

Article

Gogol's "The Nose": Between Linguistic Indecency and Religious Blasphemy

Igor Pilshchikov ^{1,2} 

¹ Department of Slavic, East European and Eurasian Languages and Cultures, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90095, USA; pilshchikov@ucla.edu

² School of Humanities, Tallinn University, 10120 Tallinn, Estonia

Abstract: Focused on Nikolai Gogol's absurdist tale, "The Nose" (1835), this article is an investigation into the concealed representation of suppressed and marginalized libertine and anti-religious discourses in nineteenth-century Russian literature. The author identifies overlooked idiomatic phraseology, forgotten specificities of the Imperial hierarchy (the Table of Ranks), and allusions to religious customs and Christian rituals that would have been apparent to Gogol's readers and shows how some were camouflaged to escape censorship in successive drafts of the work. The research builds on the approaches to Gogol's language, imagery and plot developed earlier by the Russian Formalists, Tartu-Moscow semioticians, and a few other scholars, who revealed the latent obscenity of Gogol's "rhinology" and the sacrilegious meaning of the tale's very specific chronotope. The previous scholars' observations are substantially supplemented by original findings. An integrated analysis of these aspects in their mutual relationship is required to understand what the telling details of the story reveal about Gogol's religious and psychological crisis of the mid-1830s and to demonstrate how he aggregated indecent Shandyism, social satire, and religious blasphemy into a single quasi-oneiric narrative.



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1. Introduction

Encyclopedia Britannica presents Nikolai Gogol as "one of the finest comic authors of world literature, and perhaps its most accomplished nonsense writer" (Morson 1998, p. 1007). Gogol's reputation of a preacher of moral asceticism and a religious author is less felicitous. His final book, *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy*, attracts more attention now than it used to in the Soviet period, when it was not even included in the fourteen-volume edition of his complete works (for obvious ideological reasons). Nevertheless, *The Journal of the Moscow Patriarchy* expresses regret that "even today Gogol as a religious writer and spiritual thinker is little known to a broad readership" (JMP 2010, p. 87). Gogol always wanted to describe the best of the human soul but excelled in describing the worst. Although questions of morality and religion were always central to his thinking, his comic and satirical genius overshadowed his dubious achievements in practical theology (*Meditations*) and notorious failure as a moral teacher (*Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*). It is generally (and justly) believed that his worldview found a more adequate expression in his fiction rather than in his critical and instructional prose, and this explains why I selected Gogol's most grotesque and absurdist work to represent him in a volume on East Slavic religion(s), using *Meditations* only as a point of comparison in the last section of my analysis.

2. God and Devil in "The Nose"

Gogol's peculiar position between Russian and Ukrainian languages and mentalities (today somewhat anachronistically referred to as his "hybrid identity") simultaneously

represents two regions of the East Slavic world—"Great Russia" and "Little Russia", i.e., Imperial Russia and East Ukraine (Koropecykj and Romanchuk 2003; Bojanowska 2007; Ilchuk 2021; Lounsbery 2021, pp. 492–94). Post-Petrine Russia was a powerful but relatively recent and artificial formation (Saint Petersburg's "artificiality" was vividly experienced by both Gogol and his "Great Russian" contemporaries). "Little Russia", a Ukrainian and partly Russified area, was a liminal and borderline "contact zone" between the East Slavic and West Slavic worlds, as well as between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.¹

In 1831–1832 Gogol published his first collection of prose tales, *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* (in two volumes). This groundbreaking work, a combination of comic and supernatural elements drawing on Ukrainian folklore, resounded with the Romantic interest in local color and ethnic roots. It was an instant success. In *Evenings*, supernatural characters from folkloric demonology (devils and the like) are put on stage together with Ukrainian peasants (Holquist 1967; Putney 1999; Butler 2017). Gogol's vision of Saint Petersburg in his so-called "Petersburg Tales" (to which "The Nose" belongs) is different from how the city appears in works by Petersburgians or Muscovites—it reflects some distinctive aspects of his Ukrainian origins. For Gogol's narrator, the Russian capital remains "vaguely familiar but ultimately incomprehensible", just as are Ukrainian words and habits for his Russian readers (Koropecykj and Romanchuk 2003, p. 543).

On 10 December 1834, Gogol obtained the censor's permission to print his new book, *Arabesques*, a two-volume collection of tales and essays published soon thereafter, in January 1835. It features the first three "Petersburg Tales"—"Nevsky Prospect", "The Portrait", and "The Diary of a Madman." All three of these texts were substantially revised for the third volume of Gogol's works published in 1842. This volume, entitled *Povesti (Tales)*, opens with "Nevsky Prospect", which is followed by "The Nose", so that the former could be read as a sui generis introduction to the latter.

"The Nose" came down to us in three successive redactions (this count does not include the earliest one-page draft of 1832): the first complete manuscript redaction (1833–1834), the first published version (1836), and the censored definitive redaction (1842). The uncensored definitive version never existed materially in Gogol's lifetime, being a later critical reconstruction. The text we are using today is a critical text published in the third volume (1938) of the 14-volume academic edition (Gogol 1937–1952). It mainly reproduces the 1842 redaction, in which, however, the censored passages are restored on the basis of the manuscript redaction and some editorial interventions of the 1842 text are eliminated and replaced by the more authentic 1836 version. Other critical editions mostly follow the 1842 publication and make less use of the manuscript variants.

Like *Evenings*, the "Petersburg Tales" also combine descriptions of local communities, landscape, and cityscape ("estranged" by the gaze of a provincial newcomer) with elements of the comic absurd and surrealistic grotesque, but they do not feature bearers of a folkloric worldview whose mythological vision might motivate the routine presence of the "uncanny" in everyday life. Yuri Mann showed that in the tales of the Petersburg cycle, various latent or implicit fantastic elements evident in details of the characters' everyday life and behavior—or even in the language they or the narrator use—are a substitute for the folk demonology of Gogol's early stories. Mann referred to this discursive strategy as "the omission of the exponent of the fantastic [*sniatie nositel'ia fantastiki*]" (Mann 1973, 1996, pp. 76–91; Cornwell 1990, pp. 19–20; Bocharov 1992, p. 23; Meyer 1999).

To make this point clear, consider a brief summary of "The Nose."

The tale consists of three chapters. In Chapter I, the barber Ivan Yakovlevich, a terrible drunkard, wakes up in the morning and finds a human nose in a loaf of freshly baked bread. When he tries to get rid of the nose by throwing it in the river, he is caught by a policeman. "But here the event is completely covered by a fog, and absolutely nothing is known about what happened next" (III: 52/201). In Chapter II, a certain Major Kovalyov, whom Ivan Yakovlevich had shaved a day or two before, wakes up in the morning to find his nose missing. Later, he unexpectedly encounters his own nose, dressed as a

high-ranking official, on Saint Petersburg's Nevsky Prospect. Kovalyov follows the nose to the city's main cathedral, where he sees it/him "praying with an expression of the greatest piety" (III: 55/204). The nose disappears again, and Kovalyov searches for it/him around Saint Petersburg—but in vain. A policeman later appears unexpectedly and restores Kovalyov's nose to its rightful owner, explaining that it was apprehended at the border while attempting to flee abroad. Kovalyov tries to reattach his nose, but it does not stick. "Following this... but here again the whole event is hidden by a fog, and absolutely nothing is known about what happened then" (III: 72/223). In Chapter III, Kovalyov wakes up in the morning to find his nose back in its proper place. The narrator is astonished: "No, I can't understand this at all, I absolutely do not understand!" But "no matter what you say, such events do happen in the world—they happen rarely, but they do happen" (III: 75/227).

The personified supernatural forces no longer interfere with the action. They are, as it were, present in the background and break through from there into everyday phraseology. When Kovalyov tries to explain the tale's events to himself, he stops, embarrassed: "By what means, by what fates did this occur? Only the devil can figure it out!" (III: 71/222).²

The word used for the devil is *chort*. This word denotes a minor devil or demon and is never applied to Satan (*satana*), who can also be called Diabolus (*diavol*, from the Greek διάβολος)³ but not *chort*.⁴ Unlike the English translations of Gogol, the original text is always quite explicit as to who is mentioned: Devil or the devil. The former is a rare guest in everyday life, whereas the latter is always nearby and ready to interfere.

"The Nose" is notable for its characters' instantaneous and seemingly unmotivated transitions from swearing by God (*bozhba*) to swearing by the devil (*chertykhanie*). The basic verbs for these verbal nouns are *bozhit'sia*, from *bog* 'god,' and *chertykhat'sia*, from *chort*. The permanent verbal mixture of the sacred and the demonic (Lachmann 1999, p. 22; Zyrianov 2009, p. 132–33; Kondakova 2009, p. 139) becomes an iconic depiction of the struggle between the two driving forces of the human world. In the uncensored critical edition of the definitive version of the tale (1842), *chort* is mentioned eleven times, whereas *Bog* is mentioned ten times (this includes the archaic vocative case *Bozhe* but excludes the adjective *nabozhnyi* ("pious") and the noun *nabozhnost'* ("piety") of the same root, which are used twice, i.e., once each.) The first complete manuscript redaction (1833–1834) featured five instances of *chort* and eight instances of *Bog/Bozhe* (plus *nabozhnyi* and *nabozhnost'*). Therefore, in the definitive version, the balance of forces is symmetrical because both sides are equally represented (pace Meyer 1999, p. 201).⁵

Moreover, *bozhba* and *chertykhanie* succeed each other on a regular basis. "The devil knows how this happened. [. . .] I can't understand it at all!" the barber says to himself (III: 50/199), and soon he swears to the policeman: "Honest to God, sir, [. . .] I was just looking to see whether the river was running fast" (III: 52/201).⁶ Kovalyov is talking to himself in front of the mirror:

"Well, thank God nobody's here," he said. "Now I can take a look." He went timidly up to the mirror and took a look: "The devil only knows! What rubbish!" he said, and spat. "If only there were something instead of my nose, but there's nothing!" (III: 54/203)

"Oh, the devil take it!" says Kovalyov and decides to drive to the chief of police (III: 57/207). However, he is afraid that "all searching would be in vain or could take a whole month, God forbid. Finally, it seemed that heaven itself made him see the light" and gave him an idea to go to the newspaper office instead (III: 58/208). It smells bad there, but Kovalyov cannot experience the scent "because his nose itself was in God knows what locality" (III: 60/209).⁷ However, he is scared to reveal his name because the rumor might reach his female acquaintances: "What if they find out, God forbid!" (III: 60/210). After that, he explains the situation to the clerk: "The devil wanted to play a trick on me!" (III: 60/210). The clerk does not believe him but Kovalyov exclaims: "I swear to you, as God is my witness!" (III: 62/211; literally: "as God is holy", Gogol 1998, p. 313). At the end of the visit, the clerk offers him snuff; Kovalyov indignantly replies: "Do you really not see that

the thing I would need for sniffing is precisely what I don't have? *The devil take your snuff!*" (III: 63/213). These are just "words, words, words", but phraseology plays a salient role in Gogol's plot-construction. As we shall see, the entire plot of "The Nose" can be understood as a "realization" of several idiomatic metaphors.⁸

The characters and the narrator explain the antilogism of what is happening through the intervention of the devil. However, the author does not want to simply present all the events as "devil's shenanigans", a device he previously used in the folklore-inflected Ukrainian stories. Quasi-explanations do not help, and the devil slips away: "*the devil knows*" is a dysphemism for "*God knows*", and, furthermore, both expressions mean that no one in the human world knows or understands what is going on.

Yuri Mann thus comments on Kovalyov's phrase "*The devil wanted to play a trick on me!*" (III: 60/210): "Because of its routine, 'mundane' coloring, the phrase balances on the verge of the verbal-image form of the fantastic and of ordinary everyday speech" (Mann 1996, p. 77). Tellingly, in the early manuscript redaction, the infernality, which in the definitive version would be veiled by the conventional colloquialism, was emphasized and highlighted: "It was Satan-Diabolus himself [*sam satana-diavol*] who wanted to play a trick on me!" (III: 393). When the nose returns to its place, Kovalyov exclaims twice: "Good, the devil take it!" (III: 73, 74/224, 226), as if invoking the point when the devil—perhaps—took his nose indeed.

In the fourth letter apropos *Dead Souls* (1846) included in *Selected Passages*, Gogol explicitly described *samonadeiannost'* (arrogance, conceit, or presumption) as self-estrangement or a split in man, when one of his parts escapes from the other (just like it happens in "The Nose"). There is no question where this escape leads: "he runs away from himself straight into the hands of the devil, the father of presumption" (VIII: 298; Gogol 2009, p. 109; Bocharov 1992, p. 32). In this way, the realized metaphor of the Nose's running off indicates not so much absurdity as sin.

3. Nosology as Rhinology: Noses in Russian Idioms and in Gogol's Tale

3.1. The Problem: Why Is "The Nose" "Filthy"?

Devilry, either metaphorical or real, is accompanied by other abnormalities.

Initially, Gogol prepared "The Nose" for publication in the just-launched magazine *Moskovsky Nabliudatel'* (*The Moscow Observer*) where his friends and admirers Stepan Shevryyov and Mikhail Pogodin played leading roles. Pogodin received a manuscript from the author in March 1835. However, according to the critic Vissarion Belinsky, who became an unofficial editor of this magazine a few years later, the editorial board rejected the tale "because of its banality and triviality" (Belinskii 1955, p. 504). The word "triviality" (*trivial'nost'*) could have a more specific meaning at that time and refer to frivolous vulgarity.⁹ In another account of why "The Nose" was not published in *The Moscow Observer*, Belinsky writes that the editorial board "found it filthy [*griaznaia*, literally: 'dirty']" (ibid., pp. 406–07). Apparently, the *Moscow Observer* Slavophiles rejected the tale because of the indecent associations it exploited. Another prominent Slavophile, Konstantin Aksakov, wrote of "The Nose" in 1836: "This jest has its merit but it is indeed somewhat bawdy [*nemnozhko sal'na*, literally: 'a little bit greasy']" (Lanskoi 1952, p. 550). Unlike Aksakov and Pogodin, Pushkin, who had no issue with ambiguities and profanities, published "The Nose" in his magazine *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*) in September 1836, preceded by an editor's note:

N. V. Gogol has objected to the printing of this jest for a long time; but we found in it so much that was unexpected, fantastic, merry, and original that we persuaded him to allow us to share with the public the enjoyment afforded us by his manuscript. (Gogol 1836, p. 54; quoted in Setchkarev 1965, p. 155)

What are then the associations that so displeased Pogodin and Aksakov, but did not at all disturb Pushkin? To find an answer, we need to take a closer look at the phraseology of the noun "nose" (*nos*) in the Russian language and specifically in the language of Gogol.

3.2. “The Nose” as a “Linguistic Metaphor”

In a book-length essay on Gogol, Vladimir Nabokov devoted a few eloquent pages both to Gogol’s nose and to the nasal motifs in Gogol. “His big sharp nose was of such length and mobility that in the days of his youth he had been able [. . .] to bring its tip and his underlip in ghoulish contact; this nose was his keenest and most essential outer part” (Nabokov [1944] 1961, p. 3). Gogol’s nose was remembered by his contemporaries: Mikhail Longinov described as “thin and crooked”, Ivan Turgenev—as “long and pointed”, and Ivan Panaev—as “gaunt, long and sharp, like the beak of a bird of prey” (Mashinskii 1952, pp. 70, 532; Veresaev 1933, p. 216). Gogol also called his nose “decisively avian [or ‘bird-like’: *ptichii*], pointed and long” (IX: 25). The quotation is from an entry in Elizabeth Chertkova’s album (May 1836), which did not escape the attention of the “nosologists” from Viktor Vinogradov ([1921] 1929, pp. 36–37) to Vladimir Nabokov ([1944] 1961, p. 3). Gogol used the same prose in his letter to Maria Balabina of 15 March 1838, written in Italian (a language Gogol knew well): “il mio naso, lungo e simile a quello degli uccelli” [“this nose of mine, long and similar to a bird’s”] (XI: 127). The reference to a bird is, above all, a pun: the Ukrainian and Russian *gogol’* designates *Bucephala clangula*, a bird of the genus of diving ducks. As a hint or a devil-like cameo, Gogol’s Kovalyov insists that “without a nose a person is the devil knows what: *not a bird*, not a citizen” (III: 64/214; see also Gregg 1981, pp. 375–76).

Nabokov noted the presence of “the nasal leitmotiv” throughout Gogol’s fiction: “Noses drip, noses twitch, noses are lovingly or roughly handled” (Nabokov [1944] 1961, p. 3). Below I cite a few verbal portraits from *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* and the “Petersburg Tales”, which anticipate their combination and culmination in “The Nose”.

A “barber who tyrannically holds his victim by the nose” (I: 215/105)—a figure that suddenly appears as part of an extended simile in “The Night Before Christmas” (1831)—portends the character of Ivan Yakovlevich, the barber from “The Nose”, who was holding Kovalyov by his nose while shaving him and then found the nose in a loaf of bread.

The motif of the nose’s “perversity” and “insolence” (II: 253/194–95) is found in “The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich” (1833): “The judge’s lips were close under his nose, and the nose could sniff his upper lip to his [or *its*? The original is ambiguous.—*IP*] heart’s content. This upper lip served him [or *it*? The original is ambiguous again.—*IP*] instead of a snuffbox” (II: 245/188, translation slightly modified). At one moment,

[the judge’s] nose unconsciously sniffed his upper lip, which it commonly did only from great satisfaction. Such perversity on the part of his nose caused the judge even more vexation: he took out his handkerchief and swept from his upper lip all the snuff, to punish its insolence. (II: 253/194–95)

In “Nevsky Prospect” (1834), the drunken shoemaker Hoffmann is going to cut the nose of the drunken tinsmith Schiller, who exclaims: “I do not want it, I do not need a nose!” and insists: “Cut my nose off! Here’s my nose!” (III: 37–38/143–44).¹⁰ In “The Diary of a Madman” (1834), the protagonist believes that the moon “is such a tender orb that people cannot live there, and only noses live now. And for that very same reason we cannot see our noses, for they are all located on the moon” (III: 212/178).¹¹ Osip Senkovsky (Józef Julian Sekowski), a Polish-born Russian critic, journalist and writer, in his derisive review of *Dead Souls* mocked at Gogol’s predilection for noses:

“Tell me, by grace, [. . .] why does the nose play such an enduring role here? The whole poem pivots on nothing but noses!” —“Because,” I reply as the poem’s insightful commentator, “the nose is perhaps the foremost source of ‘sublime, excited, lyrical laughter’.” —“I, however, can’t see anything funny in it,” you protest.—“You can’t but we can,” I argue back. “You must agree that this triangular piece of flesh which stands prominently in the center of man’s face is surprisingly, excitedly, lyrically funny. And it has already been proved that you

can't create anything truly amusing without a nose. (Senkovskii 1842, p. 37; also quoted in Vinogradov 1926, p. 151)

In the manuscript version of the review, these interlocutors are an ass and a camel (Senkovskii 1936, p. 240); therefore, their speculations about the disproportions of a human face are “estranged” by their animal nature. Whatever Senkovsky's intentions were when he was writing this (see Debreczeny 1966), he was right: Gogol's works abound in various idiomatic expressions with the word *nose* as well as related images, which often are comic and hyperbolic. Compare: “In fact, for a villager like me to poke his nose [*vysunut' nos*] out of his hole into the great world [. . .]” (I: 103/3); “If you, messieurs colonels, do not know your own rights, then let the devil lead you around by the nose [*chort vodit za nos*]” (II: 284); “To think that I'd let any old hussy hoity-toit around before me with her turned-up snub nose in the air! [*podymat' . . . nos svoi*]” (V: 125); “He'll spread so much nonsense around town I won't be able to show my face [literally, ‘nose’: *nosa pokazat'*] anywhere” (V: 134; more examples in Pilshchikov 2019).

Yuri Tynianov considered the Nose in “The Nose” as a “linguistic metaphor” “realized as a mask”, a device found not only in Gogol's literary texts, but also in his letters (Tynianov [1921] 2019, p. 32). In April 1838, Gogol wrote to Maria Balabina (this time in Russian):

Do you believe that I often have a fierce desire to turn into nothing but a nose—so that there would be nothing else—neither eyes, nor arms, nor legs, just one super-tremendous nose the nostrils of which would be the size of big buckets so that I could inhale as much of the fragrance and spring as possible? (XI: 144; Gogol 1967, pp. 74–75; Shukman 1989, pp. 81–82 fn. 43)

There are many such examples in Gogol's correspondence, although not always as detailed and extensive. I cite only the most eloquent ones, focusing primarily on potential parallels to the idioms relevant to “The Nose” (for the full list of these idioms in the Russian language, see Lubensky 2013, pp. 361–65, idioms from H-216 to H-249).

Showing one's nose, that is “going out”, as in “X doesn't show his face/nose anywhere”: “But now I've gotten so terribly afflicted that I cannot show my nose anywhere [*nikuda ne mogu nosa pokazat'*]”. (X: 317)

Compare Kovalyov, who cannot go out because he literally cannot show his nose anywhere.

Not seeing farther than one's nose, that is “being narrow-minded”: “. . . who cannot see anything [*nichego ne vidit*] farther than his German nose [*dalee svoego . . . nosa*] and his merchantry”. (X: 341)

Compare Kovalyov, who is always preoccupied with his nose and his rank and who is not interested in anything but his nose when it escaped; also compare his Nose, which/who embodies all his career dreams (see Section 4 below).

Sticking one's nose in the air, or *turning up one's nose*, that is “behaving arrogantly”, as in “X turns up his nose at everyone”: “Believe me, every human is a wader-bird [*kulik*], and if he sticks his nose up then his tail necessarily gets dunked. And so it must be, so that he not turn up his nose [at everyone] too much [*ne slishkom podymal svoego nosa*] and always bear in mind that he is mere rubbish”. (XII: 326)

Kovalyov is indeed a kind of person who acts high and mighty, as discussed in Section 3 below.

Leading someone by one's nose, that is “deceiving”: “. . . [to find out] who leads others by the nose [*vodit za nos*], who is just making fools of them [*durachit*], and who has or can have influence on them”. (XII: 409)

Perhaps the devil does this with Kovalyov, as Kovalyov thinks.

Gogol's letters contain examples of a synecdoche in which the nose is detached from the rest of the body: “. . . only my nose [*odin tol'ko nos moi*, literally: ‘my nose alone’] reached Frankfurt” (XII: 462), as well as a synecdoche in which the nose substitutes for

human beings: “... my own nose [*moi sobstvennyi nos*] might stick out [*vysunut'sia*] in *Dead Souls*, instead of people” (XIII: 280; quoted in Gippius [1924] 1989, p. 164). More examples are easy to find (see Pilshchikov 2019).

3.3. A Nose as a Phallus

Nabokov notes that Gogol's “nose-consciousness resulted at last in the writing of a story, *The Nose*, which is verily a hymn to that organ. A Freudian might suggest that in Gogol's topsy-turvy world human beings are turned upside down [...], so that the part of the nose is played by some other organ and vice-versa” (Nabokov [1944] 1961, p. 4). Such a Freudian really existed—it was Ivan Yermakov (also transliterated as Ermakov), the author of psychoanalytic analyses of Pushkin, Gogol, and Dostoevsky. His foreword to a separate edition of “The Nose” was published in 1921, and his *Essays in the Analysis of Gogol's Oeuvre*, which contain a chapter on “The Nose”, came out in 1924.¹²

According to Yermakov, the nose in Gogol's texts is a phallic symbol, so the fear of losing the nose symbolizes the fear of castration. In addition, “the polysemantic meaning of the nose-symbol” “indicat[es]—in witticisms, jokes and ambiguities—both the sex organ and the act of defecation” (Yermakov [1924] 1974, pp. 194, 166). For a later Freudian critic, “The Nose” is “a satirical comic fantasy born of an impotence complex” (Spycher 1963, p. 361). On the contrary, Simon Karlinsky did not find any sexual and psychological implications in “The Nose”, except Kovalyov's active unwillingness to marry, which is quite common among Gogol's characters (Karlinsky 1976, pp. 129–30). For Daniel Rancour-Laferrriere, “the nose of ‘The Nose’ is merely phallic” and “fail[s] to partake of a double psychoanalytic symbolism” (Rancour-Laferrriere 1982, p. 192; original emphasis).

I do not tackle here the complex issue of Gogol's sexuality and its reflection in his works. This theme requires serious research, and most of the earlier works on this topic are methodologically outdated and factually inaccurate. Perhaps Nabokov was right when he warned against excessive psychologism and urged “to treat Gogol's olfactivism—and even his own nose—as a literary trick allied to the broad humor of carnivals in general and to Russian nose-humor in particular” (Nabokov [1944] 1961, p. 4). Two decades earlier Vinogradov explained, as if in passing, that this sort of humor was based on “the semantics of the ‘rhinological’ calembour innuendos implied the ancient omen that remained popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries”, i.e., the omen that links “the size of the nose to men's dignity” (Vinogradov [1921] 1929, pp. 25 fn. 1, 34 fn. 2).

Elsewhere Vinogradov wrote: “Under the banner of ‘Shandyism’ on the canvas of the Romantic fantastic, Gogol marked out ‘dirty’ patterns, using [...] popular anecdotes surrounded by less than modest associations” (Vinogradov [1925] 1987, p. 79). *Shandyism* refers to Lawrence Sterne's novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, the third volume of which contains three chapters (XXXI–XXXIII in the first edition) that play on the obscene connotations associated with the nose. They are written as an explanation of the protagonist's great-grandmother's statement: “you have little or no nose, Sir” (Sterne 1761, pp. 145, 149). The narrator warns the readers with comic gravity:

For by the word *Nose*, throughout all this long chapter of noses, and in every other part of my work, where the word *Nose* occurs,—I declare, by that word I mean a Nose, and nothing more, or less. (Sterne 1761, p. 149; original emphasis)

“The gentle obscenity of this passage was quite likely to amuse both Pushkin and Gogol (both rather uninhibited in their letters),” Vsevolod Setchkarev commented (Setchkarev 1965, p. 156).

In his celebrated book on Rabelais, Mikhail Bakhtin found a correlation between the “supposition prevalent in those days even among physicians that the size of the phallus could be surmised by the size of the nose” and the fact that “in both classical and medieval grotesque the nose had usually this link with the phallus”, and, moreover, “that it always symbolizes phallus” (Bakhtin [1965] 1968, pp. 86–87, 316; translation slightly modified). He also mentioned that the phallus is “predominantly subject to positive exaggeration, to hyperbolization”, so that it can “even detach [itself] from the body and lead an independent

life”, and “the nose can also in a way detach itself from the body” (ibid., p. 317). However, when Bakhtin contrasted the elements of “folk humor” in Rabelais and Gogol, he refused to recognize any hint of the nose–phallus inversion in Gogol’s tale, even after he linked “the most grotesque nose, which strove for an independent existence”, with both Sterne’s tradition and the tradition of “Ukrainian folk-festival” forms of art (Bakhtin [1975] 1976, pp. 285, 288). Meanwhile, in Russian popular prints (*lubok*), the nose also acts both as a metaphor for the phallus and as an independent character. Apparently, Gogol was not unaware of these metaphors and associations (Dilaktorskaia 1984, pp. 162–63; Pletnyova 2003). An allusion to a phallus is particularly obvious in the first, one-page draft of the tale. When the barber finds a nose in the loaf of bread, the finding is described as having phallic qualities: “Ivan Fedorovich [a character to be renamed into Ivan Yakovlevich in the next redaction—IP] broke the bread and what a surprise it was for him when he saw a nose there. It was a male nose, quite strong and thick . . . [*Nos muzhskoi, dovol’no krepkoi i tolsty*]” (III: 380).

The idioms built on the metaphorical and metonymic use of the word *nose*—either those actually used in the text or even just implied by the context—play a pivotal role in creating an atmosphere of frivolous ambiguity. These idioms include: *drat’/podnimat’ nos* (“to stick one’s nose in the air”), *ne videt’ dal’she svoego nosa* (“to be unable to see beyond one’s nose”), *pokazat’ nos* (“to show one’s nose [face] somewhere”), *vodit’ za nos* (“to lead someone by the nose”), *ostavit’ s nosom* (literally “to leave someone with a nose”, i.e., “to leave someone empty-handed”), *byt’/ostat’sia s nosom* (“to be/to be left with a nose”, i.e., “to be left empty-handed”), *ostat’sia bez nosa* (“to be left without a nose”, i.e., “to lose the nose as a consequence of syphilis”).¹³ Pushkin played on the parallelism of the two last idioms in an epigram of the early 1820s aptly noted by Vinogradov ([1921] 1929, p. 25):

Lechis’—il’ byt’ tebe Panglosom,
Ty zhertva vrednoi krasoty —
I to-to, bratets, budesh’ s nosom,
Kogda bez nosa budesh’ ty. (Pushkin 1937–1949, vol. 2.1, p. 206)

Literally: “Get treatment, otherwise you will become a Pangloss,/you are a victim of harmful beauty,/and thus you surely will be ‘with the nose’/when you find yourself without one” (the translation of the two last lines is Erlich (1969, p. 86); Pangloss, a philosopher in Voltaire’s *Candide*, suffered from syphilis).¹⁴

Mikhail Lermontov used the same device in 1837 in a brief epigram on a deceived syphilitic:

Ostat’sia bez nosu—nash Makkavei boialsia,
Priekhal na vody—i s nosom on ostalsia.
(Lermontov 2014, p. 285)

Literally: “Our Maccabee¹⁵ feared finding himself without a nose./He came to the mineral waters for treatment and was left ‘with a nose’”. (see Okhotin’s commentary in Lermontov 2014, p. 605–6).

Nikita Okhotin has shared a few other similar examples from Russian literature with me (private communication). The first text to introduce this phraseological parallelism in Russia may have been an epigram that Viazemsky attributed to Denis Davydov, a poet-hussar and violator of all decorums:

Vozvratu tvoemu s pokhoda vsiak divitsia:
Kak bez nosu poiti, a s nosom vozvratit’sia?
(Viazemskii 1893, p. 492)

Literally: “Everyone is surprised by your return from the military campaign:/How could you leave without a nose and return with one?”

The memoirist Aleksandr Galakhov reports a pun by the famous vaudeville writer and actor Dmitry Lensky (dated the mid-1840s): “in married life, it is better to be ‘with a nose’ than without one [*v brachnoi zhizni luchshe byt’ s nosom, chem bez nosa*]” (Galakhov 1886, p. 187).

Last, but definitely not least, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky devotes almost two pages to the pun under discussion (Vinogradov [1921] 1929, p. 71; Martinsen 2004, pp. 59–60). The passage that crowns the literary tradition of Russian rhinological puns is found in Chapter 9 of Book 11, entitled “The Devil [Chort]. Ivan Fyodorovich’s Nightmare.” The existing translations render the wordplay only approximately—the idioms “to get one’s nose pulled” (Constance Garnett) or “to put someone’s nose out of joint” (David Magarshack; Julius Katzer; Pevear and Volokhonsky) are used instead of *ostat’sia s nosom*:¹⁶

“My friend,” the visitor observed sententiously, “it’s sometimes better to have your nose put out of joint than to have no nose at all [*s nosom vse zhe luchshe otoiti, chem inogda sovsem bez nosa*], as one afflicted marquis (he must have been treated by a specialist) uttered not long ago in confession to his Jesuit spiritual director. I was present—it was just lovely. “Give me back my nose!” he said, beating his breast. “My son,” the priest hedged, “[...] If a harsh fate has deprived you of your nose, your profit is that now for the rest of your life no one will dare tell you that you have had your nose put out of joint [*chto vy ostalis’ s nosom*].” “Holy father, that’s no consolation!” the desperate man exclaimed. “On the contrary, I’d be delighted to have my nose put out of joint [*ostavat’sia s nosom*] every day of my life, if only it were where it belonged [*na nadlezhashchem meste*, literally, ‘on its proper place’]!” “My son,” the priest sighed, “[...] if you cry, as you have just cried, that you would gladly have your nose put out of joint [*ostavat’sia s nosom*] for the rest of your life, in this your desire has already been fulfilled indirectly; for, having lost your nose, you have thereby, as it were, had your nose put out of joint all the same [*poteriav nos, vy tem samym vse zhe kak by ostalis’ s nosom*] ...” (Dostoevskii 1976, pp. 80–81; Dostoevsky 1991, p. 646)

In light of these persistent associations, the opening paragraph of the second chapter of “The Nose” sounds far from innocuous: “Collegiate Assessor Kovalyov jumped up from the bed and shook himself: There was no nose!” (III: 53/201). Kovalyov tried to explain the problem to the Nose when he met it/him:

You must agree that it is improper for me to walk around without a nose. [...] with plans to obtain ... and moreover being acquainted with ladies in many homes: Mrs. Chekharyova, the wife of a state councillor, and others ... [...] Forgive me ... if one looks at this in conformity with the rules of duty and honor ... you yourself can understand ... (III: 56/205)

However, the Nose refuses to understand the allusions in the best tradition of Sternean literature: “I understand absolutely nothing,” the Nose answered. “Express yourself in a more satisfactory manner” (III: 56/205). A similar ambiguity arises when Kovalyov attempts to explain himself in the newspaper office: “I have many acquaintances: Chekharyova, the wife of a state councillor, Palageya Grigoryevna Podtochina, the wife of a staff officer ... What if they find out, God forbid!” (III, 60/210). Both the narrator and the characters constantly talk about the indecency of not having a nose but never directly refer to the reason. Advertising the absence of a nose in a newspaper is, for instance, “unseemly, it’s awkward, it’s not good!” (III, 75/226); or, in another translation, “it is indecent, inept, injudicious!” (Gogol 1998, p. 325). The police commissioner is absolutely sure “that a respectable man would not have had his nose torn off, and that there are all kinds of majors in the world who don’t even keep their underwear in a seemly condition and who hang around in indecent places” (III: 63–64/213–14). The narrator fully agrees with the commissioner: “That hit him right between the eyes!” (III: 64/214; the Russian phrase “*ne v brov’, a (priamo) v glaz*”—literally: “not in the brow but (right) in the eye”—means “exactly, precisely, absolutely right”).

Finally, Kovalyov writes an indignant letter to Podtochina, suspecting her of having stolen his nose in order to make him marry her daughter (*sic!*). In her reply, Podtochina changes the topic by referring to a more innocent idiom “*ostavit’ vas s nosom*”, literally: “to leave you with a nose”, i.e., “to leave you empty-handed” (Slonimskii [1923] 1974, pp. 359–60; Erlich 1969, p. 86; Peace 1981, p. 139):

You also mention a nose. If you mean by this that I wished to lead you around by the nose [The idiom in the original reads “*ostavit’ vas s nosom*.”—IP] that is, to give you a formal refusal, I am amazed that you yourself are saying that, when I, as you well know, was of the exact opposite opinion, and if you are now asking in a legitimate fashion for my daughter’s hand in marriage, I am prepared this very minute to give you satisfaction, for this has always been the object of my most keen desire. (III: 71/221–22)

Thus, Gogol plays on the same parallelism of idiomatic phrases as Pushkin, Lermontov, and others (compare Budagov 1953, pp. 26–27).

The first redaction of the tale finished with explicit erotic overtones:

“Hey, Ivan!”—“What would you like, sir?”—“What, wasn’t there a girl, a very pretty one, asking for Major Kovalyov?”—“No, sir!”—“Hmm!” said Major Kovalyov and looked in the mirror, smiling. (III: 399)

Noses are in one way or another associated with the erotic and matrimonial theme both in the definitive redaction of “The Nose” (Shukman 1989, pp. 76–77) and in Gogol’s other works. In *The Marriage*, Agafia Tikhonovna’s main flaw is her long nose (this theme is particularly emphasized in the first redaction of the comedy). The ladies of the town of N. discover the same flaw in Chichikov’s appearance (*Dead Souls*, chap. IX): “People have been spreading rumors that he’s handsome, but he’s not handsome at all, not handsome at all, and his nose . . . a most unpleasant nose . . . » (VI: 182; Gogol 2004, p. 206). The extended metaphorical pun in the tale of the two Ivans is especially noteworthy:

I must admit I do not understand why it has been ordained that women should take us by the nose as easily as they take hold of the handle of a teapot: either their hands are so created or our noses are fit for nothing better. (II: 241/184)

Last but not least, the parallel between the nose and the phallus in “The Nose” is supported by the latent obscene phraseology. The climax of the story of how Kovalyov discovered the absence of the most important part in his face is his exclamation: “If only there were something instead of my nose, but there’s nothing! [*a to nichego!*]” (III: 54/203). The main dysphemism for *nichego* (“nothing”) in Russian is *ni-khuyá* (“nothing”; literally, “not a prick”) (Dahl and Baudouin de Courtenay 1903–1909, vol. 4, p. 1244). This kind of dysphemization started to flourish in the twentieth century, but *ni-khuyá* and *né-khuy(a)*, which stand for *nichego* and *néchego* (both meaning “nothing”), belong to some of the earliest documented examples of obscene dysphemisms. They are found in obscene folklore proverbs collected by the lexicographer Vladimir Dahl (also transliterated as Dal’) and folklorist Alexander Afanasyev in the middle of the nineteenth century (Afanas’ev 1997, pp. 498, 505, 525, 585; Carey 1972, p. 59, 97; see (Pilshchikov forthcoming) for details and analysis). *Khuya* is the genitive case of *khui*, the main Russian obscene term for the phallus. Kovalyov’s “nothing” sounds like a euphemism of this dysphemism, so that the phallus (*khui*) almost sticks out on the surface of the tale’s text—but eventually it does not, and its narrative non-appearance iconically depicts its absence.

4. How the Table of Ranks Brought the Nose to the Kazan Cathedral

4.1. “The Nose” as a Cornerstone of the “Petersburg Text”

The setting of the tale is not so much the anthropologically authentic description of capital-city life as the mythopoetic space of the “Petersburg Text” of Russian literature, which Vladimir Toporov discovered and described in a series of studies (from the inaugural programmatic manifesto Toporov 1984 to the posthumous compendium Toporov 2009). Toporov credits Pushkin and Gogol as the “initiators” of this “synthetic hypertext”

and Dostoevsky as its “ingenious designer”; Gogol’s “Petersburg Tales” are named as a foundational oeuvre, one that strongly influenced other writers, including Dostoevsky (Toporov 1984, pp. 14–15; compare Lotman 1990, p. 195). Despite its specific temporal situatedness, the urban text becomes, at a deeper layer of analysis, ahistorical, like a myth (Kalinin 2010). Toporov compared this to Propp’s vision of the magic folktale: every tale is a different tale, but each realizes a different variant of the same invariable plot or its part; similarly, every “Petersburg tale” (Pushkin’s, Gogol’s, etc.) can be read as a variant of the “Petersburg Text” (Toporov 1984, p. 17 fn. 17).¹⁷

The intrinsic features of the reinvented Saint Petersburg as represented in the “Petersburg Text” are its duality, ambiguity, artificiality, fictitiousness, and illusoriness (Toporov 1984, pp. 4, 6, 12, 25–26, 2009, pp. 644, 657, 665–66, 676–77, 682, 711; Lotman 1990, p. 196). Saint Petersburg is “artificial” because it is not an old city formed that took shape over centuries in a “natural” way, but a new one, which the Tsar created by decree in 1703 (Toporov 1984, p. 12 fn. 12; Lotman 1990, p. 194). The duality of Saint Petersburg was determined from the very beginning: it was envisaged as the city of Saint Peter but realized as a willful and arbitrary creation of Peter the Great (Bocharov 2009, p. 13). This fundamental ambiguity underlies Saint Petersburg’s “foundational myth” and is thus at the core of the “Petersburg Text.” The dualism of the sacral and the profane is even reflected in the name of the city (ibid.): in colloquial Russian, the city is never called by the full name “Saint Petersburg” but always shortened to “Petersburg” or the even more unceremonious “Piter.” In such a city, the secular is constantly substituted for the sacred, and the secular itself is ambiguous because the city is simultaneously treated as terrestrial “paradise”, “the embodiment of Reason”, and as “the terrible masquerade of the Antichrist” (Lotman 1990, p. 194). This ambiguity is a leitmotif in all the “Petersburg Tales”, including “The Nose.” Moreover, Gogol always emphasizes the evil and infernal aspect of the city:

In “The Nose”, just as in the other “Petersburg Tales”, the main object of description is the satanic city taken in the confluence of both of its symbolic functions—secular (the brainchild of Peter the Great) and ecclesiastical (the city of the Apostle Peter), the latter being embodied in the Kazan Cathedral (which is, as is known, stylized as Saint Peter’s Basilica). (Weiskopf 1993, pp. 236–37)

The Kazan Cathedral, the ex officio church of the Imperial family and Saint Petersburg’s de facto Mother Church in 1811–1858, with its colonnade—a replica of Lorenzo Bernini’s Colonnade of Vatican’s San Pietro—is the point where the Nose’s earthly career reaches its zenith. Like all of Saint Petersburg, its main cathedral also embodies both the sacred and the secular hierarchy, and the Nose putting in an appearance there makes a travesty of both. The secular hierarchy was then represented by the Table of Ranks, a system of correspondence between the military, civilian, and court ranks that was introduced by Peter I in 1722. In Imperial Russia, not only the military hierarchy but also the court and administrative hierarchies were visually reinforced by the corresponding dress uniforms worn by everyone serving in these hierarchies. This layer of representation was so important that the monarchs themselves personally reviewed the designs for every institution’s uniforms (see Shepelyov 1991). The Table of Ranks, the dress uniforms, and the Kazan Cathedral all play a conspicuous role in “The Nose.”

4.2. A Collegiate Assessor or a Major?

For the tale’s texture, the details of everyday social life are as important as the idioms of everyday speech:

Kovalyov was a collegiate assessor of the Caucasus. He had only been at that rank for two years and therefore could not forget about it for a single moment, and so as to lend himself nobility and weight, he never called himself “Collegiate Assessor”, but always “Major”. (III: 53/202)

In the newspaper office, Kovalyov suggests: “You can simply write: a collegiate assessor, or even better, a person occupying the rank of major” (III: 60/210). Why was this

substitution possible and, if possible, why did it then give Kovalyov more “nobility and weight”?

Equating one rank to another was possible thanks to the Table of Ranks, which affirmed the meritocratic principle of social organization, placing it above the principles of nobility and wealth (a person’s status is determined by his service to the Empire). However, the bureaucratized Russian state gradually eroded the essence of Peter’s reform, rendering the system of ranks and positions the only regulator of relations between people in all spheres of life, including outside the service.

All ranks were divided in fourteen classes (the first was the highest; the fourteenth was the lowest). Collegiate assessor was a civilian rank of the eighth class, which corresponded to the military rank of major. This rank was, so to say, the lowest of the higher ranks. Beginning with the eighth class, the official was honored with a special mention in the newspapers when entering and leaving the city or town. Thus, every issue of the newspaper *Moskovskie Vedomosti* (*Moscow Gazette*) published “News about persons of the first eight classes who have arrived in and departed from this Capital.” Before 1845, the eighth class afforded civilians hereditary nobility. It remains unclear if Kovalyov was born noble or earned nobility through his service (Reyffman 2016, p. 108). To compare: the main characters of “The Diary of a Madman” (1834) and “The Overcoat” (1841), Aksenty Ivanovich Poprishchin and Akaky Akakievich Bashmachkin, are only one class below Kovalyov. They are titular councillors (ninth class) and have been granted only “personal” nobility (not to be passed on to their children); their fate is generally believed to symbolize the “tragedy of the little man.”¹⁸

Why, then, did Kovalyov prefer to be addressed as major, rather than collegiate assessor? This was not simply “a more impressive title” (Seifrid 1993, p. 384). The answer is prompted by the full name of the Petrine Table of Ranks: *The Table of Ranks of all Grades, Military, Civil, and Court, which grades are in which class; and those which are in one class have seniority among themselves according to the time of entry into the grade; however, military ranks are higher than civilian ones, even when [civilians] had been promoted into that class earlier* (Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire, First Series, No. 3890; Dukes 1978, p. 10). In other words, within the same grade, the military rank was considered higher than the civilian rank. By identifying himself as “major”, Kovalyov cheated, tacking on an extra half-rank in comparison with other collegiate assessors. He used the same stratagem for purposes of flattery when addressing “a court councillor of his acquaintance” (a civil rank of the seventh class) as “lieutenant colonel, especially if there were other people around” (III: 57/206). It should be pointed out that this practice was expressly prohibited by the law (Shepelyov 1977, p. 53, 1991, p. 115; Dilaktorskaia 1984, p. 154): “Civilian officials are not allowed to be addressed using military ranks” (*Statutes of Civil Service* 1833, p. 119). Therefore, Kovalyov is a Khlestakov-type dodger who likes to take advantage of privileges, both legal and illegal, or simply enjoys being taken for a person of a higher rank.¹⁹ Another telling detail: Kovalyov was once seen “buying the ribbon for an Order of some sort, no one knows for what reason, because he himself was not a knight of any Order at all” (III: 75/226). In light of these details, the Nose’s brazen imposture is a grotesque hyperbole of Kovalyov’s petty imposture.

Yet another significant detail has already been commented on in Gogol scholarship: “Kovalyov was a collegiate assessor of the Caucasus” (III: 53/202), or, literally: “Kovalyov was a Caucasian [*kavkazskii*] collegiate assessor” (Gogol 1998, p. 305). According to the government’s decision, “to prevent a shortage of capable and worthy officials”, the promotion to collegiate assessor in the Caucasus, “because of the remoteness of those places”, was simplified in relation to the established order (*Statutes of Civil Service* 1833, p. 105). Namely, officials were promoted without taking a special exam and without obtaining a university education (Dilaktorskaia 1984, p. 154). According to the Statutes of Civil Service, “officials in the Caucasus region, Georgia, the provinces of Transcaucasia [and a few other remote regions] [. . .] are promoted to the 8th and 5th classes [. . .]

without the examination and certificates required of other civil servants” ([Statutes of Civil Service 1834](#), pp. 850–51). This is what the narrator implicitly refers to:

The collegiate assessors who receive that rank with the help of learned diplomas cannot at all be compared with those collegiate assessors who are created in the Caucasus. These are two quite particular types. (III: 53/201–2)

4.3. In Search of a Plumed Hat

Colonel Skalozub. The uniform’s the way to tell, ma’am.
The braid, the shoulder-tabs, and gorget-tabs as well ma’am.
([Griboedov 2006](#), p. 98)

And what about the Nose? Gogol’s contemporaries understood immediately that the Nose was “wearing the uniform of the Ministry of Education” when Kovalyov met him (the words of Prince Pyotr Vyazemsky in his letter to Alexander Turgenev of 9 April 1836; [Viazemskii 1899](#), p. 314). This is how Gogol depicts the Nose’s appearance:

He was in a uniform with gold embroidery, with a large stand-up collar; he was wearing suede trousers and had a sword at his side. Judging by his plumed hat he bore the rank of state councillor. (III: 55/203–4)

In the administrative semiotics of Imperial Russia—or, indeed, in the framework of Russian “semiotic totalitarianism” ([Morson 1992](#))—“uniform signifies the place of service, as well as a degree of rank and position” ([Statute on Civil Uniforms 1834](#), § 1; Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire, Second Series, No. 6860, in [Complete Collection of the Laws 1835](#), vol. 9.1, p. 169). State councillor is a rank of the fifth class. The corresponding military rank of brigadier was abolished in 1799 ([Raskin 1989](#), p. 663). The next-lower rank was that of colonel (sixth class), and the next-higher rank was that of major-general (fourth class). Beginning with the fifth class, the corresponding rank was conferred only “with the Supreme [=His Imperial Majesty’s] permission” ([Statutes of Civil Service 1833](#), p. 106). The fifth class was the lowest of the five highly privileged classes.

The plumed hat (“*shliapa s pliumazhem*”) deserves special attention. Irina Reyfman in her otherwise illuminating book on the Imperial Table of Ranks in Russian literature insists that Kovalyov and the Nose allegedly “misread” each other’s uniforms. In particular, she argues that “the uniform of state councillors did not include plumes on the hat; plumes could signal either a high military rank [. . .] or a court title. [. . .] The Nose’s declaration that he is [. . .] an educator [. . .] undermines this assumption and leaves the reader as confused as Kovalyov” ([Reyfman 2016](#), p. 108). Olga Dilaktorskaya, who was the first scholar to specifically investigate the meanings of official titles and forms of their semiotic expression in “The Nose” ([Dilaktorskaia 1984](#)), made the same arguments earlier when commenting on the tale in the *Literaturnye pamiatniki* (*Literary Monuments*) edition of Gogol’s “Petersburg Tales”: “By all this we can assume that the Nose is not just a state councillor, but a person who, in the author’s opinion, is close to the Imperial Court, a VIP” ([Dilaktorskaia 1995](#), p. 273).

The real historical reception of this passage and other available documents do not confirm these claims. Vyazemsky, who was present at Gogol’s reading of the uncensored version of “The Nose” to the élite of Petersburg litterateurs at the poet Vasily Zhukovsky’s apartment on 4 April 1836, found it amusing that Kovalyov met the Nose in the church (more on that below), but he did not find anything special in the Nose’s dress:

Zhukovsky’s Saturdays are flourishing [. . .]. Only Gogol [. . .] livens them up with his stories. Last Saturday he read us a story about a nose which all of a sudden disappeared from the face of some Collegiate Assessor and turned up later in the Kazan Cathedral wearing the uniform of the Ministry of Education. Killingly funny! A lot of real humour.²⁰ After having met his nose, the Collegiate Assessor tells him: “I am surprised at seeing you here; it seems to me you should know your place. ([Viazemskii 1899](#), pp. 313–14; partly quoted in [Gogol 1967](#), p. 7)

Characteristically, the text also provoked Vyazemsky (as a real “ideal reader” of the tale) to make puns on the idioms with the nouns *nose* and *place*: “And in order for my letter not to be lost, but to get to its place [*k svoemu mestu*], that is, under your nose [*tebe pod nos*], and for me not to be ‘left with a nose’ [*s nosom*], I will finish writing and send my letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs” (Vyazemskii 1899, p. 314; the addressee, Alexander Turgenev, was travelling around Europe).

The uniform of the Ministry of Education was introduced on 28 August 1810; the uniform of the Petersburg educational district was introduced earlier, on 20 January 1809. The uniforms of the ministry, educational districts, and universities were similar although differentiated by minor details (Shepelyov 1999, pp. 304–13). The law describes the ministerial uniform briefly:

A dress of dark blue cloth with a stand-up collar and velvet cuffs of the same color; blue lining; the camisole and undershirt are white cloth; gilded plain buttons [. . .] Gold embroidery in accordance with the attached pattern”. (quoted in Shepelyov 1999, pp. 311–12)

A later statute that was enacted as part of the larger reform of civil uniforms on 27 February 1834 introduced only minor changes (Statute on Civil Uniforms 1834, § 84; Shepelyov 1999, pp. 226–31, 312–13). This is precisely the period when Gogol was working on the first redaction of “The Nose.”

The form of the hat was not defined by those laws (we only know it should have been triangular), but the existing practices are attested in at least one legal document. On 17 October 1834, a Supremely Ratified Decree of the Committee of Ministers Declared by the Senate was published entitled *On granting permission for officials of the first five classes, who retired before the Decree on the Civil uniforms was made effective, to wear a plumed hat as they did before* (Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire, Second Series, No. 7437). The permission was founded on the Emperor’s decision of 5 October:

HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY, upon the provision of this [issue] by the Committee, on 5th of this October, did MOST EMINENTLY deign [. . .] to decree [. . .] to the Civil Service that officials of the first five classes, who retired before 27 February 1834, be given the right to wear a plumed hat as before [*nosit’ po-prezhnemu shliapu s pliumazhem*] [. . .] if they retired with the uniform approved for their last place of service. (Complete Collection of the Laws 1835, vol. 9.2, pp. 54–55)

Furthermore, a plumed hat as a sign of a high rank in the civil service (state councillor and above) is mentioned in various memoirs (Kirsanova 1989, pp. 182–83). The following is an excerpt from Count Mikhail V. Tolstoy’s memoirs about what the Doctor of Medicine, Professor of Moscow University, and State Councillor Vasily Kotelnitsky looked like in the early 1830s (between 1831 and 1834):

[When Kotelnitsky] took a cab he would tell the cabman: “Look out, drive carefully—you are driving a state councillor!” The passion for ranks was then almost ubiquitous, and the good old boy Kotelnitsky was fascinated by the grandeur of his rank! [. . .] [He] would go down after a full-dress function from the grand porch of the old university building wearing a uniform and triangular plumed hat [*v treugol’noi shliape s pliumazhem*] (at that time, officials of the 5th class and above wore plumes on their hats [*pliumazh na shliapakh*]) [. . .]. (Tolstoy 1881, p. 50)

All the persons mentioned above were “within one handshake” from Gogol: when Mikhail Tolstoy entered the university, one of his examiners was Mikhail Pogodin, who would reject “The Nose” from the *Moscow Observer* four years later. Tellingly enough, Pogodin was also among those who did not find anything unusual in the Nose’s hat. Meanwhile, this detail was important for Gogol, and he repeated it again (“[Kovalyov] remembered very well that his hat was plumed and that his uniform had gold embroidery”, III: 57/206).

4.4. The Two Thresholds

The Nose says to Kovalyov: “Judging by the buttons on your uniform, you must be employed in the Senate or at least in the Ministry of Justice. As for me, I am in the scholarly line” (III: 56; [Struve 1961](#), p. 49). Reyfman argues that, although “the buttons of the Senate and the Ministry of Justice uniforms were indeed similar”, Kovalyov could not have served in either institution “during his time in the Caucasus [. . .] since both were located in Saint Petersburg” ([Reyfman 2016](#), p. 109). The structure of civil administration in the Caucasus was complicated and constantly changing, so that we cannot say for sure what Kovalyov’s position was when he served there. We only know that his functions were similar to those in the institutions subordinate to the Ministry of Justice, since he “had been sent on investigations several times when he was still in the Caucasus region” (III: 71/222).

Furthermore, Kovalyov was not even wearing a full dress uniform (*mundir*): he was in “vice-uniform” (*vits-mundir*). This difference is rarely commented on and never translated. The *vits-mundir* was a dress uniform for ordinary (not festive) days; for civil officials who did not belong to the three highest classes, the function of the *vits-mundir* was performed by the *mundirnyi frak*—the “uniform tail-coat” ([Shepelyov 1999](#), pp. 229–30). The “uniform tail-coat” of the Senate Chancellery was “the same as that of the Ministry of Justice” ([Statute on Civil Uniforms 1834](#), § 64; Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire, Second Series, No. 6860, in [Complete Collection of the Laws 1835](#), vol. 9.1, p. 174). Therefore, the Nose was unable to precisely identify Kovalyov’s affiliation.²¹

The Senate and ministerial positions that a collegiate assessor could occupy in a standard career were junior secretary in the Senate or junior “desk chief” [*stolonachal’nik*] in ministerial departments ([Raskin 1989](#), p. 662). A state councillor would be appointed a vice-director in a Department of the Ministry of Justice or an official at the Chief Procurator’s desk in the Senate. However, the Nose served “in the scholarly line”, i.e., in science and/or education; therefore, it/he could have been a university rector or a deputy trustee of the educational district (*ibid.*, p. 661). Kovalyov’s Nose—being part of the same body—must have been awarded its (considerably higher) rank of the fifth class in the Caucasus as well. For the promotion of Caucasian officials to the fifth class, the same exemptions were made as for the promotion to the eighth class. In other words, the Nose may not have had a proper education either, which did not hinder promotion “in the scholarly line.”

There were two “thresholds” in the Table of Ranks: Class 8 and Class 5. Kovalyov only mastered the first threshold, whereas the Nose somehow managed to get over the second one as well. As Grigory Gukovsky put it,

... this is the meaning of the story’s conflict: the struggle is between a *man* with the rank of collegiate assessor and a *nose* with the rank of state councillor. The *nose* is three ranks higher than the *man*. This conditions its victory, its invulnerability, and its superiority over the man. ([Gukovskii 1959](#), p. 283)

4.5. To Know One’s Place

The interaction between Kovalyov and the Nose is framed in the social-psychological field that Gogol himself dubbed “the electricity of rank” (V: 142): “We must note that Kovalyov was a person who was extremely quick to take offense. He could forgive everything that was said about himself but could never excuse anything that related to his office or rank” (III: 64/214). In Gogol’s world, the rank makes people arrogant, and Kovalyov is not an exception. Various unpleasant characters in Gogol’s texts have their noses in the air just because they are higher in rank than their neighbors. In the preface to the second volume of *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* (1832), the beekeeper Rudy Panko complains:

I tell you what, dear readers, there is nothing in the world worse than these high-class people. Because his uncle was a commissar once, he *turns up his nose at everyone* [*nos nesyt vverkh*]. As though there were no rank in the world higher than a commissar! Thank God, there are people greater than commissars. No, I don’t like these high-class people. (I: 195–96/90–91).

A similar character is featured in “A May Night; or The Drowned Maiden” (1830–1831): “He thinks [. . .] that because he is the mayor, [. . .] he can *turn up his nose at everyone* [*nos podnial*]!” (I: 160/56). In the early draft version of *The Marriage*, the bride’s aunt laments (act 1, scene 12): “The nobleman just sticks his nose in the air [*deryot . . . nos*] when commoners are around, but with his own sort that’s just a bit higher in rank, he bows and scrapes ‘nough to break [his neck]” (V: 295). In an early manuscript redaction of the first volume of *Dead Souls*, “a new-made statesman sits there like a peacock with his nose and bald head craning up in the air [*podniavshi kverkhu nos . . .*]” (VI: 413).

“It seems to me . . . you should know your place [*znat’ svoe mesto*],” Kovalyov says to his Nose (III: 55/204). He had held his nose so high that it *forgot its place*. Perhaps the odious Vladimir Yermilov, an “orthodox” Marxist critic of the Stalin era, was not too far off the mark when he suggested the apparently simplistic formula: “Kovalyov turned up his nose too high—and it flew away from him!” (Yermilov 1952, p. 157).²² If the Nose is a hypertrophied projection of Kovalyov (compare Bem [1928] 1979, p. 244), then the words about “knowing one’s place” could be addressed to Kovalyov himself. Gogol makes a pun on this when he writes that Kovalyov came to Saint Petersburg “to find a *position* becoming to his rank [the Russian word for ‘position’ being *mesto*, i.e., ‘place’]: if he could manage it, a position as vice-governor, and if not, then as administrator in some prominent department” (III: 54/202). A position of vice-governor required a rank of the fifth class, which the Nose had already been awarded but Kovalyov had not.²³

“It’s strange to me, my dear sir . . . it seems to me . . . you should know your place. And suddenly I find you, and where? In a church” (III: 55/204)—this is the full text of the major’s remark quoted in the previous paragraph. The Nose’s attending the church service is indeed unusual, but doing so in a uniform makes a little more sense at least, because he was there not as a private person but as a high-ranking official: it was allegedly his duty. However, Dilaktorskaya’s explanation (Dilaktorskaia 1984, p. 156) accepted by Yuri Mann (1996, p. 90)—that officials were legally required “to be at the Divine Service in festive uniform” on all the twelve major church holidays (or “great feasts”) of the Orthodox calendar, including the Day of the Annunciation when Kovalyov meets the Nose—seems to be an anachronism. The scholars refer to a later law of 8 March 1856 (No. 30247) enacted in the second year of the reign of Alexander II (Description of Changes 1856, p. 9; Complete Collection of the Laws 1857, vol. 31.2, p. 55). It has nothing to do with the age of Gogol unless it reaffirms the status quo. Furthermore, in earlier versions of the tale, the day when Kovalyov meets the Nose in Kazan Cathedral is not a great feast day. Therefore, the legal reasons for the Nose’s presence in the cathedral in full dress uniform require further investigation.

The uniforms immediately reveal the hierarchical inequality between Kovalyov and his double the Nose and turn physical distance into social distance that Imperial semiotics further transforms into existential distance: “The Table of Ranks was a direct product of the imperial representation policy, where the ‘natural’ (divine) hierarchy, according to which existence is organized, is replaced by an artificial imperial Table” (Iampolski 2007, p. 16). For Theophanus Prokopovich, one of the most ardent ideologists of the Petrine reforms, “if all rank is derived from God [. . .] then the thing most necessary to us and pleasing to God that the rank demands is that I should have mine, you yours and likewise for everyone” (Feofan Prokopovich 1961, p. 98; quoted in Lotman 1990, p. 262; translation modified). However, for Gogol, a hierarchy that pretends to be divine and replaces the divine could only be diabolical.

5. Liturgy, Sacrilege and the Calendar

5.1. The Problem: Why the Annunciation?

Yermakov insightfully observes that the Nose disappeared from Kovalyov’s face on the day of the Annunciation according to the Julian calendar (25 March) and returned on 7 April, that is, on the day following the Annunciation according to the Gregorian calendar (6 April), “so the whole episode took place in one day—or one night” (Yermakov [1924] 1974,

p. 185 fn. 48). Yermakov noticed this fact but did not actually explain it (Seifrid 1993). An explanation was found by Boris Uspensky: according to popular beliefs characteristic of “interfaith frontier areas” (a category which perfectly fits Gogol’s native Ukraine), the entire period separating the Orthodox and Catholic holidays of the same name is considered an “unclean” time, when various evil things usually happen (Uspenskii 2004, p. 335–37). What is more, the absurd events of the tale take place over thirteen days—an unlucky number, “the devil’s dozen”, according to a widespread superstition.

In the uncensored definitive version, Kovalyov meets the Nose in the Kazan Cathedral, where it/he was praying on the occasion of the Feast of the Annunciation. In earlier redactions, the story was not yet timed to coincide with the Annunciation, but Gogol nevertheless insisted that these characters should meet in the church: “In case your stupid censorship starts to fuss about having a nose in Kazan Church, it can be transferred to a Catholic church,” Gogol wrote to Pogodin on 18 March 1835 (X: 355; quoted in Oulianoff [1959] 1967, p. 162; see also Glyantz 2013, p. 100). Predictably enough, the censors excluded the mentions of the liturgy from both printed versions (1836 and 1842), and the entire scene was transferred to the city’s main shopping center, known as Gostiny Dvor, which is situated 0.3 miles to the east of the Kazan Cathedral along Nevsky Prospect (Gillel’son et al. 1961, pp. 183–84).

The dialog between Kovalyov and the Nose is remarkable in all respects. Kovalyov: “... you should know your place. And suddenly I find you, and where? In a church” (III: 55/204). The Nose pretends he does not understand anything: “Pardon me, I cannot make any sense of what you wish to say ...” (III: 56/205). The blasphemous innuendo is followed by an obscene one (“You must agree that it is improper for me to walk around without a nose”), to which Nose again responds with feigned incomprehension (III: 56/205). “One could see from the nose’s own replies that *nothing was sacred* for this person,” Kovalyov concludes (III: 58/207).

5.2. The Proskomedie in “The Nose” and in Meditations on the Divine Liturgy

Having found Kovalyov’s nose in the loaf of bread, Ivan Yakovlevich exclaimed in surprise “It’s solid! [...] What could it be?” (III: 50/198) and conjectured that “bread is a baked thing, and a nose is something else entirely” (III: 50/199). Boris Uspensky comments that the Annunciation usually falls on the days of Lent, when meat is forbidden to eat; therefore, the nose found in bread was especially improper, being quite literally a piece of flesh (Uspenskii 2004, p. 335). The Russian word for “solid” that Ivan Yakovlevich used is *plotnoe*, literally, “fleshy.” However, as the scholar himself notes, these phrases were added to the text as early as in the 1836 redaction (or even earlier) when the action had not yet been synchronized with the Annunciation or Lent (*ibid.*, p. 343 fn. 30). Perhaps, Gogol initially meant Friday fasting (compare Weiskopf 1993, pp. 234–35).

In the context of the religious symbolism of the tale, the bread motif that was present in the text from the very first draft may have a different meaning, which is not connected with Lent but refers to the Divine Liturgy. According to Mikhail Weiskopf, the barber’s manipulations with bread and the nose can be interpreted as a disguised parody of the preparation of bread and wine for the Eucharist—Proskomedie (Greek: Προσκομὴ), or the Liturgy of Preparation, which Gogol later described in detail in his *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy* (Weiskopf 1987, pp. 28–29, 1993, pp. 231–33).

Gogol thus explains the meaning of the Proskomedie:

All this part of the service consists in the preparation of what is required for the celebration, i.e., in the separation from the gifts, or little loaves of bread, of those sections which at first represent and are later to become the Body of Christ. (Gogol 1960, p. 5)

The parallels between “The Nose” and Gogol’s explication of the Liturgy of Preparation found by Weiskopf are striking. “For the sake of propriety, Ivan Yakovlevich put his tailcoat on over his shirt” (III: 49/198), similarly to the priest who is “proceeding to don the sacred vestments” (Gogol 1960, p. 1; translation slightly modified). The barber’s

spouse took “some freshly baked loaves of bread out of the oven” and “threw a loaf on the table” (III: 49/197–98).²⁴ In the service, “the priest takes one of the little loaves of altar bread, called *prosphori*, in order to separate from it the section which will become the Body of Christ—the middle portion of the upper part, on which the seal bearing the name of Jesus Christ” (Gogol 1960, p. 5). This portion is called the Lamb of God and symbolizes He “Who offered Himself in sacrifice for the whole world” (ibid., p. 6). After that, the priest takes a knife, “which has the form of a spear in commemoration of the spear with which pierced the Body of the Savior upon the Cross” and cuts the middle portion from the *prosphora* (the Host, Eucharistic bread). “Then with the spear he lifts out the middle section of the bread which has been cut round” (ibid.). Ivan Yakovlevich did almost the same: he “took a knife in his hands, and assuming a dignified air, started cutting the bread. Having cut the loaf into two halves, he looked into the middle [. . .] and pulled out—a nose” (III: 49–50/198). To these parallels we can add a no less important difference. “The priest who is to celebrate the Liturgy should from the evening before hold himself sober [*trezvit’sia*] in body and mind” (Gogol 1857, p. 4; 1960, p. 1), whereas the barber was so drunk the evening before that in the morning he does not even remember how drunk he was: “Whether [. . .] I came home drunk last night or not, I can’t tell for sure” (III: 50/199).

In the first draft, where Ivan Yakovlevich was called Ivan Fedorovich, not only the phallic connotations of the nose were more explicit (see Section 3 above), but also a travesty of the Liturgy was manifested from the very beginning. However, initially it started as a travesty of the Eucharist, rather than a travesty of its preparation. The barber did not *cut* the bread but *broke* it: “Ivan Fedorovich perelomil khleb [. . .]” (III: 380). The verb *perelomil*—a past tense form meaning “broke”—is a pleophonic vernacular Russian equivalent of the non-pleophonic Church Slavonic *prelomi* and ecclesiastic Russian *prelomil* with the same meaning (in Russian, *prelomil* sounds very much like the past tense form *brake* in KJV instead of *broke*). This verb is unambiguously associated with the rite of breaking of the bread (Latin: *fractio panis*; Church Slavonic and ecclesiastic Russian: *prelomlenie khlēba*), which is the central part of the Eucharist. According to Mark (14:22), as the Apostles were eating at the Last Supper, “Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it [KJV: *brake*; Synodal Slavonic Bible, 1751: *prelomi*; Russian Synodal Translation, 1819: *prelomil*], and gave it to them and said, Take, eat; this is My body” (NKJV). Luke (22:19) reports Jesus also said: “do this in remembrance of Me.” This is the meaning of the Eucharist. After Resurrection, the Apostles recognized Jesus when “He sat at the table with them, [. . .] took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them” (Luke 24:30–31); “He was known to them in the breaking of bread” (Luke 24:35; compare Weiskopf 1987, p. 30).

In the next redaction of Gogol’s tale, the rite of the breaking of bread was substituted for by the rite of the cutting of bread, which, according to Gogol, “is merely a preparation for the Liturgy” (Gogol 1857, p. 14; cf. Gogol 1960, p. 5), i.e., a less important ritual. One of the reasons for this change may have been another pun—this time not obscene but blasphemous.

On the Host of the Lamb is found what Gogol refers to as “the seal bearing the name of Jesus Christ.” This is an abbreviated form of the Greek Christogram ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΝΙΚΑ (Jesus Christ Conquers) spelled in Greek or Cyrillic letters (which in this case look similar or identical):

IC	XC
NI	KA

The priest takes the Host and starts cutting out the seal from the right part (with the letters “IC NI”). In view of Gogol’s parody, the result is overwhelming. This part as seen from the other participants’ side reads as “NI IC”, that is, the Ukrainian word *nis* “nose”, spelled in Cyrillic as НІС(Ь) or НІС(Ь).²⁵ The identity of the Church Slavonic N and the secular Cyrillic H is obvious for churchgoers (i.e., everyone in the nineteenth century), whereas a straightforward correspondence between the Ukrainian *nis* “nose” and the Russian *nos* “nose”, spelled in Cyrillic as НОС(Ь) (the title of Gogol’s tale) is

equally obvious for the speakers of both languages, to say nothing of Ukrainian–Russian bilinguals such as Gogol.²⁶ Then, the priest cuts the seal from other sides (see Figure 1) and eventually “cuts it crosswise”, as the shortened and censored text of Gogol’s *Meditations* reads (Gogol 1857, p. 17, 1913, p. 14; the same wording is used in Dmitrevskii [1803] 1807, Explanation of the Divine Liturgy, part 1: On the Proskomedia, chap. 4, p. 12). Gogol’s original formulation was more ample: “... in token of His death upon the Cross, traces the sign of sacrifice on it, along which it will then be divided during the coming rite [i.e., the Eucharist]” (Gogol 1889, p. 419; cf. Gogol 1960, p. 6).²⁷



Figure 1. The Proskomedia of the Lamb. Adapted from Slobodskoi (1967, p. 645).

Taking into consideration Gogol’s exploration of the same theme in his *Meditations*, his insistence on a church as the meeting place for Kovalyov and his nose and the choice of the Annunciation as the day when the story begins in the final version, it becomes possible to read the tale as permeated with leitmotifs of blasphemy and sacrilege (compare Uspenskii 2004, pp. 335, 342–43 fn. 30). Moreover, its entire plot can be considered a travesty of the Gospel story from the Annunciation to the Ascension,²⁸ which the rites of the cutting and breaking of bread represent “in complete semiotic entirety” (Weiskopf 1987, p. 28, 1993, p. 231).²⁹ At the same time, the parodies in “The Nose” of the Life of Christ and the rites of the Divine Liturgy that symbolize its various events are not carried out consistently: “The allusions to the main events of Christ’s life are in disorder; they do not follow the evangelic sequence” (Glyantz 2013, p. 107). All in all, it is not a coherent travesty of the Gospel plot but rather “a humorous midrash on it”, as John E. Cornell put it on another occasion (Cornell 2002, p. 271).

5.3. The Ascension and the Chronotope of “The Nose”

The Ascension is explicitly although inconspicuously alluded to by the address of “the barber Ivan Yakovlevich, who lives on Voznesensky Avenue/Prospect” (III: 49; Gogol 1985, vol. 2, p. 216, 1998, p. 301). This is the second sentence of the tale, and the name of the

street/avenue is repeated again when the police officer brings Kovalyov his nose: “And it’s strange that the chief participant in this affair is that crook of a barber on Voznesenskaya Street,” he says (III: 66; Gogol 1998, p. 317; cf. Gogol 1985, vol. 2, p. 232). The English translations do not usually inform the readers that *Voznesensky* and *Voznesenskaya* are adjectival forms of *Voznesenie*, “Ascension.” Only three translations make it “Ascension Prospect/Avenue” (Gogol 1916, pp. 67, 93, 1984, pp. 46, 59, 2020, pp. 197, 217). The Russian readers do not usually pay any attention to this detail either: the names sound too familiar and therefore inconspicuous.

The Ascension of Christ was preceded by His Resurrection. Both events are considered a prefiguration of the future Resurrection of the Dead. In Gogol’s travesty, the Resurrection is alluded to in the mention of the *Voskresensky* (Resurrection) Bridge (III: 56/205; Glyantz 2013, p. 106).³⁰ The Resurrection is closely associated with baptism; only those baptized will be resurrected (John 3:3–5). According to Saint Paul’s epistle to the Romans, those who “were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death”:

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:3–4)

Gogol undoubtedly remembered Paul’s further explanation:

Why then are they baptized for the dead? [. . .] what you sow is not made alive unless it dies [KJV: “that which thou sowest, is not quickened except it die”]. [. . .] So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. [. . .] It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. (1 Cor 15:29, 36, 42, 44).

In the fourth letter on *Dead Souls* (1846) already quoted in Section 2 above, Gogol recalls 1 Corinthians 15:36:

“It is not quickened except it die,” says the Apostle.³¹ It is first necessary to die in order to be resurrected. (VIII: 297; cf. Gogol 2009, p. 108)

Linked directly to the idea of rebirth, baptism is symbolized by immersion in water. This is exactly what happens with the nose (Weiskopf 1993, p. 236). The barber decided “to throw it into the Neva”, went to St. Isaac’s Bridge, and “quietly threw in the rag with the nose on it” into the water [river] (III: 50–51/199–200). After that, it/he is blasphemously reborn as a high official, whose social—rather than spiritual—rank has been upgraded. The Nose as “a *spiritual* body” (Church Slavonic and Russian: *dukhovnoe*) implies another sacrilegious pun: the carnal olfactory organ represents the Spirit (Church Slavonic and Russian: *dukh*, also meaning “smell”) (Virolainen 2004, pp. 106–7).³²

The chronotope of “The Nose” is characterized not only by elapsed time but also by distorted space. Yuri Lotman described it as ambiguous “phantasmagoric space”, in which two quasi-spatial forms can be discerned: physical space and social, bureaucratic space. According to Lotman (1968, pp. 40–41), in the material world of “The Nose”, the several intertwined plots do not fit together, forming gaps in discontinuous physical space. However, the social space of the authoritarian State preserves its continuity, although “within this space, continuity exists only at the level of forms, but not that of meanings” (ibid.). The Table of Ranks continues to operate, giving the Nose legitimacy as long as he is properly classified according to his rank. However, as soon as it turns out that the Nose has a fake passport, he instantly ceases to be a “Sir” (*gospodin*) and becomes just a “nose” again. To the physical (material) and social (semiotic) spaces, we can add a third (symbolic) space—sacral (Toporov 1984, p. 23), or, given Gogol’s blasphemous travesty, sacrilegious. It exploits the real urban sacral toponymy—names such as the Kazan Cathedral dedicated to Our Lady of Kazan and mentioned in connection with the Feast of the Annunciation, Ascension Prospect, and the Resurrection Bridge. The symbolic meaning of other toponyms, for example Saint Isaac’s Bridge near Saint Isaac’s Cathedral, requires more research. Particularly important is the fact that the Cathedral is dedicated to Saint Isaac of Dalmatia, a patron saint of Peter I (Weiskopf 1987, p. 36, 1993, p. 538 note 348).

5.4. The Psychological and Cultural Background of Gogol's Religious Blasphemy

"The Nose" is on par with the demonological works of the period of Gogol's religious and psychological crisis (tales such as "Nevsky Prospect", 1834, and "Viy", 1835) and his sacrilegious mockery of the Eucharist in a letter to Alexander Danilevsky of 28 September 1838:

Imagine that all along the way, in all cities, the temples are poor, the worship too, the priests are ignorant and unkempt [. . .], to say nothing about the taste and fragrance of the sacrifices [. . .]. Thus I must confess that, against my will, I am visited by free-thinking and apostatical thoughts, and I feel my religious rules and faith in the true religion are weakening every minute, so that if only another religion could be found with skilled priests and especially sacrifices, like tea or chocolate, then farewell to the last piety [*nabozhnost'*]. (XI: 173; Weiskopf 1993, p. 538 note 348)

The ill-fated Kovalyov suffered the same hesitation: in the church he "felt so upset that he had no strength to pray", whereas his Nose "was praying with an expression of the greatest piety [*nabozhnost'*]" (III: 55/204). "The monster clearly is parodying prayer and those who pray. This is a caustic mockery of Christian piety" (Oulianoff [1959] 1967, p. 169).

Viktor Zhivov considered the ambiguous and problematic nature of the separation of the religious and the secular in post-Petrine Russian culture to be the origin of blasphemy in Russian literature of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century. The sacralization of the poet's role in the neoclassical and romantic period leads authors to blasphemous parodies of church rites as well as biblical and liturgical texts in the works of various genres (Zhivov 1981).³³ Robert Maguire demonstrated the implicit equation between priest and artist in Gogol's *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy* (Maguire 1994, pp. 308–10). This can be taken as the cultural and semiotic background of Gogol's making a comedy of Proskomedia. Apparently, it also had psychological grounds.

At the same time that Gogol was working on "The Nose", he was writing *The Government Inspector*. As the author of this play, Gogol thought of himself not only as a comedic playwright but also as a teacher of life (a role to which Gogol would infamously return later). His expectations that his great comedy (it is great indeed) would change the world overnight did not materialize (Mochul'skii 1934, p. 42). A moral and religious crisis began, and Gogol left Russia. However, his sense of fear and despair began right when he was planning to take on the comedy and other projects (Mann 2012a, pp. 353–59). He wrote to Pogodin on 1 February 1833:

I don't want to produce anything minor! I can't seem to think up anything great! In a word, mental constipation. Send me sympathy and wish me the best! Let your word be more effective than an enema. (X: 257)

This looks like a typical neurotic reaction: Gogol wants to perform a great deed, but he is afraid of a possible failure. "By the end of 1833, Gogol's letters begin to carry notes of terrible anguish, almost despair" (Mann 2012a, p. 353; cf. Oulianoff [1959] 1967, pp. 159–60). On 28 September 1833, he wrote to Pogodin:

What a terrible year 1833 has been for me! My God, how many crises! Will there be a benign restoration for me after these destructive revolutions? How much I started, how much I burned, how much I gave up! Do you understand the terrible feeling of not being content with oneself? [. . .] The person who has been possessed by this hell of a feeling [*eto ad-chuvstvo*] is turned all to anger, he alone forms the opposition to everything, he makes a terrible mockery of his own ineptitude. My God, may it all be to the good! Say this prayer for me, too. (X: 277)

However, the problem was much broader: Gogol "was seeking a literary equivalent to the incarnation of the Word, but he was unable to go beyond a parodic consciousness" (Iampolski 2007, p. 20). An example is *Dead Souls*. It is a mock epic—a comic poem in prose (the author himself subtitled his work a "poem") and a travesty of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Instead of three volumes, Gogol wrote only his version of “Inferno”—*Dead Souls*, Volume One. Only scattered fragments remained from his “Purgatory” (in February 1852, Gogol burned the manuscripts of the second volume and starved himself to death), whereas “Paradise” was not even started. Volume One is a laugh riot, but it is laughter through tears, “laughter visible to the world and tears invisible and unknown to it” (Gogol 2004, p. 150).

Gogol’s ambivalent carnivalesque laughter and *parodia sacra* are intimately linked not only with tears but also with fear and horror³⁴: “The theatricalized world [. . .] is at the same time a diabolical, illusory world, in which ‘the demon himself lights the lamps for the sole purpose of showing everything not as it really is’” (Lotman [1974] 1976, p. 299; the quotation is from “Nevsky Prospect”, III: 46/153). Lotman linked this ambivalence with the Great Russian, rather than Ukrainian, aspect of Gogol’s personality, and explained it through “the tradition of medieval Eastern Orthodoxy” that “separated the divine principle, as real, from the apparent, the imaginary, the ‘dreamy,’ and the diabolical. The former is constant, the latter is many-faced and variable” (ibid., pp. 297–98).

5.5. The Calendar of “The Nose”

The latent blasphemy of “The Nose” explains yet another detail: in the definitive version, Kovalyov lost his nose on Friday. We know this because “the barber Ivan Yakovlevich had shaved him on Wednesday, and all day Wednesday and even all day Thursday his nose had been intact” (III: 65/215). Friday is an unlucky day because it is the day of the events that make up the Passion of Christ (Mk 15:42). In this context, Kovalyov’s exclamation when he realized the horror of his situation sounds (un)ambiguous: “My God! my God! Why such a misfortune?” (III: 64/214). It sounds like a travesty of the Crucifixion (noted by Weiskopf 1987, p. 28; also, Weiskopf 1993, p. 231):

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mt 27:46)

Again—Kovalyov ends his phrase with devilry: “but without a nose a person is the devil knows what” (III: 64/214).

In the early redactions of the tale, there was no symbolism of dates, and the dates themselves varied. In the initial draft (1832), the story begins “on the 23rd of the year 1832 [23 *chisla* 1832-go *goda*]” (III: 380), month not specified. This omission immediately reminds us of “The Diary of a Madman”, where the dates are confused (“January of the same year, which happened after February”), improbable and incomplete dates are introduced (“The Year 2000, April 43”, “Marchtober 86”, “The first [Chislo 1]”, “The 25th [Chislo 25]”), and—eventually—time totally disappears (“No date of any sort. The day had no date”; “I do not remember the date. There was also no month. It was the devil knows what.”—III: 207–13/173–79).

In the first complete manuscript redaction of “The Nose” (1833–1834), the story begins “on the 23rd of this February [*sego fevralia* 23 *chisla*]” (III: 484), i.e., “February 23 of this year.” In 1834, February the 23rd according to the Julian calendar fell on Friday, but there is no indication of a Friday in the text yet—one might rather think that the nose disappeared the day after shaving, i.e., on a Thursday. This could mean, then, that the events took place not in 1834, but in 1833, when February 23 was a Thursday. *Terminus post quem* for the first complete manuscript redaction is 21–23 September 1833, and *terminus ante quem* is 27 August 1834 (III: 651). Therefore, the words “this February” could very well refer to 1833.

In the first published version (the text of *The Contemporary*, 1836) Kovalyov’s nose “had been intact” “all day Wednesday and even all day Thursday” (Gogol 1836, p. 78; the same phrase in the definitive version, III: 65/215). The nose was lost “on the 25th of this April [*sego apreli* 25 *chisla*]” and was regained “at the beginning of May—on the 5th or 6th” (Gogol 1836, pp. 54, 88; III: 399, 484). It is unlikely that Gogol was describing future events in this version because it was finished much earlier than 25 April 1836.³⁵ In any case, it is not clear in what year the story happened: 25 April 1836 was a Saturday; in 1835, April 25

was a Thursday; and in 1834, it was a Wednesday. In other words, in these years there was no Friday, 25 April.³⁶ Does it mean that the events started on a non-existent day?

The importance of days of the week for the tale's chronotope is indirectly evidenced by another seemingly random detail: "Major Kovalyov wore a multitude of carnelian seals, some with coats of arms and some engraved with 'Wednesday,' 'Thursday,' 'Monday,' etc." (III: 54/202). With this in mind, what significance could the choice of a particular day of the month have in each of these redactions?

Nicholas Oulianoff pointed out that 23 February according to the Julian calendar is "the feast day of the holy martyr St. Polycarp and Sts. John and Alexander", when "the first chapter of Isaiah is read at the sixth hour, and this would be quite enough to disturb Gogol if he were in a susceptible state" (Oulianoff [1959] 1967, p. 164). This is, however, just a conjecture and does not explain much in the text. The next date Oulianoff attempted to explain was "April 23 of this year", as it allegedly stands in *The Contemporary*: "April 23 is the feast day of St. George the Conqueror, a saint who battled with a serpent, with a monster. Letting loose a monstrous creature into the world on this very day meant imparting a special point to the story" (ibid., p. 169). Alas, this is a mistake or, in fact, an illusion: the first published version reads "April 25" and not "April 23" (*The Contemporary* used a font-face in which 5 looks similar to 3). Although the academic edition correctly reproduces the 1836 text as "on the 25th of this April" (III: 484), Oulianoff's mistake and his "explanation" of the phantom date continues to reappear in later scholarship (Woodward 1981, p. 84; Glyantz 2013, p. 101).

Presumably, the selection of dates proceeded consecutively, by way of approximation. In the first published version, the nose disappears on a Friday, and the time of action is about twelve days (this is the difference between the Julian and Gregorian calendars in the nineteenth century). In the definitive version, the Nose's escape was timed to coincide with a major Christian holiday, and a dozen turned into a "devil's dozen" of the interfaith temporal collapse (12 + 1). Kovalyov's meeting with the Nose was designed to happen at church from the very beginning, but Gogol wanted more:

... he needed a Christian holiday to serve as the background against which the appearance of the Nose would be the ultimate expression of the idea of the devil's triumphant onslaught. For such a holiday, he chose the Annunciation, March 25, the day which brings the tidings of the forthcoming advent of the Savior. (Oulianoff [1959] 1967, p. 169)

Boris Uspensky points out that the final change of dates occurs during the years of Gogol's long stay abroad. When Gogol witnessed the Annunciation in Rome in 1837, 1838, 1839, and 1841, he first watched the Catholic celebration in Rome's cathedrals and then participated in the Eastern Orthodox celebration at the Russian embassy church (Uspenskii 2004, p. 339). If Gogol checked the calendar (and apparently, he did), then the events in the final version of the tale take place either in 1832 or 1838—only in these two years the day of the Annunciation (25 March according to the Julian calendar) was a Friday (Pilshchikov 2019, pp. 234–35). Most likely, the events in the definitive version happen in 1832 as the Nose walks around wearing a plumed hat abrogated in 1834.

6. Nosology as Hypnology: HOC as COH in Documents and Legends

More than any other of his works, this tale which Gogol's contemporaries failed to appreciate (Pushkin and Vyazemsky excepted) resists a realistic interpretation. It displays in the highest degree the bizarre combination of fantasy and naturalism that Vasily Rozanov noted in Gogol's work generally. In a series of articles written between 1891 and 1909, Rozanov performed a complete deconstruction, as we would say today, of Gogol's poetics. He declared the established view of Gogol as a realist to be a misunderstanding, and Gogol's social criticism to be a slander of reality (Mondry 2003). In Gogol's works, details are realistic, but his overall picture of the world is phantasmagoric.

The pinnacle of Rozanov's "deconstruction" comes in the article "The Genius of Form (On the Centenary of Gogol's Birth)", most of which is devoted to "The Nose." According

to Rozanov, Gogol “finds for incarnation the least important details, vulgarity, monstrosity, distortion, disease, insanity, or a dream that resembles insanity. After all, ‘The Nose’ is—literally—a chapter from ‘The Diary of a Madman’, [whereas] ‘The Diary of a Madman’ is a thread of intertwined ‘Noses’” (Rozanov [1909] 1995, p. 348). “The fabula outline of Gogol’s ‘The Nose’ strongly resembles the ravings of a madman”, Tynianov agreed (Tynianov [1926] 2019, p. 235). However, in “The Diary of a Madman”, the absurdity of the world is “depicted in the light of the hero’s insane consciousness”, whereas in “The Nose”, it is manifested “without any motivation, by the author’s arbitrary will” (Gippius 1966, p. 83). This is why “The Nose” is “radically inexplicable” (Morson 1992, p. 227).

Gogol combines disparate devices and approaches in one text: idiomatic puns, grotesque social satire (even—caricature), and blasphemous travesty. Granted, these strategies of construction and interpretation do not even need to be semantically coherent and can contradict each other to produce a stronger absurdist effect: “*Absolutely* meaningless makes sense; sense is therefore fictitious” (Pumpianskii 2000, p. 326; see Slonimskii [1923] 1974, p. 369; Todorov [1970] 1975, p. 73; Fanger 1979, pp. 120–22; Shukman 1989, pp. 64, 78; Morson 1992, pp. 207, 230–33; Maguire 1994, pp. 338–39). That said, how does Gogol manage to do this formally? Is there a single unifying device—“the dominant” (to use the Formalist term)?

The finale of the first complete redaction of the tale explains all the events as a nightmare: “However, everything here described was seen by the major in a dream” (III: 399), but the definitive version is ambiguous. On the one hand, the described events are presented as a real occurrence, and Kovalyov even pinches himself to make sure that he is not dreaming or drunk (III: 65/215). It seems that he is awake and sober, but who knows for sure? On the other hand, his awakening could have been false, and the nightmare could have extended into a daydream (Erlich 1969, pp. 88–90; Rowe 1976, pp. 100–4; Shukman 1989, p. 72). Furthermore, if “The Nose” is a bad dream, it is not individual and personal but collective: the barber seems to be having the same dream as Kovalyov (Pumpianskii 2000, pp. 328–29).

Gogol’s contemporaries compared the poetics of the “Petersburg Tales” with those of E. T. A. Hoffmann, who created an ironic narrative open to both supernatural and realistic explanations of the fantastic events, with the narrator’s point of view vacillating between the two mutually exclusive interpretations. A supernatural interpretation would involve mystical worlds, occult practices, or magic; a realistic-psychological explanation would favor phenomena from everyday life: falling asleep and dreaming, excessive consumption of alcohol, or an unbridled imagination. However, even against this background, “The Nose” stands out for its undisguised parody that sublimates irony to the grotesque—a fantastic combination of incompatible elements (Vinogradov [1921] 1929; Slonimskii [1923] 1974; Mann 1966, 1973; Günther 1968, pp. 131–47; Erlich 1969; Karlinsky 1976, pp. 123–30). In Hoffmann, the events can be explained as *either* unreal *or* real, whereas in Gogol, the reader’s “fantastic hesitation” over how to understand a nose in a plumed hat, a carriage on Nevsky Prospect, or a post chaise planning to go to Riga with a fake passport is sustained throughout, never resolving into either a rational, materialist explanation (it was a dream), or the acceptance of supernatural events at face value (a nose can abscond if it pleases) (Todorov [1970] 1975, pp. 72–73). In the “Petersburg Tales” cycle, absurdity can be motivated by demonism, but this motivation (in the Russian Formalists’ sense of the term) can shift from explanation to comparison, as in the celebrated passage from “Nevsky Prospect”: “It seemed [. . .] that a demon had crumbled the whole world into a multitude of various pieces and had mixed them all together with no meaning or sense” (III: 24/129). Victor Erlich noted that this passage could serve as a motto for “The Nose” (Erlich 1969, p. 82). The world of Gogol’s Saint Petersburg is a world turned upside down and ruled by the devil, “the main hero of almost all of Gogol’s works” (Čiževsky 1938, p. 193; cf. Čiževsky [1951] 1952).³⁷

All that notwithstanding, there is a commonly held notion that the “nose” points to a pun on “sleeping/dreaming” because the Russian *nos* (“nose”) is a palindrome of *son* (“sleep, dream”). This observation belongs to Yermakov, who even claimed that “at first [the

tale] bore another title: ‘The Dream’”, but—allegedly, later—“Gogol discarded the original title and renamed the story ‘The Nose’” (Yermakov 1921, p. 99; Yermakov [1924] 1974, pp. 173–74). Unfortunately, this tempting hypothesis is not supported by documentation. Its apocryphal nature was already noted by Vinogradov ([1921] 1929, pp. 43–44 fn. 1). Nonetheless, this legend, popularized in Janko Lavrin’s biography of Gogol in “The Republic of Letters” book series (Lavrin 1926, p. 116),³⁸ is still alive and references to the non-existent draft reappear in Anglophone Gogol scholarship at least once or twice every decade (see Bowman 1952, p. 210; Erlich 1969, p. 89; Karlinsky 1976, p. 123; Rancour-Laferriere 1982, p. 84; Shukman 1989, p. 64; Sobel 1998, p. 335; Kutik 2005, p. 67). In later redactions of “The Nose”, the initial motivation of the absurdity by the oneiric illogic was removed or at least veiled—or, in Vinogradov’s perfect formulation, “dismantled like the scaffold of an artistic construction” (Vinogradov [1921] 1929, p. 46). The dream, like the devil, was left in the subtext.

7. Conclusions

However, the devil, as is well known, is in the details, and “The Nose” is “a fantasy rich in enigmatic detail” (Gregg 1981, p. 370). In order to understand the many-pronged functions of this richly-detailed masterpiece, we have had to recall or reconstruct many features of the language and everyday life of Gogol’s time. In particular, there are three groups of linguistic and social-cultural phenomena with which we need to be familiar to competently read the tale: idiomatic phraseology, forgotten specificities of the Imperial hierarchy (the Table of Ranks), and allusions to religious customs and Christian rituals that would have been obvious to Gogol’s readers. An integrated analysis of these aspects in their mutual relationship both reveals how the telling details of the story are associated with Gogol’s religious and psychological crisis of the mid-1830s and demonstrates how he aggregated indecent Shandyism, social satire, and religious blasphemy into a single oneiric narrative that mischievously rejects its dreamlike nature (compare Bocharov 1985, pp. 204–5). Correspondingly, the quasi-oneiric chronotope of the tale combines three spaces—physical, social, and sacral—each of which is presented as *mutatis mutandis*, mockingly indecent, grotesquely satirical, and latently sacrilegious. While creating one of the first fragments of the “Petersburg Text”, Gogol makes a parody of what would become its main idea and main plot: finding “the way to moral salvation, to spiritual rebirth under conditions where life is being conquered by death, and lies and evil triumph over truth and good” (Toporov 1984, pp. 16–17; quoted in Shapovalov 1988, p. 43). Viewed from this perspective, “The Nose” is not only the most absurdist but also the most subversive and nullifidian work of Gogol.

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Notes

- ¹ “Contact zone” is Mary Louise Pratt’s term for “social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt 1991, p. 34).
- ² References are provided to Gogol’s fourteen-volume complete collected works (Gogol 1937–1952) cited by volume: page (volumes are given in Roman numerals, and pages in Arabic numbers). The translations of Gogol’s Petersburg tales used here are those by Susanne Fusso (Gogol 2020). Earlier stories are quoted in Constance Garnett’s translation revised by Leonard J. Kent (Gogol 1985, vol. 1). The translation pages are cited after the original pages and divided by a slash. Other translations from Russian are by Igor Pilshchikov and Ainsley Morse if not indicated otherwise.
- ³ Etymologically, “slanderer.” From διαβάλλω [δια- (“across”) + βάλλω (“throw”)], “throw over or across, bring into discredit, mislead, calumniate, slander” (LSJ).
- ⁴ An East and West Slavic word with uncertain etymology; not used in South Slavic languages, including Church Slavonic. The Proto-Slavic *čьrtь (“demon”) may be cognate with either the Proto-Slavic *čьrta (“line, boundary”) and its descendants or—less

likely—with *čьръ/*čьra (“spell, magic”) and its descendants (Trubachev 1977, pp. 164–66), or with both, as in the Czech *čára*, which means “a borderline up to which something is permitted or magically prohibited, e.g., the line which marks the so-called magic circle (where the evil demons retain or lose their power)” (Jakobson 1959, p. 276). Compare Andrei Bely’s intuition that “Gogol’s ‘devil’ [*chort*] derives from a line [*cherta*], and a line is a boundary” (Bely [1934] 2009, p. 182, see also p. 227; one needs to consult the original (Bely 1934, pp. 148, 186) to get the point). The *chort*’s synonym *běsъ < *bēd-s-, also meaning “demon” (Church Slavonic: *běsъ*; Russian: *bes*; Ukrainian: *bis*) is cognate with the Proto-Slavic *bēda (“trouble, calamity”) and *bēditi (“compel, persuade”) (Trubachev 1975, pp. 88–91, 54–57). The Russian word *chort* is more colloquial and folkloric than *bes*. The Old Believers in the town of Mogilev shared a folk-belief that the devil rejoices when he is called by the Russian word *chort* (pronouncing this word is itself a sin), but does not like to be called by the Church Slavonic and ecclesiastic Russian word *běsъ*/*bes* because he hates everything related to church (Zelenin 1930, p. 89; Uspenskii 2012, p. 26).

The word *bes* is not used in “The Nose” (there is only one occurrence of the verb *vzbesit’* of the same root, meaning “enrage”). In Gogol’s works and letters, the word *bes* is used 23 times (and the Ukrainian *bis* once), whereas *chort* occurs almost ten times as frequently. Pushkin, whose style sets the norm for this period, used *bes* 59 times and *chort* 91 times (a 2:3 ratio). On Pushkin’s usage of these words, see Vinogradov (1956–1961, vol. 1, pp. 96–97, vol. 4, pp. 926–27).

Emphasis added here and below if not attributed to the author.

The olfactory aspects of “The Nose” has recently been studied by Klymentiev (2009).

Compare Tynianov ([1921] 2019, p. 32); Čiževsky (1952, pp. 270–73).

For example, Emperor Nicholas I suggested that Alexander Pushkin should change “too trivial passages” in the first version of his *Boris Godunov*, where phrases such as “*bliadiny deti*” were used (the latter, meaning “sons of whores,” was later changed for *sukiny deti*, “sons of bitches”, and, eventually, *postrely*, “scamps”) (Vinokur 1935, p. 423, 426; Pushkin 1937–1949, vol. 14, p. 59).

The names of these characters mockingly refer to the German literary tradition, whose actuality for Gogol was discussed by his readers and critics (see Meyer 2000, pp. 69–70; Kutik 2005, pp. 59–60). Ironically, Lieutenant Pirogov, another character in “Nevsky Prospect” who saw this scene, “could not understand what was going on”—not for mystical reasons, however, but simply because they spoke German, whereas his “knowledge of German did not go beyond ‘*guten Morgen*’” (III: 37/143).

See Kutik (2005, pp. 69–76), for a discussion of the “moon” topic and, in particular its connection with Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso*, canto 34.

On Yermakov see Young (1979).

Etymologically, *nos* in the idiom *byt’/ostat’sia s nosom* has perhaps nothing to do with the nose, being supposedly a suffixless substantive of the verb (*pri*)*nosit’* “to bring” (compare the pairs like *beg* / *begat’* and the like). If so, *nos* meant “what is brought (as a gift or bribe),” and the meaning of the whole idiom was “to be left with what is brought, i.e., to be rejected a gift or bribe (such as a ritual bribe in wedding mediation).” However, in modern usage the original meaning of the idiom has been lost, and the speakers interpret *nos* in this phrase as “nose,” just like in all other idioms of this series (Shanskii 1960, p. 77, 1963, p. 67 fn. 1). The situation was not different in Gogol’s time (Dahl and Baudouin de Courtenay 1903–1909, vol. 2, p. 1443). Compare Bierich et al. (1994, p. 180).

See also Pushkin (1984, p. 123).

On the name of Maccabee in this context see Zhatkin (2002).

Roman Jakobson cited this Dostoevsky passage as an example of “the abrogation of the boundary between real and figurative meanings” of idioms in poetic language (Jakobson [1921] 1973, pp. 67–68). On the same issue in Spanish translations of Dostoevsky see Obolenskaia (1980, pp. 58–59).

“A Petersburg Tale” is the subtitle of Pushkin’s narrative poem “The Bronze Horseman” (1833). Gogol’s *Tales* (1842) started to be routinely called “Petersburg Tales” as early as the 1880s. This non-authorial title was codified in academic parlance by the Gogol scholar Vladimir Shenrok (1893, p. 78).

On the Table of Ranks in Gogol’s fiction see Reyfman (2016, pp. 102–16).

Khlestakov, an irresponsible, frivolous young man, who is mistakenly identified as an inspector by the corrupt officials of a small Russian town in Gogol’s comedy *The Government Inspector* (1836), is a liar *par excellence*. According to Yuri Lotman: “Lying intoxicates Khlestakov because, in his imaginary world, he can cease to be himself, escape from himself, become someone else. [...] The split personality which was to become the central focus of Dostoevsky’s *Double* [...] was already present in Khlestakov” (Lotman [1975] 1985, p. 162). Lotman compares Khlestakov with the protagonist of “The Diary of a Madman”: “The deliverance from self and flight to life’s summits that Khlestakov receives from ‘an uncommon addle-headedness in thinking’ and a potbellied bottle of provincial Madeira, Poprishchin experiences as the price of insanity” (ibid., p. 163 fn. 29). Kovalyov belongs to the same type; if “‘Diary of a Madman’ is a tragic parallel to *The Inspector General*” (ibid.), then “The Nose” is a surrealist parallel to both.

Humour: English word in the original.

It should be added here that the censor excluded the references to specific ministries in the Nose’s conversation with Kovalyov from the printed text, so that the phrase under discussion was reduced to “Judging by the buttons on your uniform [*vits-mundir*], you must serve in a different department” (III: 486; Gogol 1836, p. 65, 1842, p. 97). This censored variant, reproduced in some

twentieth-century editions, is translated in all English versions from 1916–2020, except the *en regard* translation by Gleb and Mary Struve.

- 22 This statement was disputed on the both sides of the Iron Curtain: the émigré scholar Nicholas Oulianoff (Oulianoff [1959] 1967, p. 160) and the Soviet scholar Yuri Mann (Mann 1966, pp. 37–38) objected to Yermilov’s interpretation.
- 23 See Peace (1981, pp. 136–37) on *mesto* (“place, position, job”) as a key word throughout “The Nose.”
- 24 “The barber’s wife baking bread can be likened to one of the minor characters behind the scenes who participate in the process of the Mass: the special woman who bakes the liturgic bread. There were specific rules fixed by the ecclesiastics which obliged them to ‘choose as bakers of liturgic bread’ either ‘widows living in purity’ or virgins no younger than 50 years of age” (Glyantz 2013, p. 99). She obviously was neither virgin nor widow—nor, in fact, did she live in purity, judging by “complaints of an erotic nature, addressed to her husband” (ibid.).
- 25 In Gogol’s times, the word *nis* could have spelled as нисъ (the spelling of the printed editions of Ivan Kotlyarevsky’s foundational mock-epic *Eneyida* [the Aeneid]), нісъ (the spelling of Oleksiy Pavlovsky’s 1818 Ukrainian grammar) or ніс (the “spelling of The Mermaid of the Dniester” introduced by Markiy Shashkevych in 1837). See (Ohiyenko 1927, pp. 5–8; Nimchuk 2004, pp. 6–8).
- 26 As an example, in the Ukrainian spelling that Mykhaylo Maksymovych proposed in 1827, the word *nis* was spelled etymologically, as нѣсъ. See Ohiyenko (1927, pp. 6–7).
- 27 On the differences between the manuscript and the first published version see Gogol (1889, pp. 593–94) (Nikolai Tikhonravov’s commentary) and Voropaev (2000, pp. 189–90).
- 28 It has been proposed that the phrase “it seemed that *heaven itself* made him see the light” and sent him “directly to the advertising department of the newspaper” (III: 58/208) to place an *announcement* (III: 58/208) can also be read as a travesty of the Annunciation (Cornell 2002, p. 276). This is a questionable claim. First, in Russian, there is no straightforward correspondence between the words for “announcement” (*ob’yavlenie*) and “Annunciation” (*Blagoveshchenie*). In the latter, the first part, *blago-*, reflects the Greek *εὐ-* in *Εὐαγγελισμός*. The other part, *-veshchenie*, is used with a different stress in the words like *izveshchenie* (“notice”) but not in the word for “announcement.” Second, this episode is already contained without any allusion to the Annunciation in the 1836 redaction of “The Nose,” in which the strange events begin on 25 April and not on 25 March (see below).
- 29 On the dogmatic and anagogical meanings of the Proskomedia and the Eucharist accepted by the Russian Orthodox Church see Ivan Dmitrevsky’s *Historical, Dogmatic and Mysterious Explication of the Liturgy* (Dmitrevskii [1803] 1807) and Archbishop Benjamin’s *The New Stone Tablet* (Veniamin [1803] 1823)—the two main sources for Gogol’s *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy* (Frank 1999, p. 87 fn. 3; Voropaev 2000, p. 186).
- 30 Mistranslated as “the Ascension bridge” in Gogol 1916, p. 78.
- 31 Gogol quotes the Slavonic version: “*ne ozhivet, ashche ne umret.*”
- 32 Compare Iampolski (2007, pp. 560–61), on excessive materiality and imaginary illusion as exaggerated extremes in Gogol’s travesties of the Transubstantiation. In his mockery, Gogol comes close to mis/reinterpretations of the Eucharist as symbolic cannibalism (see Kitson 2000; compare Utz and Baatz 1998).
- 33 For a broader context see (Levy 1981, 1993; Lawton 1993; Nash 1999, 2007; Whickman 2020).
- 34 On horror in “The Nose” see Bely ([1934] 2009, pp. 20–21, 227–28).
- 35 We know that on 4 April 1836, Gogol read his story at one of the “Saturdays” at Zhukovsky’s, as Vyazemsky reported to Alexander Turgenev (discussed above; see also Mann 2012b, p. 41).
- 36 The nearest April 25 that fell on Friday occurred in 1830.
- 37 Čiževsky’s observation goes back to Merezhkovsky ([1906] 1974, esp. pp. 57–58). On Merezhkovsky’s *Gogol and the Devil* see Hashemi (2017, pp. 157–62).
- 38 “The most outdated and least reliable of [Gogol’s] biographies” (Karlinsky 1976, p. 320).

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