whether disenchantments with the reforms of the 1860s, the failure of the Populist project in the 1870s, or the government reaction in the 1880s, the events of the day echoed in Uspenskii's aching heart with an ever-growing confirmation of his own worthlessness, pollution, and guilt. These feelings progressively colored his writings, often drowning out Uspenskii's special and attractive humor of earlier years. These struggles shed further light on Uspenskii's misgivings

14. Uspenskii, "Ne su'sia!" in his *Krest'ianin i krest'ianskii trud*, SS 5:50, 51.

15. Uspenskii's complicated attitudes toward Populism have been noted by pre-revolutionary, Soviet, and western critics. For representative discussions, see G. Novopolin, *Gleb Uspenskii: Opyt literaturnoi kharakteristiki* (Kharkov, 1903), 74–75; Prutskov, *Gleb Uspenskii*, 56–73, 110–20; Richard Wortman, *The Crisis of Russian Populism* (London, 1967); Mondry, "Introduction" in her *Pure, Strong, and Sexless*, 7–28.

16. Uspenskii, *Krest'ianin i krest'ianskii trud*, SS, 5:48.

17. Wortman, *Crisis of Russian Populism*, 61.

18. For an excellent discussion of Uspenskii's mental illness, its causes, its perceptions by his contemporaries, including his doctors, and its relationship to his writing, see Mondry, *Pure, Strong, and Sexless*, where Mondry also provides a translation of B. N. Sinani's diary (195–272). For another account of Uspenskii's final years, see Aptekman, *Gleb Ivanovich Uspensky*.

about the value of the individual and give his aesthetic searchings a deeply personal tragic dimension.

### The Distortions of the Microscope: "One on One"

Uspenskii's comment about "the isolated belletrist" conducting "a microscopic study" of his paltry heroes' paltry troubles quoted at the top of the paper brings into focus the spirit of his critique. Breaking with the long tradition of associating realism with scientific objectivity and microscopic scrutiny, Uspenskii rejects the microscope as a metaphor for expanded and objective literary observation. To him, the microscope is not a tool for aiding the eye, for bringing to visibility the unseen and the indiscernible. It is a symbol of contemporary letters' distorting optics, an optics that magnifies the infinitesimally small personal problems, like Peter Petrovich's trifling troubles with fat Maria Andreevna and thin Natali'a Ivanovna, into a subject of literary representation.

The concern with the inconsequential mirrors the general dwindling of modern life. In Uspenskii's idiom, the frequently used word "microscopic" is associated with the decline of values, indifference to big ideals, an abandonment of moral and social obligations, and the increasingly self-seeking ways of the Russian intelligentsia. "The microscopic study" of "an isolated belletrist" is in keeping with other microscopic phenomena: a microscopic personality, "a microscopic specialist," and "a microscopic deed."<sup>19</sup> But the literary preoccupation with the microscopic minutiae does not merely reflect the withering of the modern human personality and the shrinking sphere of its concerns. The very placement of Uspenskii's critique of "the isolated belletrist's" subjects and methods suggests the writer's bigger and possibly more corruptive role.

The line appears at the end of "One on One (Apropos of a Criminal Trial)" ("Odin na odin [Po povodu odnogo protsessal]"), an 1885 sketch published in *Russkie vedomosti* as part of the unfinished cycle *Bezvremenie*, a difficult-to-translate word that evokes the idea of time's absence and that was frequently used by Uspenskii and others to capture the apathy and pessimism of the reactionary 1880s. The sense of disengagement from meaningful action and, as it were, of exclusion from history, were deepened, in Uspenskii's own life, by his rapid physical and emotional decline, a prelude to a decade-long agony that would end in his death in 1902. "One on One" captures the darker moods of these later years and even indulges in a type of unhinged emotionalism that led Gor'kii to describe Uspenskii as a "hysterical realist."<sup>20</sup> At the same time, Uspenskii's overwrought hyperbole does not obscure but intensifies the sketch's underlying logic. His condemnation of the isolated writer comes at the

19. On personality, see G. I. Uspenskii, *Ochen' malen'kii chelovek*, SS, 2:457; on microscopic specialty, see G. I. Uspenskii, "Trudami ruk svoikh" in *Skuchaiushchaia publika*, SS, 6:170; On microscopic deeds, see G. I. Uspenskii, "Svoekorystnyi postupok" in *Bez opredelennykh zaniatii*, SS, 4:511, 512.

20. Mondry, *Pure, Strong, and Sexless*, 16.



end of his reflections on a sensational murder and the ensuing criminal trial that to Uspenskii's suffering mind emblemized the spirit of *bezvremnie*.

"One on One" describes the criminal trial of one Kapiton Pishchikov, convicted of a grotesquely violent murder of his wife. In the minds of Uspenskii's contemporaries, the case was bound to bring up associations with Dostoevskii's descriptions of extreme domestic violence in "Akul'ka's Husband" (a chapter in *Notes from the House of the Dead*) and the article "Environment" in the *Writer's Diary*. Unlike Dostoevskii's peasant protagonists, however, the Pishchikovs belonged to non-peasant classes (Pishchikov's wife was from the landed gentry), a circumstance that contributed greatly to the trial's notoriety. Like the public in the overflowing provincial courtroom, the nation's reading public was gripped by the revelations of ghastly and sordid details.<sup>21</sup> Published over several issues in *Orlovsky vestnik* and summarized in the central papers, the trial transcripts laid out a stunning case of shocking brutality, sexually charged violence, and limitless depravity.<sup>22</sup>

On May 15, 1885, twenty-five year old Valentina Pishchikova, *née* Saint Vensant, died after an eight-hour execution administered by her husband, Kapiton, a former copying clerk whom the well-to-do Saint Vensant had married against her family's objections seven years earlier. Extreme physical and psychological abuse was soon to follow. The final vortex of drunken violence began two days before Mrs. Pishchikova's death, when Pishchikov, attacked his wife with a fire pit poker, hitting her on her back and her face and smashing her nose. He then confined his wife to a bedroom where in the course of a night he delivered over three hundred lashes to her nearly naked body. At the time of murder, Pishchikova was days away from giving birth to the couple's fifth child. In a graphic testimony, the medical expert Dr. Solomoka, who had attended the crime scene, attested that the condition of the dead Mrs. Pishchikova had been incomparably more horrific than that of soldiers made to run the gauntlet. Whether Pishchikov was motivated by jealousy for the premarital past of his wife of seven years, as was asserted by his defense, or by the desire to gain control of her estate, as was argued by the prosecution, remained unclear, but the jury found for the prosecution, sending Pishchikov into penal servitude for life.

To Uspenskii, whose account of the trial (later repeated by Chekhov) appears to have relied on the coverage in the *Orlovsky vestnik*, Pishchikov's case

21. Pishchikov was tried in Bolkhov in the Orel province. The documents pertaining to the pre-trial investigation and the trial can be found in Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Orlovskoi oblasti, "Delo o meshchanine Pishchikove, V.K., obviniaemom v zlodeiskom ubiistve svoei zheny, (nachato 13 iunia, 1885, okoncheno 25 sentiabria 1890 goda)." Opis' sudebnykh del Orlovskogo Okruzhnogo suda. Orlovskii Okruzhnoi sud, Ugolovnoe otделение, Otdel Dorevoliutsionnykh fondov, fond no. 714, arkhiv 748.

22. The following is a partial list of periodicals that reported on Pishchikov's verdict: *Syn otechestva*, September 9, 1885; *Peterburgskie vedomosti*, September 6, 1886, 2; *Sovremennye izvestiia*, September 6, 1885, 2; *Svet*, September 6, 1885, 1; *Novoe vremia*, September 11, 1885, 4. For an extensive coverage of the trial, see *Orlovsky vestnik*, September 5, 1885, 2; September 6, 1885, 3; September 7, 1885, 3; September 8, 1885, 2–3; September 10, 1885, 2–3; September 11, 2–3; September 12, 1885, 2–3; September 13, 1885, 2–3; September 14, 1885, 2–3; September 17, 1885, 2; September 18, 1885, 3.

illustrates the escalating individualism and growing isolation characteristic of Russian modern life. Pishchikov's very retirement to his wife's estate, where he ensconced himself upon marrying Saint Vensant and abandoning his copying job in town, dramatizes, even on the physical level, a complete withdrawal from public life and from all obligations of social responsibility. Isolated from the human community for years on end and not feeling any pull on himself from an equally indifferent society, Pishchikov abandons himself to alcohol, idleness, fits of rage and the perpetual nursing of imaginary grievances. His ultimate outburst of savage violence figures in "One on One" as a result of his total withdrawal from social life.

Uspenskii's reference to the "isolated" writer at the end of these reflections startles the reader with the suggestion of the writer's similar retreat from responsibility, and the allusion to his microscopic optics, with its implication of literature's complicity in creating a monstrosity like Pishchikov. Although there is nothing about the terrifyingly blinkered Pishchikov to suggest that he is a reader of literature, and although Uspenskii is careful not to attribute responsibility for Pishchikov's crime to anything outside Pishchikov himself, his rhetoric links Pishchikov's "microscopic personal grievances" magnified "as under a microscope, a million times" by his "idle imagination," to the similarly impoverished literary imagination that legitimates the preoccupation with the insignificant.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, literature exports its passion for the inconsequential to other areas of life. In Uspenskii's critique of the trial, the spirit of microscopic scrutiny has invaded the courtroom, trivializing the legal process and diminishing law's power to be the force for good.

Uspenskii is satisfied with Pishchikov's guilty verdict. What he criticizes is the legal process which attaches undue importance to unimportant details.

The more you try to understand the 'details' of the case and to draw on them to get 'to its very root,' the more you begin to feel 'that this is not it,' that 'this is not the important thing,' that these are minor details. It is somewhere 'around' the trial, and not here, not in this circuit court, not in this report of the court proceedings that you are reading, that lies the important, the horrible that oppresses you with an unspeakable horror. . . you see that nobody involved in the proceedings is capable of explaining the villainy, of offering such reasons for it that you could say to yourself: 'Ah, finally, that is what's at the bottom of it all!'<sup>24</sup>

In scrutinizing the minutest circumstances, anatomizing motives, and probing personalities involved, law missed the opportunity to understand and to pronounce on the true meaning of Pishchikov's crime. His enormous and incontrovertible guilt made its "microscopic" calibrations especially unnecessary and misdirected. To Uspenskii, the "minor details" at the center of the trial do not reveal but obstruct the view of what matters. Worse, details swell the horror he feels. The smaller the detail, the more oppressive the horror:

23. Uspenskii, "Odin na odin," in *Bezvremenie*, SS, 6:386. Donna Orwin points out in *Consequences of Consciousness: Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy* (Stanford, 2007), 180–81, that by overvaluing inwardness, Russian psychological prose had the effect of promoting individualism, and even potentially undermining traditional morality.

24. Uspenskii, "Odin na odin," in *Bezvremenie*, SS, 6:375–6.

“This horror begins to increase as the ‘details’ (*podrobnosti*) of the case begin to bother you by their insignificance, pettiness (*melochnost’iu*) . . .”<sup>25</sup>

Uspenskii’s swelling horror is a natural response to the mindboggling facts of Pishchikov’s case. But he is also horrified by the attention accorded to Pishchikov’s life story and psychology. Reproducing the practices of the “isolated” writer, lawyers scrutinized Pishchikov’s personality, biography, and motivation, thereby infusing them with false significance and indirectly magnifying his “infinitesimally” small gripe.<sup>26</sup> But what the law mistakes for psychological depths to be excavated, Uspenskii reveals to be a void not worth exploring: “Vast emptiness surrounds [Pishchikov] . . . vast emptiness is inside him, in his empty soul, empty as a vast and empty shed . . . there is nothing inside . . .”<sup>27</sup> In place of misguided examination of Pishchikov’s insignificant personality, a fictitious interiority fabricated through its very exploration, Uspenskii wants to see a wide-ranging examination of conditions that made the Pishchikov phenomenon possible. To Uspenskii, the only question that is worth asking is:

What are those astonishing, incomprehensible conditions of our life that, on the one hand, allow a person the broadest, most luxurious possibility to give his whole life, his whole soul, blood and flesh to an itsy-bitsy personal question, to work out this itsy-bitsy question in extraordinary nuances, to swell its infinitesimal significance to gigantic proportions; and, on the other hand—what are the conditions of life, which let even the poppy seed of a personal question reach impossible dimensions?<sup>28</sup>

The trial is unable to answer (or ask) this wide-reaching question because of the myopic range of its concerns, itself a reflection of the narrowing of modern values and of the loss of a broader vision. Laying bare “the invisible horror” of which Pishchikov’s crime is only a “visible” local manifestation demands a change in perspective. In place of a microscopic optic absorbed in the contemplation of oppressively insignificant detail, law needs to achieve a more comprehensive vantage point from which to survey all of Russian culture.<sup>29</sup>

Uspenskii’s impatience with “*podrobnosti*,” the word to which in “One on One” and elsewhere he gives the pejorative connotation of occluding triviality, recalls Mitya Karamazov’s attitude during the preliminary investigation. Like Uspenskii, Mitya is anxious to skip over “little things” (*melochi*)—“how, when, and why, and precisely how much money and not that much, and all that claptrap (*gamaznia*)”—to get at the things that are important. But whereas Dostoevskii, ventriloquizing through the unsuspecting Mitya, remarks that it is precisely “little things” that make up the novel he is writing (“it’ll take you three volumes and an epilogue to cram it all in,” Mitya exclaims in frustration), Uspenskii sides with Mitya.<sup>30</sup> He, too, seems to believe that the clutter

25. Uspenskii, “Odin na odin,” in *Bezvremenie*, SS, 6:375–6.

26. Uspenskii, “Odin na odin,” in *Bezvremenie*, SS, 6:377.

27. Uspenskii, “Odin na odin,” in *Bezvremenie*, SS, 6:381.

28. Uspenskii, “Odin na odin,” in *Bezvremenie*, SS, 6:377.

29. Uspenskii, “Odin na odin,” in *Bezvremenie*, SS, 6:373–4.

30. F. M. Dostoevskii, *The Brothers Karamazov: A Novel in Four Parts with Epilogue*, trans., Larissa Volokhonsky and Richard Pevear (New York, 2002), 420. For the original



of unimportant detail blocks the view of the important broader phenomena behind it.

Uspenskii's critique of the legal process mirrors his critique of contemporary letters, and so does his recommendation for an exchange of perspective. While revealing the invisible but all-important truths hidden behind the surface reality has been the mandate of realism for a long time, it can no longer be achieved with the aid of the microscope. Unlike the many realists who believed that the success of their project depended on spotlighting a small but revealing detail which could concretize life and make it palpable, "One on One" implies an association between the "isolated" writer's aesthetics of small detail and the triviality of his subject matter. To Uspenskii, these form the two sides of the same distorting poetics, a poetics that overvalues the private, the personal, and the insignificant, and that finds its fullest expression in the reigning conventions of the novelistic genre.

### Shoes, Gloves, and Other Accessories: Balzac and "She Straightened"

Uspenskii was deeply aware of the problematic generic identity of his literary output. This was a sore issue, one that made him doubt his worth as a writer. He returns to it frequently, anxiously, and defensively, questioning his very place in Russian letters. Everything about him—from the material conditions of his writing to his lowly themes to messy writing habits—relegated him, so Uspenskii believed, to the margins of tradition. Uspenskii's notebook—"a most disorderly heap of various notes, clippings, excerpts, collected by chance and on the fly, somewhere and somehow and written down haphazardly, with whatever was at hand (once even with a hairpin and twice with a match)"<sup>31</sup>—offers a poignant image of Uspenskii's "literary homelessness," a new kind of solitude he claims to have been unknown to previous generations of Russian writers.<sup>32</sup>

A significant source of Uspenskii's anxiety was his lack of success with the novelistic form. His attitude toward the novel was ambivalent. He dutifully acknowledged his respect for the great masters and professed his own inability to write a novel. Chided by Mikhailovsky, Uspenskii is said to have replied: "I can't. The novel means that one needs to begin: 'Maria Ivanovna was reclining on a settee.' How can I possibly write something like this? No, this is not in my line."<sup>33</sup> It would be a mistake, however, to take this statement merely as an instance of Uspenskii's habitual self-deprecation. Uspenskii's irony cuts in the other direction, as well, to distance him, as it were, from the literary practice he disapproves. To grant meaningless occurrences, such as Maria Ivanovna's reclining on a settee, the status of events means to Uspenskii participating in the same economy as the "microscopic" explorations that he decries in "One on One."

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see F. M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh* (Leningrad, 1972), 14:421.

31. Uspenskii, "Khochesh' -ne-khochesh'," in *Novye vremena, novye zaboty*, SS, 3:57.

32. Uspenskii, "Ot avtora. Predislovie k pervomu sobraniuu sochinenii," SS, 9:177.

33. Sokolov, *Masterstvo G. I. Uspenskogo*, 38.

Uspenskii's implicit polemic with the novel is made visible by Tolstoi, who is reported to have said of Uspenskii, "This one won't write how a lady [*barynia*] was lounging on a settee, and won't depict the tip of her boot, but Tolstoi will."<sup>34</sup> In recasting Uspenskii's comment to capture the difference between Uspensky's aesthetics and his own, Tolstoi simultaneously makes a veiled reference to Balzac.

Tolstoi's language recalls Théophile Gautier's 1858 essay "Honoré de Balzac" where Gautier lists "the polished tip of a vamped boot" among other articles of a glamorous feminine toilette, the admiring enumeration of which holds a particular fascination for Balzac.<sup>35</sup> For Gautier and others, such catalogues of aristocratic splendor exemplified Balzac's special approach to detail and were expressive of his broader commitment to concrete visuality as a central characteristic of his poetics. Baudelaire, for instance, also identified Balzac's "prodigious taste for detail" and his unerring ability "to clothe pure trivialities in regal purple" as special qualities of Balzac's artistic gift and related them to his desire "to see everything."<sup>36</sup>

In using the Balzacian detail to draw a contrast between his own and Uspenskii's poetics, Tolstoi does not merely align himself with Balzac. He also casts the Balzacian novel's aesthetics of small detail and its attention to "necessary superfluities" as an antithesis to Uspenskii's art.<sup>37</sup>

That Balzac and his literary legacy indeed figure in Uspenskii's thinking as a counterpoint to his own aesthetic commitments is confirmed by "She Straightened," (*Vypriamila*) (1885), Uspenskii's most famous articulation of his views on art and its role in modern society. In fact, the same Gautier's essay that probably prompted Tolstoi's remark about the tip of the lady's boot serves as a foil to Uspenskii's program in "She Straightened," and Balzac himself serves as an intended, if unnamed, target of Uspenskii's criticism.

Written the same year as "One on One," "She Straightened" is a chronologically multi-layered and structurally complex narrative told by Uspenskii's alter-ego *narodnik* Ivan Tiapushkin (a self-deprecating allusion to Pushkin). The chronically dejected Tiapushkin is exhausted by his unending, lonely, and thankless toil as a country school teacher. Surrounded by peasant poverty and ignorance, on the one side, and by the intelligentsia's blankness and falsity, on the other side, Tiapushkin feels defeated, broken mentally and spir-

34. A. I. Ertel', in A. S. Volzhskii, ed., *Gleb Uspenskii v zhizni*. Ertel' recorded this remark in his diary on February 6, 1884. Tolstoi's wording was probably prompted by a line in the January 1884 installment of *Volei-nevolei: Otryvki iz zapisok Tiapushkina* in *The Fatherland Notes*. Uspenskii writes that *Volei-nevolei* had multiple discarded beginnings, including "Maria Vasil'evna was lying on a settee . . . one time, it was even 'half-reclined.'" Uspenskii, "Vmesto predislovia," in *Volei-nevolei*, SS, 6:8.

35. Théophile Gautier, "Honoré de Balzac," trans. Alyson Waters, in Honoré de Balzac, *Père Goriot*, trans. Burton Raffel (New York, 1994), 226. For the original see Claude-Marie Senninger, ed., *Honoré de Balzac par Théophile Gautier* (Paris, 1980), 102.

36. Charles Baudelaire, "Balzac's Genius," trans. Noah David Guynn, in Balzac, *Père Goriot*, 225. For the original see Charles Baudelaire, "Théophile Gautier," in Roger Pierrot, ed., *Oeuvres complètes de Balzac*, 26 vols. (Paris, 1968), 465.

37. On Balzac's use of "necessary superfluities," the phrase he uses in *Lost Illusions*, see Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven, 2005), 25.

itually. What momentarily restores him in this dark hour is a memory of his visit to the Louvre where, more than a decade ago, he saw, for the first time, the statue of the Venus de Milo. The ideological center of "She Straightened" is formed by Tiapushkin's account of this experience.

Tiapushkin travels to Paris as a tutor to a wealthy Russian family. He is repulsed by the vulgarity of his traveling companions and crushed by scenes of misery and inhumanity punctuating his impressions of the city. Despondent, he wanders into the Louvre and chances upon the Venus de Milo. In the presence of the statue, Tiapushkin is transformed. Like "a crumpled glove" that regains its proper shape if one breathes air into it, Tiapushkin's soul "straightens" as the statue, like an inverted Pygmalion, breathes life into him and restores him to his human image.<sup>38</sup> For a long time, Tiapushkin cannot account for the statue's "straightening" powers until he suddenly recalls Afanasii Fet's poem "Venera Miloskaia" (1857).<sup>39</sup> In his private polemic with Fet, Tiapushkin clarifies the source of the statue's revitalizing power. Fet's poem, Tiapushkin believes, is nothing more than a trite paean for the beauty of the female body. Shackled by his cultural habits that dictate that Venus be seen as a symbol of sensuality, Fet reproduces the familiar tropes "solely under the influence of the word 'Venus' that compels one to sing feminine charms."<sup>40</sup> Tiapushkin is especially offended by several of Fet's metaphors that emphasize the statue's physical allure. Later in the sketch, he repeatedly repurposes Fet's phrases—"laughing body," "burning with passion," "blooming with eternal beauty"—to trivialize Fet's poem.<sup>41</sup> Tiapushkin concedes that other Venus statues may exude sensuality but not the Venus de Milo, who is an "armless cripple" and is not even feminine. "Look, if you will, at her face," Tiapushkin urges Fet and the reader, "at this nose, this forehead, at these, I am even embarrassed to say, almost coarsely male (*muzhitskie*) curls on the sides of the forehead."<sup>42</sup> The sculptor "took what he needed in male and female beauty, without regard for sex, and perhaps even for age, only capturing in all of that what is human." What the Greek artist immortalized, for the benefit of future generations, is not the beauty of the female body but "the enormous beauty of the *human* being," delighting each of us with the possibility of being beautiful.<sup>43</sup>

Since the time of its publication, "She Straightened" has been considered by many the most significant statement of Uspenskii's views on art. For his contemporaries, the sketch revealed Uspenskii's search for harmony, so sorely missing both from his inner life and from the life around him.<sup>44</sup> In Soviet times, these interpretations were adjusted to emphasize the political dimen-

38. Uspenskii, "Vypriamila (otryvok iz zapisok Tiapushkina)," in *Koi pro chto*, SS, 7:247. The comparison to Pygmalion belongs to Mondry, *Pure, Strong, and Sexless*, 72.

39. Uspenskii, "Vypriamila," *Koi pro chto*, SS, 7:247.

40. Uspenskii, "Vypriamila," in *Koi pro chto*, SS, 7:253.

41. Uspenskii, "Vypriamila," in *Koi pro chto*, SS, 7:250.

42. Uspenskii, "Vypriamila," in *Koi pro chto*, SS, 7:252.

43. Uspenskii, "Vypriamila," in *Koi pro chto*, SS, 7:254.

44. See, for instance, N. K. Mikhailovsky, "G. I. Uspenskii kak pisatel' i chelovek (1889)," in N. K. Mikhailovsky, *Literaturno-kriticheskie stat'i* (Moscow, 1957); A. S. Volzhskii, *Dva ocherka ob Uspenskom i Dostoevskom* (St. Petersburg, 1902), 11–14.

sion of Uspenskii's sketch, to externalize his inner struggles as class conflict, and to cast "She Straightened" into a manifesto of revolutionary democratic aesthetics.<sup>45</sup> Still more recently, "She Straightened" has been examined for its representation of the female body and of Uspenskii's gender politics. What used to be regarded as Uspenskii's "democratic" ideal of the human body, equally inclusive of male and female characteristics, has been revealed to be Uspenskii's fantasy of escaping sexuality by reconfiguring the female body after male biology.<sup>46</sup>

While nearly all discussions of "She Straightened" address Uspenskii's polemic with Fet, the sketch's critique extends beyond Fet's "pure art" to include Balzacian realism. Although unnamed by Uspenskii and, to my knowledge, so far unrecognized by critics, Balzac is as much of a target in "She Straightened" as is Fet. It makes sense that on his trip to Paris, Tiapushkin would be thinking of French literature, as is evident from Tiapushkin's description of the Paris morgue, redolent of Zola.<sup>47</sup> But it is Balzac who looms especially large over the pages of "She Straightened." The very discussion of the Venus de Milo responds, I believe, to Gautier's "Honoré de Balzac," and the specter of Gautier's Balzac stands alongside Fet as an implied antipode to the Greek artist and to Uspenskii himself.

Emphasizing Balzac's modernity, Gautier notes that it comes at the expense of Balzac's sensitivity to classical "plastic beauty."<sup>48</sup> Indifferent to the flawlessness and timelessness of the classical ideal, Balzac is enthralled by the transient and imperfect beauty of the fashionable Parisienne. A long quotation from Gautier is necessary.

He [Balzac] read with a distracted eye the white marble stanzas in which Greek art sang the perfection of human form. In the Museum of Antiquities, he could look at the Venus de Milo without going into ecstasies, but the Parisian woman who stopped in front of the immortal statue, draped in a long cashmere scarf that flowed without a fold from the nape of her neck to the tip of her heel, coiffed her hat with the little Chantilly veil, her hand sheathed in a close-fitting Jouvin glove, and the polished tip of her little vamped boot peeking from beneath the hem of her flounced dress made his eye sparkle with pleasure. He would analyze her coquettish allure, and lingeringly savor her wily charms, all the while finding, as he did, that the goddess was thick-waisted and would cut a sorry figure in the homes of Mesdames de Beauséant, de Listomère, and D'Espard.<sup>49</sup>

Beyond the obvious reference to the Venus de Milo, much else about this passage evokes Uspenskii's sketch. Uspenskii seems to accept Balzac's discriminating judgment that next to a Parisian beauty Venus may even look

45. V. P. Druzyn, N. I. Sokolov, "G. I. Uspenskii. Kritiko-biograficheskii ocherk" in *SS*, xlvi–xlvi; N. I. Prutskov, "G. I. Uspenskii" in his *Istoriia russkoi literatury*, vol. 3 of 4, (Leningrad, 1980), 200–1.

46. Mondry, *Pure, Strong, and Sexless*, 65–80.

47. For Zola's description see Chapter 13 of *Thérèse Raquin*.

48. Gautier, "Honoré de Balzac," 226; for the original see, Senninger, ed., *Honoré de Balzac par Théophile Gautier*, 101.

49. Gautier, "Honoré de Balzac," 226; for the original see, Senninger, ed., *Honoré de Balzac par Théophile Gautier*, 102.

common, too common, in fact, to be received in the salons of his aristocratic protagonists. As I have noted, however, the coarseness of Venus's features is emblematic of superior beauty for Uspenskii. Unlike Balzac, who loves "not a pale statue, but the woman of today," Uspenskii loves the statue and fears the woman.<sup>50</sup> The elegantly dressed lady who eclipses in Balzac's eyes Venus's immortal beauty becomes, under Uspenskii's embarrassed and threatened pen, "a living specimen" of the Fetian "laughing body." Such specimens roam Champs-Élysées in droves, flaunting their feminine charms even though, like the woman in Gautier's passage, they are carefully clothed from head to foot.

Gautier's caressing contemplation of the details of the woman's toilette mimics Balzac's own admiring gaze. Two items in particular stand out in Gautier's catalogue of the "unnecessary superfluities": the already mentioned tip of the lady's boot and her Jouvin glove.<sup>51</sup> Gautier's glove anticipates Uspenskii's, possibly offering some insight into his admittedly odd metaphor for the human soul. If the expensive "close-fitting Jouvin glove" is a fetishized object of female luxury, Tiapushkin's "crumpled glove" is a formless "lump of leather," as unglamorous and lowly as Tiapushkin's non-aristocratic origins.<sup>52</sup> If Gautier's glove is a metonymy for the woman's well-groomed, pampered, Fetian "laughing" body, Tiapushkin's creased glove is a metaphor for his anguished, sorrowful, dejected soul.

The re-inflecting of the glove is one in a series of contrasts to the Balzacian realism staged in "She Straightened." In spite of his humble background and declared lack of refinement, by the end of "She Straightened," Tiapushkin asserts himself as the true authority on art. What entitles Tiapushkin to this role is the nature of his response to Venus. Profound, chaste, and deeply spiritual, Tiapushkin's experience is vastly superior to other reactions sketched out by Uspenskii. Besides Fet, who failed to understand the enormity of the experience before him or to even touch "the edge" of the experience, the sketch features yet another inferior spectator: a Russian gentleman whom Tiapushkin spots inspecting the statue.<sup>53</sup> The man is a grotesque inversion of Tiapushkin. Unlike Tiapushkin, who, upon his first encounter of the statue, forgets all the ordinary business of life, including eating and drinking, the man is repeatedly associated with food and physicality. Carnal, churlish, and "overindulged on trashy delights," he impudently ogles the statue but is disappointed to find "nothing noteworthy in his line" in the modestly draped Venus.<sup>54</sup>

An uncouth proxy for Fet, the Russian gentleman also acts as a surrogate for Gautier's Balzac with whom he shares his satiated indifference to Venus. Fet's sensuousness and Balzac's insensitivity contrast starkly with Tiapushkin's exalted response. Whereas Balzac, oblivious to Venus, is basking in the presence of feminine elegance, Tiapushkin is overwhelmed by the chastity and

50. Gautier, "Honoré de Balzac," 227; for the original, see Senninger, ed., *Honoré de Balzac par Théophile Gautier*, 102.

51. On Xavier Jouvin's invention of technologies that revolutionized glove-making, see Willard M. Smith, *Gloves, Past and Present* (New York, 1917), 71–77.

52. Uspenskii, "Vypryamila," in *Koi pro chto*, SS, 7:247.

53. Uspenskii "Vypryamila," in *Koi pro chto*, SS, 7:252.

54. Uspenskii, "Vypryamila," in *Koi pro chto*, SS, 7:247.



dignity of Venus's beauty. Whereas Balzac, "eyes sparkling with pleasure," scrutinizes the particulars of fashion and glamor, Tiapushkin reflects on human suffering and art's lofty goals.<sup>55</sup> Whereas Balzac's sphere of concern is limited to "shawls and dresses and hats," Tiapushkin thinks about the destinies of mankind and resolves to devote his life to improving humanity's lot.<sup>56</sup>

Recalibrating the significance of the seemingly identical experience Uspenskii enters the debate not just with Gautier or Gautier's Balzac but with the very aesthetics of the Balzacian novel. What he rejects is a literary practice that, with the help of proliferating detail, gives substantiality to the insubstantial, and that validates the triviality of the bourgeois drama by turning it into a subject of artistic contemplation. Tiapushkin's experience is not a Balzacian non-event of observing a woman's scarf, heel, or flounce of a dress, but a spiritually transformative, life-changing and enduring epiphany. This re-scaling of the important and the trivial is consistent with Uspenskii's devaluation of detail that I have noted in "One on One" and that was imputed to him as an artistic flaw. "She Straightened," in fact, may be seen as a veiled response to Uspenskii's critics. The Venus sculptor's universalizing approach, the same one that dictates that he take freely from male and female beauty, validates Uspenskii's own inattention to microscopic detail. Unlike Balzac, who, in his portraits of women "never failed to place a sign, a fold, a wrinkle, a pink patch, a tender and tired little spot, a vein that is too obvious, some detail that depicts the bruises of life," the Venus sculptor represents something that "does not exist now, this minute, in any person or any thing anywhere" yet, "at the same time, exists in every human being."<sup>57</sup>

### **"The Story of Every Russian": Willy-Nilly and Living Numbers**

Uspenskii's admiration for the universalizing imperative of the Venus sculptor illuminates further his aesthetic program and especially his search for the typical. His approach, while by no means neo-classical, integrates something like a neo-classical interest in highly generalized archetypes (although not neo-classical characteristic focus on beauty) with realism's interest in the lowly (although not its focus on small particulars). Of course, 19th century realism itself has been understood by many as a project of uncovering the typical: of what is characteristic of an era's social experience and of the underlying impersonal forces that shape it. But this common understanding also sees the uncovering of the typical as realized through the exploration of an individual life. Seen this way, realism's very progress consists in an increasingly complex fusion of individually apprehended characters and situations and the large social forces specific to these characters' times. A key measure

55. Gautier, "Honoré de Balzac," 226; for the original, see Senninger, ed., *Honoré de Balzac par Théophile Gautier*, 102.

56. Gautier, "Honoré de Balzac," 227; for the original, see Senninger, ed., *Honoré de Balzac par Théophile Gautier*, 103.

57. Gautier, "Honoré de Balzac," 226; for the original see see Senninger, ed., *Honoré de Balzac par Théophile Gautier*, 102; Uspenskii, "Vypryamila," in *Koi pro chto*, SS, 7: 254.

of realism's achievement lies, in this view of realism, in the right balance and interdependence of the particular and the typical, the individual and the social, the private and the public, the affective and the material, exemplified in the century's best novels.<sup>58</sup>

Uspenskii's search for a wider lens with which to replace "microscopic" explorations of contemporary fiction aims at restructuring the realist synthesis in the direction of starker and thinner typification. The heightened emphasis on uncovering the general "conditions of life," which he believes are not revealed but obscured by particular facts and fates, was assessed differently by different generations of Uspenskii's readers. For Uspenskii's contemporaries, his overriding desire to get to "the idea" underlying an event gave his prose a rushed, unpolished quality and forced it into "journalistic excursions" that undermined its aesthetic value.<sup>59</sup> Later commentators saw Uspenskii's ability to strip off the incidental and inconsequential to get to the essential phenomena of social life as a special characteristic of his artistic gift. For these later critics, this quality of Uspenskii's writing was not disruptive but constitutive of his aesthetics, of a special hybrid of fiction and journalism that is the signature of Uspenskii's art.<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, to a great extent, Uspenskii's formal choices should be understood in terms of his abiding concern with broad patterns of social reality and the priority they take over the flux of individual experience. This concern explains, for example, Uspenskii's close attention to the tradition of the physiological sketch and his method of linking his own sketches into extended sequences or "cycles," a convention he (and other Populist writers) adopted from Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin.<sup>61</sup> This method accommodated Uspenskii's goals of comprehensiveness, while the sketch-modeled approaches to character representation emphasized plainer and starker typicality over particularity and individuation. Designed to mimic classification methods of natural sciences and to consider its subjects as samples of broad representative categories, the sketch spoke to Uspenskii's artistic apprehension of life in which individual persons and situations served to reflect an established average.<sup>62</sup>

Uspenskii's broadly typifying practices as an element of his poetics are already evident in *Manners of Rasteriaeva Street* (1866). His first major work,

58. For a classic statement of this view, see Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism* (New York, 1964); Georg Lukács, "Art and Objective Truth" in Arthur D. Kahn, ed., *Writer & Critic, and Other Essays* (New York, 1970); Raymond Williams, "Realism and the Contemporary Novel" in his *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth, Eng., 1965).

59. Mikhailovsky, "G. I. Uspenskii kak pisatel' i chelovek," 333.

60. See, for instance, D.A. Barabokhin, *Gleb Uspenskii i russkaia zhurnalistika* (Leningrad, 1983), 141. For additional detail, see sources listed in n10, above.

61. M. S. Goriachkina, *Satira Shchedrina i russkaia demokraticheskaia literatura 60–80kh godov XIX veka* (Moscow, 1977), 35.

62. K. Stepanova, "Ocherk kak zhanr opisatel'nyi" in A. I. Gruzdev, Ia. S. Bilinkis, B. F. Egorov, M. L. Semanov, and N. N. Skatov, eds., *Zhanrovoe novavtorstvo russkoi literatury kontsa vosemnadtsatogo–deviatsatogo vekov: sbornik nauchnykh rabot* (Leningrad, 1974), 48–57; V. M. Markovich, "O transformatsii 'natural'noi' novelly i dvukh realizmakh v russkoi literature XIX veka" in V. M. Markovich and Volf Schmid, eds., *Russkaia novella: Problemy teorii i istorii, sbornik statei* (St. Petersburg, 1993), 113–33, especially 114–18.

*Rasteriaeva Street* depicts the life of a provincial town through a loosely linked gallery of representative portraits of its inhabitants. The work's plotlessness and strong tendency toward summative and iterative narration, its lack of narrative momentum and absence of character-defining action or incident may be especially suited to represent the crushing "immobility" and stagnation of the Rasteriaeva world.<sup>63</sup> These key elements of Uspenskii's poetics, however, are not restricted to this early work. They persist throughout Uspenskii's career highlighting his departure from the novel's convention of individuated character and of plot as its vehicle.

The trade of a close-range, microscopic view for a more comprehensive perspective does not merely ensure that the falsely significant is made to regain its true, "infinitesimally" small, proportions. It also means that distinct, individuated fates and identities we associate with the traditional realist novel become replaced with broad representative samples. Even his characters' names (Mikhail Ivanych, Prokhor Porfiryich), made forgettable by a deliberate withholding of last names, or broadly typifying nicknames (*Neizlichimyi*, *Beznadezhnyi*), speak to Uspenskii's tendency toward de-individuation.

How demoting the individual impacts the familiar structures of the novelistic character and sabotages the novel itself is brought home by *Willy-Nilly: Fragments from Tiapushkin's Notes* (*Volei-nevolei [Otryvki iz zapisok Tiapushkina]*) (1884). Originally serialized in four installments in *Fatherland Notes*, it featured the same truth-seeking narrator as "She Straightened."<sup>64</sup> *Willy-Nilly* helps bring out the conflict between the "microscopic" mode of the novel and the "macroscopic" method of Uspenskii. What it shows is that even a work that was ostensibly begun as a novel (Tiapushkin comments that this "novel, novella, or memoir" had countless false starts, one even involving "Maria Vasil'evna was lying on a settee"), cannot sustain the novelistic project under the pressures of Uspenskii's depersonalizing imperative.<sup>65</sup>

Especially instructive in this regard is the second half of *Willy-Nilly*. Its third installment begins with an instance of metanarration: Tiapushkin reveals that "for the beginning of his fictional narrative" (*belletristicheskoe povestvovanie*), he has chosen a "shameful episode" that has for many years been weighing on his conscience. The "shameful episode" is an infanticidal wish. Tiapushkin confesses that twenty years ago he wished for the death of his new-born baby whom he later abandoned to go to "the People."<sup>66</sup> The revelation of this private and specific guilt, which overlays and deepens a more public and general crisis of conscience suffered by many Populist progressives, primes the reader for a literary confession.<sup>67</sup> What we expect is a

63. G. I. Uspenskii, *Nravy Rasteriaevoi ulitsy*, (Moscow, 1964), SS, 1:70.

64. For a general discussion of *Willy-Nilly*, see N. I. Sokolov, *G. I. Uspenskii: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo*, (Leningrad, 1968), 235–40.

65. Uspenskii, "Vmesto predislovia," in *Volei-nevolei (Otryvki iz zapiskok Tiapushkina)*, SS, 6:7, 8.

66. Uspenskii, "Vmesto predislovia," in *Volei-nevolei*, SS, 6:57.

67. On the prominence of guilt in the psychological structure of Populism, see Wortman, "The City and Countryside," in his *The Crisis of Russian Populism*, 1–34. How this psychological drama of Populism is exemplified in Uspenskii's life is the topic of Chapter 3, "Gleb Ivanovich Uspenskii and the Impossible Reconciliation," 61–100.

retrospective examination of the self's path toward transgression, along with a revelation of a deeply personal truth.

But an exploration of the confessing personality quickly shifts to an investigation of "the general conditions of true life" that are said to render personality impossible. In the Russian culture of ubiquitous oppression, cruelty, coercion, and the despotism of the powerful, the impulse toward individuality, Tiapushkin argues, is suppressed from the early age. His story is not one of individual personality but of personality's "systematic mortification."<sup>68</sup> The very wish for his baby's death figures in it as a reflection of the self's shriveling, whose extent Tiapushkin grasps fully only when confronted with the demands of fatherhood.

The attenuation of Tiapushkin's personality finds its formal expression in disintegration of the novelistic impulse and in the melting of his personal story into a collective history. As the micro-psychology of Tiapushkin's self-scrutiny crumbles under the pressures of macro-diagnoses, the individualized confessional subject becomes dissolved in the portrait of the multitude. Hurriedly and guiltily, he effaces whatever may distinguish his life from another as embarrassingly insignificant and irrelevant, as something that delays the discussion of "the important thing" which transcends all particularity. The phrase "I won't recollect in detail" becomes something of a refrain in Tiapushkin's narrative, and the personal confession is replaced with a collective mode.<sup>69</sup> "Everyone at the bottom of his heart recognized his shamelessness, pitilessness, stupidity, heartlessness."<sup>70</sup> "The absence of 'personality,' of personal responsibility, duty and honor decomposed us, as air decomposes corpses."<sup>71</sup> "We knew," "we felt," "we did" becomes the mode of Tiapushkin's narrative. Even his impulse to confess is transformed from a private need into a public duty: Tiapushkin relates the shameful episode not for "personal execration" but on account of its "great social importance."<sup>72</sup>

Despite his tale's grotesque lugubriousness, Tiapushkin's story, presented in broadest strokes that avoid specific incident, situation, or experience, is said to mirror the story of every Russian, for "all of us, from the lowly watchman to Turgenev . . . are brought up in the same conditions of Russian life." Although there may be some variation in the power with which "the same impressions of nature, people, family and social relationships" influence different individuals, "the essence of [these impressions] is the same for everyone."<sup>73</sup> Whatever claim Tiapushkin may have on the reader's attention, he lays it not as a "singular phenomenon" but as "a 'product' of such and such inevitable influences, a product whose personal characteristics are typical . . . of the entire Russian society and people!"<sup>74</sup>

68. Uspenskii, "Podrobnosti 'vozmutitel' nogo sluchaia'—'Nam samim' nichego ne nado," in *Volei-nevolei*, SS, 6:92.

69. Uspenskii, "Vozmutitel'nyi sluchai v moei zhizni.—Opyt opredeleniia 'podlinnykh' razmerov i podlinnykh svoistv 'russkogo serdtsa'," in *Volei-nevolei*, SS, 6:73, 78.

70. Uspenskii, "Vozmutitel'nyi sluchai v moei zhizni," in *Volei-nevolei*, SS, 6:69.

71. Uspenskii, "Vozmutitel'nyi sluchai v moei zhizni," in *Volei-nevolei*, SS, 6:76.

72. Uspenskii, "Vozmutitel'nyi sluchai v moei zhizni," in *Volei-nevolei*, SS, 6:58.

73. Uspenskii, "Vozmutitel'nyi sluchai v moei zhizni," in *Volei-nevolei*, SS, 6:61.

74. Uspenskii, "Vmesto predisloviia," in *Volei-nevolei*, SS, 6:7.

In form and theme, *Willy-Nilly* dramatizes Uspenskii's quarrel with the novel. At once self-proclaiming and self-defeating, this "novel" dramatizes, through its very collapse, the victory of the macro over the micro, as the individual gets swallowed up by Uspenskii's schematizations of social and historical processes. If the novel has been traditionally understood as a sphere that affirms the value of individual experience, Uspenskii's frank and deliberate disregard for all individuating factors, from inner nature to lived experience to incidental factors, puts him at odds with the novel form. In fact, as an instrument for exploring and modeling individual personality, the contemporary novel contravenes Uspenskii's sense of the depletion of the personality that he observes among Russian non-peasant classes. His disdain for its "microscopic" dimensions, the triviality of its preoccupations, and its impotence to forge a meaningful destiny form an important ideological background to Uspenskii's formal searchings.

Uspenskii's discomfort regarding the claims and the experiences of the self reverberates with the echoes of the Populist debate about the value of the individual personality.<sup>75</sup> On one side, the moderates Nikolai Mikhailovsky and Petr Lavrov defended the ideal of individual human personality and understood progress in terms of individuality's flowering.<sup>76</sup> On the other side, the radical Petr Tkachev objected to the personality principle as retrograde, elitist, and exploitative of the masses, advocating instead "the leveling of individuality," which he understood not as a mere "political, juridical, or even economic equality" but also as some deep underlying sameness that he expressed as "an organic physiological equality" and that he saw, not unlike Uspenskii, as "stemming from the same education and from identical conditions of life."<sup>77</sup>

Uspenskii's ambivalent view of personality appears to incorporate elements of both positions. On the one hand, he seems to have found something akin to Tkachev's "leveling" in the midst of existing reality. But unlike Tkachev, for whom reducing "the multiplicity of individualities to one common denominator" held the key to a just society, to be worked out by the future efforts of the revolutionary vanguard, Uspenskii seems to lament what he calls "the near annihilation" of modern Russian personality and to experi-

75. The Populist debate was part of a broader public discourse on personality whose beginnings in Russia date back to the last decades of the 18th century. See Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910–1925* (Ithaca, 2002), 63–67; Derek Offord, "Lichnost': Notions of Individual Identity," in Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd, eds., *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881–1940* (Oxford, 1998), 13–25.

76. For a discussion of the overlaps and disagreements in Tkachev's, Lavrov's, and Mikhailovsky's views on personality, see Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford, 1979), 257.

77. I rely on Andrzej Walicki's discussion of the Populist debate on the personality principle; see Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, 222–67, especially 244–49. Walicki notes that although the full delineation of this idea occurs in Tkachev's "What Is the Party of Progress?," which was not published until 1932, Tkachev's debate with Lavrov was known to his contemporaries from the 1870s onward. Quotation on 247. Also see James H. Billington, *Mikhailovsky and Russian Populism* (Oxford, 1958), 97.



ence such depletion with anxiety and even shame.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, he clearly shares the common Populist belief that whatever personal fulfillment is possible, it is possible only through renunciation of the insignificant individual “I” for the sake of merging with the larger collective “we.” Tiapushkin is only one in the long gallery of Uspenskii’s educated protagonists who seek to extinguish their feelings of personal unworthiness by sacrificing their lives in the service to the “People.”

Uspenskii’s prioritizing the uncovering of the social and historical forces that underlie human lives over the textured and richly elaborated accounts of those lives give his characters a feel of a statistical average. Uspenskii’s interest in the statistical research of his time is not surprising. The statistical investigations of the 1870s–1880s were closely aligned with the Populist quest to understand the peasant world and aimed at replacing the intelligentsia’s conjectures about the peasant with objective facts.<sup>79</sup> But it was not just the focus of these studies on rural and provincial life that gripped Uspenskii’s attention. The tropes of social statistics and their practitioners’ tendency to think in representative samples dovetailed with Uspenskii’s efforts to keep at bay the vicissitudes of individual fate and appealed to his creative imagination.

An especially arresting demonstration of the impact statistics had on Uspenskii’s method is found in the 1888 cycle *Living Numbers* (*Zhivye tsifry*). Uspenskii’s narrator-protagonist sets out to make sense of some particularly incomprehensible metrics in statistical sheets, such as a quarter of a horse per peasant capita and the zero entered in the tables under “mother” and “father” for seven hundred infants born in St. Petersburg each month. It is a notable feature of *Living Numbers* that Uspenskii’s stories do not seek to concretize the statistical digits by offering elaborated accounts of individual human experience as we ordinarily expect when art sets out to humanize impersonal statistical records. Uspenskii’s characters remain nameless and faceless, indistinguishable from others in their statistical category, the rudimentary schemes of their lives serving as samples of a shared fate.<sup>80</sup> In “The Receipt” (*Kvitantsiia*), the anonymous mother of a dead baby-boy, whose body she attempts but fails to collect using a “receipt” she got from the orphanage where she left him, is described as “that very same ‘linen seamstress’ whom every Petersburger meets in such abundance in any street crowd.”<sup>81</sup> The woman emerges from this crowd to allow us a glimpse of her despair only to be re-absorbed by it at the end of the sketch. In “The Quarter of a Horse,” the manifold hardships associated, in peasant life, with the absence of a family horse, are abstracted into the image of an anthropomorphized “woman-fraction” (*drob'-baba*). The quirky image of the walking and talking fraction

78. Quoted in Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, 247. Uspenskii, “Podrobnosti ‘vozmutitel’ nogo sluchaia,’” in *Volei-nevolei*, SS, 6:102.

79. Wortman, *Crisis of Russian Populism*, 28.

80. Sokolov makes a similar point when he suggests that *Living Numbers* represents not portraits of individual lives but synthesized images evincing social phenomena expressed by a statistic. See Sokolov, *G. I. Uspenskii: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo*, 205, 215–16. Also see Bialyi, *Russkii realism*, 526.

81. Uspenskii, “Kvitantsiia,” in *Zhivye tsifry*, SS, 7:500.

illuminates the distinctiveness of Uspenskii's method. Rather than looking to discern a human being in the statistical digit, the narrator is straining "to discern in the living human image, the outlines of a seemingly meaningless statistical fraction."<sup>82</sup> The moment of insight, when he is suddenly able to see "the quarter of a horse" embodied, as it were, in the horseless peasant-woman comes, as critics have noted, as a transformative experience: an artistic epiphany that Uspenskii describes by the word *perevorot* (overturning).<sup>83</sup>

Perevorot as an awakening to a new vision, however, is not the only perevorot enacted in *Living Numbers*. Another reverses the familiar paths of novelistic sympathy and subverts the novel's conventional critique of social statistics as a field destructive of an affective sympathetic response.<sup>84</sup> Dostoevskii's condemnation of "percent" in *Crime and Punishment* provides a representative example of the traditional humanistic critique. Dostoevskii objects to replacing a living human being with a statistic and masking the substitution with the seemingly neutral language of science.<sup>85</sup> In personalizing ethics of the novel, only concrete stories of human suffering can counteract the desensitizing effects of impersonal numbers.

Not so in Uspenskii. Uspenskii rejects the view of statistical abstractions as a threat to human capacity for compassion. In fact, as *Willy-Nilly* demonstrates, in Uspenskii's view, statistics is capable of inspiring stronger sympathy than stories of individual persons. The reason for such affective powers lies in statistics' ability to strip away the insignificant particulars of personal experience. The statistical tables move Tiapushkin more strongly than any story of individual plight because they are free of obtruding "particulars, trivialities, and details of life tribulations." What stirs him to action is not "the real groans and misfortunes," but the pain compressed "in a small digit, in which you can discern no individual human image or suffering."<sup>86</sup> Unsure of his own right to complain, deprived of dignity, self-respect and a sense of personal worth, Tiapushkin is unable "to feel the petty grief" (*melochnoe gore*) of others deeply and is even repelled by individuals' claims on his "human attention to their human needs, to human trivialities of their lives."<sup>87</sup> Evoking a favorite Dostoevskian theme of abstract love for abstract humanity but arguing against Dostoevskii, Tiapushkin suggests that such love is not

82. Uspenskii, "Chetvert' loshadi," in *Zhivye tsifry*, SS, 7:490. "Something told me that what stands before me is none other than a living statistical fraction," SS, 7:488.

83. Uspenskii, "Chetvert' loshadi," in *Zhivye tsifry*, SS, 7:486. The meaning of perevorot as an artistic epiphany is discussed by Bialyi, "Russkii realism," 526.

84. In recent years, Victorian studies have seen efforts to reassess this standard view of the novel's relationship to statistics and to show how statistical ways of thinking invade the novel, both thematically and structurally. See Audrey Jaffe, *The Affective Life of the Average Man: The Victorian Novel and the Stock-Market Graph* (Columbus, 2010); Emily Steinlight, "Dickens's Supernumeraries and the Biopolitical Imagination of Victorian Fiction," *Novel* 43, no. 2 (2010): 227–50; Michael Klotz, "Manufacturing Fictional Individuals: Victorian Social Statistics, the Novel, and *Great Expectations*," *Novel* 46, no. 2 (2013): 214–33.

85. Harriet Murav, *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky's Novels & the Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford, 1992), 58–59.

86. Uspenskii, "Vozmutitel'nyi sluchai v moei zhizni," in *Volei-nevolei*, SS, 6:78.

87. Uspenskii, "Vozmutitel'nyi sluchai v moei zhizni," in *Volei-nevolei*, SS, 6:78, 79.

merely a form of egotism and solipsism. For the “atrophied” Russian heart, disfigured and battered by the very course of Russian history, a love for the whole inspired by statistics that dissolves the individual person, may be the only form of love available.<sup>88</sup>

Uspenskii's appreciation of statistics, of its tropes, methods, and capaciousness of vision captures the spirit of Uspenskii's dissatisfaction with contemporary realism. This appreciation is the obverse side of his anxiety about the value of individual experience and about the novel as a vehicle of its affirmation. In transcending the particular, the individual, and the incidental, statistics embraced a type of comprehensiveness that Uspenskii believed was unavailable to the novel and that he strove to achieve in his own writings. As I've attempted to suggest in this paper, for Uspenskii, the search for a new optics was also a search for a new ethics. To the novel's hedonistic obsession with the individual and the particular he opposed an “ascetic” exploration of the typical and the general, which he redefined as the proper object of literary exploration.

Forty years later, commenting on the decline of the novel, Osip Mandel'shtam connected it to the weakening of “personality's stock in history.”<sup>89</sup> The triumph of historical forces over individual life has discredited the novel's long-standing interest in biography and psychology, thereby portending its end. Mandel'shtam might have been too pessimistic about the novel's resilience but his comments bring into focus the processes of the form's disintegration that are already discernible in Uspenskii. What Uspenskii's late works confirm is that a programmatic indifference to individual biography and psychology dictates a number of formal practices subversive of the conventions of his contemporary novel: from denigrating the role of detail to rejecting the contrivances of plot. The center of all subversions happens, however, at the level of character. In replacing the conception of individual character as a distinctive aggregation of features made visible by action, dialogue, commentary, and situation, with a repeatable nexus of social and historical factors common to all, Uspenskii not only moved away from the detailism, visuality, and psychological preoccupations and individualizing processes of the contemporary novel. He also staked a claim to a new, or rather recovered, understanding of the real. Uspenskii's unapologetic preference for the general and the universal over the particular and the concrete embraced realism's flagging commitment, moral as well as aesthetic, to represent not just the visible forms of life but, more crucially, the broad invisible forces shaping them.

In “Literature without a Plot,” Viktor Shklovsky put forth a conception of literary evolution as descent not along a straight line, from father to son, but along whimsical paths, from “uncle to nephew.”<sup>90</sup> Uspenskii's literary legacy

88. Uspenskii, “Vozmutitel'nyi sluchai v moei zhizni,” in *Volei-nevolei*, SS, 6:66, 67, 71. In an unpublished section of *Willy-Nilly*, Uspenskii directly alludes to Dostoevskii. Sokolov, G. I. *Uspenskii: zhizn' i tvorchestvo*, 239–40.

89. Osip Mandel'shtam, “Konets romana,” in *Sochineniia*, 2 vols. (Ekaterinburg, 2004), 656–62; quote on 658.

90. Viktor Shklovskii, “Literature without a Plot: Rozanov,” in his *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher, (McLean, 1990), 190.

offers a compelling illustration to Shklovsky's zigzagging evolution. His creative quest anticipates several distinct literary developments, from Tolstoi's crusade against bourgeois art in *What Is Art?*, to modernist revolts against realism's psychological preoccupations, to the anti-individualism of Soviet socialist realism. But no matter how we choose to see Uspenskii's place in relation to his literary heirs, his place in literary history is secured for him by the unquestionable originality of his vision. And while the ever self-doubting Uspenskii tended to regard this originality with mistrust, gloom, and anxiety, he remained uncompromisingly true to a deeply felt urgency to revitalize the culture's waning sense of what matters and what is real.