

ELIZABETH C. SHEPARD

Pavlov's "Demon" and Gogol's "Overcoat"

On Sunday, February 24, 1852, the epilogue to the tragicomedy which was N. V. Gogol's life was played out in the University Chapel in Moscow. Curiosity seekers, government officials, members of high society—"people who had not wanted to know Gogol during his lifetime,"¹ Khomiakov bitterly remarked later—thronged the final rites performed over the writer's emaciated body. Among the crowd in the chapel was Gogol's old acquaintance, N. F. Pavlov (1803–64), a former serf, actor, university student, law clerk, and journalist who had made his way into Moscow's *beau monde* and had married a wealthy heiress.² Several days after the funeral, Pavlov set down his reaction to it in a letter to A. V. Venevitinov:

He was buried with due respect and with all possible honors. . . . The deceased's body was brought to the university chapel. Students stood watch day and night. Zakrevsky [the governor general of Moscow] came to the funeral service with his ribbon on. In farewell, a laurel wreath was torn to bits; everyone wanted some of it, if only a leaf, as a keepsake. Khomiakov and those of his mind were displeased; they had opposed holding the funeral service in the university chapel, asserting that it was too much like a salon, that the class of people which Gogol had most esteemed would not enter it, and that this funeral was a civil, not a religious act. All the others and I were of a completely opposite opinion. Gogol's funeral should have had the social character which it did. The beggars, footmen, and tradespeople whom they [Khomiakov et al.] wanted would not have come even to a parish church, because to appreciate a writer one has to be literate, and anyway that class of people has always preferred an affected literature to a literature of genius. Count Zakrevsky hasn't read Gogol, but he came to the funeral, whereas the Moscow merchants, who also haven't read him and who consequently have the same rights, did not come. . . . Most curious and striking of all was the gossip among the populace during the service.³ There was a swarm of anecdotes. They all were trying to find out what the rank of the deceased

1. N. P. Barsukov, *Zhizn' i trudy M. P. Pogodina*, 22 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1888), 11:538.

2. The poetess Karolina Jaenisch Pavlova (1807–93).

3. Pavlov is speaking of the crowd outside the chapel.

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had been. The policemen speculated that he was some kind of important count or prince. No one could imagine that it was a writer whose funeral was being held. One cart driver finally assured them that it was the chief clerk at the university who had died; that is, not the one who makes copies, but the one who knows how to address each person in writing—the sovereign, some general or other, whomsoever.⁴

Witty, urbane, even cynical, Pavlov must have enjoyed embroidering upon a basic situation which offered such an opportunity to poke fun at the Slavophile enthusiasms of his Muscovite friends and to indulge in a bit of discreet irony at "their" writer's expense: the rumors, the speculation, and the confusion, the policemen and the driver, and the ironic *pointe* of the boldly asserted mistaken identity—a clerk. What could be a more fitting encomium to the creator of Akakii Akakievich? But perhaps a deeper irony was intended.

In 1835, while Gogol was privately complaining about the slow sales of his *Arabesques* and *Mirgorod*,⁵ Pavlov's first collection of stories, *Three Stories*, was sold out within a few weeks of its publication, and Pavlov was riding the crest of a literary notoriety which shortly was enhanced by official censure of the book.⁶ Amidst a welter of travel accounts, philosophic, fantastic, historical, and neosentimental stories, and tales with Caucasian, Eastern, and Ukrainian settings, Pavlov's stories struck their readers as refreshingly contemporary, a quality which was all the more titillating in view of their evident dependence on the most recent French models. Frequently compared with Balzac, of whose works he was the first Russian translator,⁷ Pavlov shared with his great French contemporary a piercing insight into the mechanisms of social power and an overriding interest in the themes of money and social mobility. A pragmatist whose later political thought would owe a debt to English utilitarianism, Pavlov conceived of human nature in terms of self-interest. In his society stories, vanity (*samoliubie*), as both an innate and an acquired trait, was exposed as the major moving force in human events. Starting from the premise that by masking self-interest with idealism people are consciously or unconsciously dishonest with themselves and with others, Pavlov probed the quality of that dishonesty, and dramatized its consequences. The tsar and Count Uvarov were not alone among Pavlov's contemporaries

4. Barsukov, *Zhizn' i trudy Pogodina*, 11:538. Cited from a document preserved in the Semeinyi arkhiv M. A. Venevitinova.

5. N. V. Gogol to A. S. Pushkin, Oct. 7, 1835, in N. V. Gogol, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 14 vols. (Moscow and Leningrad, 1937–52), 10:375. See also Gogol's letter to M. P. Pogodin, Mar. 23, 1835, *ibid.*, p. 358.

6. The minister of public education, S. S. Uvarov, brought *Three Stories* to the attention of Tsar Nicholas I, who issued an order forbidding republication of the book. It was not until 1922 that the full text of any of Pavlov's stories was reprinted in Russia.

7. N. A. Trifonov, "Pervyi perevodchik Bal'zaka v Rossii," *Nauchnye doklady vysshei shkoly: Filologicheskie nauki*, 2 (1960): 99–112.

in finding this viewpoint offensive. S. P. Shevyrev, for example, found Pavlov's unidealized treatment of his female protagonists "impermissible."⁸ And V. G. Belinsky, although he included Pavlov on the list he compiled in 1835 of the six writers who constituted the "full circle of the history of the Russian short story,"⁹ was suspicious of the kind of "truth" which he found in Pavlov's stories, and which he contrasted by implication with the truth embodied in Gogol's works.¹⁰

Pavlov's second volume of three stories, *New Stories*, appeared in 1839. Here, in "The Masquerade" and "A Million," Pavlov continued his investigation of high society and its "domestic secrets." But in "The Demon" Pavlov focused on a plebeian protagonist who was increasingly commanding the attention of Russian writers—the "unfortunate petty clerk" (*bednyi chinovnik*).

Andrei Ivanovich, the middle-aged hero of "The Demon," is a clerk of unspecified rank who works in an unnamed department of the immense imperial bureaucracy in St. Petersburg. The one incongruous note in his modest existence is his wife, a nineteen-year-old beauty whose taste for luxury he indulges insofar as he is able, but from whom he is in fact as estranged as he is from his fellow workers and society at large. Andrei Ivanovich's tedious work as a copyist had colored his entire existence: "the regular flow of his life, and his habitual regularity, formality and sense of order had saved him from developing unrealizable desires, and from making dangerous comparisons between himself and others."¹¹ But late one night, as he sits gazing out over the "enchanted" capital, "incorporeal inspiration, like an invisible sprite" descends upon him, and he is "re-born." Invested with demonic vision, he suddenly perceives the disparity between the haves and the have-nots, and questions why this must be so. The following night he conceives a plan (which is not revealed to the reader), and falteringly writes out a petition. Early the next morning he calls at the office of a General, where, by means of a bribe, he succeeds in having the document accepted. He returns several days later, and after a prolonged wait is admitted into that inner sanctum of bureaucratic

8. S. P. Shevyrev, "Tri povesti N. Pavlova," *Moskovskii nabliudatel'*, 1, no. 1–2 (1835): 126.

9. V. G. Belinsky, "O russkoi povesti i povestiakh g. Gogolia," *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 12 vols. (Moscow, 1953–56), 1:283.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 259–307 *passim*. This article should be seen in the light of the following considerations. In the spring of 1835, Shevyrev had rejected Gogol's "The Nose" for publication in *Moskovskii nabliudatel'*, and had reviewed *Mirgorod* in a way which could only have alienated Belinsky. At the same time, O. I. Senkovsky reviewed the two writers' books, placing his favorable Pavlov review *before* his less enthusiastic Gogol review. See *Biblioteka dlia chteniia*, vol. 9 (1835). Belinsky apparently responded by failing to review Pavlov's book separately, noting it instead in the laudatory article on Gogol.

11. N. F. Pavlov, *Povesti i stikhi* (Moscow, 1957), p. 169. All further references will be taken from this edition and will be noted in the text.

power, the private office of a General. Here, the story's climactic confrontation between the Little Man and the System takes place. Tongue-tied by years of silent humility, Andrei Ivanovich gropingly describes his lifelong devotion to duty, and at last blurts out the reason for his visit: the General has "offended" him by stealing his wife's affections, he claims. Outraged, the General orders him to leave. But Andrei Ivanovich's plan works as he knew it would. After several minutes, the General summons a clerk and casually obtains the information that Andrei Ivanovich's wife is indeed beautiful. Sometime later, Andrei Ivanovich is discovered in a new apartment, with a servant in attendance, a carriage and pair at the door, and an Anna (the Order of Saint Anne) around his neck.¹² No longer obliged to go to the office, he receives callers and affably responds to their admiration of his success: "True, true, my dear fellow. Where there's a will, there's a way."

This brief précis does not begin to convey the thoroughness with which the Petersburg thematic complex is exploited in "The Demon." As is typical of Pavlov's technique, the relatively uneventful plot is heavily overlaid with descriptive and psychological detail. But the précis does suggest an important way in which Pavlov's treatment of the unfortunate petty clerk ran counter to the prevailing mode of that figure's portrayal in Russian fiction of the time. While apparently responding to the advent of what Belinsky had announced to be the "popular" era in Russian literature,¹³ Pavlov retained in "The Demon" the detached and skeptical narrative tone of the "urbane" (*svetskii*) persona which had informed his society stories. And it is evident that such a narrative tone violated the existing generic norms of the *chinovnik* story.¹⁴ Indeed, in the opinion of a Soviet scholar, this is the chief difference between the two story forms: "But the most important difference of the *chinovnik* story [from the society story]—its basic pathos—consists of the author's palpitating sympathy for the little man. . . ."¹⁵ This sympathy may be evidenced in interpolated authorial commentary, and in the weighting of descriptive detail to evoke compassion for the protagonist. The narrative's central conflict may be structured around a collision of the Individual and the State. The more modest the Little Man's attempt to extract any benefit from the System, the more pathetic his failure to do so may be made to appear. The

12. See A. P. Chekhov's comic story "Anna on the Neck" (1895) for a variant of this situation. There is no evidence that Chekhov knew Pavlov's stories.

13. Belinsky, *PSS*, 1:98.

14. Concerning the development of the *chinovnik* story see A. G. Tseitlin, *Povesti o bednom chinovnike Dostoevskogo (Istoriia siazheta)* (Moscow, 1923), pp. 1–45. Tseitlin is the first modern scholar to call attention to "The Demon," which he terms an "excellent" and "unjustly forgotten" story (p. 5).

15. M. A. Belkina, "Svetskaia povest' 30-kh godov i 'Kniaginia Ligovskaia' Lermontova," *Zhizn' i tvorchestvo M. Iu. Lermontova* (Moscow, 1941), p. 533.

inevitability of his failure is a central premise. An ethical evaluation may therefore be implicit in the outcome of the narrative: although he is defeated, the clerk-protagonist wins a moral victory, since by the very fact of his inability to confront the System on its terms, he demonstrates his moral superiority to it.

Elaborated during the 1820s and early 1830s, the conventions of the *chinovnik* story were authoritatively established in the mid-1830s by Gogol's "Notes of a Madman" (1835) and Pushkin's "The Bronze Horseman" (1837).¹⁶ But the exemplary *chinovnik* story in Russian fiction is Gogol's "The Overcoat" (1842). It is a story which is curiously reminiscent of Pavlov's "The Demon." At the end of September 1839, Gogol arrived in Russia after spending over three years abroad. He brought sketches for "The Overcoat" with him. His arrival thus coincided with the time when interest in Pavlov's *New Stories* was at its height. These considerations suggest the possibility that, as at least two of their contemporaries seem to have thought (see below), Pavlov's story may have contributed in some way to the creation of Gogol's masterpiece. What can be discovered that might link Gogol's writing of "The Overcoat" with a knowledge of "The Demon"? What interactions between the two texts point to "The Demon" as a putative source for "The Overcoat," and what might have motivated this hypothetical relationship?

Scholars have concluded that Gogol began work on "The Overcoat" in July 1839, while in Marienbad.¹⁷ M. P. Pogodin arrived in Marienbad on July 9, and sometime during the month he spent there he took down the preliminary sketch from Gogol's dictation. Gogol resumed work on it a month later in Vienna, where he spent the better part of August and September, leaving for Moscow with Pogodin (who had rejoined him) on September 22. This second sketch represents a reworking of the beginning of the story, plus the addition of the episode concerning the clerk's birth and an outline of his visit to the tailor. Thus when Gogol returned to Russia, the story was still in a very fragmentary state (in print the fragment amounts to three pages of a quarto volume).

Several clues to the genesis of "The Overcoat" have been cited by literary historians, who have been especially inclined to entertain any plausible evidence concerning the sources of Gogol's works, since his chronic inability to think up story ideas is well attested. One of these clues is Annenkov's well-known statement about the *chinovnik* anecdote, which he says Gogol heard some-

16. Pushkin's *poema* was written in 1833, but except for its opening invocation to the city (*Biblioteka dlia chteniia*, 1834), it was not published until the spring of 1837 (*Sovremennik*, vol. 5). Pavlov's treatment of the Petersburg motifs in "The Demon" may reflect his recent reading of that work.

17. The following discussion of the textology of "The Overcoat" is based on commentary by the editors of the Academy edition of Gogol's *PSS*, 3:675-90.

time in the mid-1830s.¹⁸ Another is the suggestion offered by the editors of the Academy edition of Gogol's works (but not repeated in subsequent editions), that Gogol was intrigued by one or more anecdotes told by a companion in Marienbad.¹⁹ A third clue, which is frequently cited, is contained in a letter Gogol wrote to his mother in 1830, in which he relates how, for lack of funds, he had to make do that winter with his summer overcoat.²⁰ But what about "The Demon"? Could Gogol have been acquainted with it before he began work on "The Overcoat"? Or could his subsequent reading of "The Demon" have had some effect on the way the initial story idea was elaborated?

Initially, the first suggestion seems unlikely. Not only is it doubtful that Gogol (who had been abroad since the summer of 1836) could have heard anything substantive about "The Demon," but also, in view of the fact that *New Stories* could not have appeared before the end of June 1839 (and probably not until the second half of July), a copy could not have reached him until well after he had begun "The Overcoat." But there was another, indirect route by which the story could have reached him. It is only natural to assume that when Pogodin arrived in Marienbad, Gogol would have been anxious to hear news of his old circle of Moscow acquaintances and their literary activities. The imminent publication of a volume by one of Gogol's "close friends"²¹ would surely have been interesting to him. All the more so since one story in the book, "The Demon," represented an incursion into the territory of Gogol's own writing. Pogodin not only knew of the stories, but, as his diary shows, he had already read them.²²

Gogol and Pogodin arrived in Moscow on September 26, just before *New*

18. P. V. Annenkov, *Literaturnye vospominaniia* (Leningrad, 1928), pp. 61-62. As recounted by Annenkov, the anecdote concerns a "poor *chinovnik*" who is a passionate hunter. By extraordinary economies he manages to save two hundred rubles and buy a magnificent rifle. The first time he goes hunting, however, the rifle falls from his boat and is lost. The *chinovnik* takes to his bed in a high fever but is "restored to life" when his coworkers take up a collection and buy him another rifle.

19. Gogol, *PSS*, 3:676. This suggestion is based on Pogodin's account of his stay in Marienbad in his travel diary, *God v chuzhikh kraiaikh (1839): Dorozhnyi dnevniki M. Pogodina*, 4 vols. (Moscow, 1844), 3:75-79.

20. Gogol, *PSS*, 10:170.

21. This is what Gogol called him in a note to Pogodin in 1849. Gogol and Pavlov probably met for the first time in 1832, in Moscow. Pavlov was an intimate of Aksakov and Pogodin, Gogol's closest Moscow friends, and in 1838 the three men sent money to Gogol, who was ill and penniless in Italy. See S. T. Aksakov, "Istoriia moego znakomstva s Gogolem," *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* (Moscow, 1966), 3:155. The fact that Pavlov had been trained as an actor must have appealed to Gogol, and in 1846 he advised an actor in "The Inspector General" to model his elocution on Pavlov's (Gogol, *PSS*, 13:118).

22. Pogodin read the stories in December 1838, while traveling to St. Petersburg with Pavlov, who was taking them to the capital for submission to the censor (Barsukov, *Zhizn' i trudy Pogodina*, 5:204-5).

Stories became available there.²³ A month later Gogol left for St. Petersburg, traveling with S. T. Aksakov, who reports that Gogol read Pavlov's new volume at this time, and reread it shortly thereafter—that is, at the time when he resumed work on "The Overcoat."²⁴ Thus, not only could Gogol have known Pavlov's story before he began "The Overcoat," but he certainly knew it well before more than a few pages of his story were written.

The two stories present similar structural profiles. Of the same length (some thirty-one pages of a crown octavo volume), they include casts of characters who fulfill similar plot functions: the clerks; the wife ("The Demon"), the tailor and his wife ("The Overcoat");²⁵ the Generals; various episodic clerks and functionaries; and the *fantastic* city itself. The events of "The Demon" are distributed among five chapters, a narrative schema with which the events of "The Overcoat" can be made to coincide, as it were, fortuitously.

Both narratives open with a portrait of the clerk-protagonist whose monotonous existence is depicted against a background of the bustling life of his department and the surrounding city. Middle-aged copy clerks (Andrei is forty-five, Akakii over fifty), they are superannuated fixtures in the offices where they have served for decades:

Сколько бурь высидел он там на одном и том же стуле! Ураган финского залива уносил над его головой начальников отделения, а он не колыхался, он продолжал писать; сочинители черновых менялись над ним,—что ему за дело? сочинения оставались те же. Сегодня он пришел отсюда, завтра пойдет туда. . . . ("Demon," p. 172)²⁶

Сколько ни переменялось директоров и всяких начальников, его видели все на одном и том же месте, в том положении, в той же самой должности, тем же чиновником для письма, так что потом уверились, что он, видно, так и родился на свет уже совершенно готовым, в вицмундире и с лысиной на голове. ("Overcoat," p. 143)²⁷

23. Public sale of the book in Moscow was delayed, perhaps owing to the distributor's ill will toward Pavlov. See N. F. Pavlov to A. A. Kraevsky, Dec. 25, 1839, *Russkii arkhiv*, 1 (1897): 457. However, Pavlov and his friends had received copies of the book by mail from the capital in July.

24. Aksakov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 3:168–70. "The third draft began to take shape in November–December 1839, in Petersburg . . ." (Gogol, *PSS*, 3:685). Work on the story was set aside when Gogol left for Moscow in the winter of 1840, and was not renewed until March–April 1841, when he completed it in Rome.

25. There is, of course, an interesting parallel between the roles of the wife in "The Demon" and of the overcoat itself.

26. "How many storms had he sat out there on one and the same chair! A tempest from the Gulf of Finland had carried off chiefs of the department over his head, but he hadn't flinched, he had kept on copying. Writers of rough drafts came and went above

Their offices are filled with much younger men who either ignore them or occasionally tease them, and neither Andrei nor Akakii choose to participate in the limited social life available to them, which in both stories includes going to clerks' parties, eating in restaurants, and looking in shop windows (a particularly dangerous activity, associated with sexual fantasies; cf. "Demon," p. 172, and "Overcoat," pp. 158–59). The city itself is hostile territory where inimical forces lie in wait for Andrei and Akakii ("Demon," pp. 172, 180–81, and "Overcoat," pp. 145, 152, 161–62). This perilous passage, which must be braved twice a day, links office with home, public with private life, and work with leisure. But these two sectors are barely distinguishable, since they encompass the same activity—copying:

. . . на небе стоял месяц на карауле.
. . . и в этот великий час в целом
божьем мире все чиновники давным-
давно перестали писать, а ты пиши
да пиши. . . . Напрасно перо твое
притупится, рассудок потемнеет и
ты уткнешься в бумагу с вопросом:
Господи Боже мой, неужли в самом
деле есть на свете такие земли и
такие люди? . . . они есть. . . . и все
затем, чтобы заставить тебя писать,
да как и не писать? Не для того ли
построен Петербург, не для того ли
днем светит солнце, а ночью месяц?
("Demon," pp. 171–72)²⁸

Даже в те часы, когда со-
вершенно потухает петербург-
ское серое небо и весь чиновный
народ наелся . . . Акакий Ака-
киевич не предавался никакому
развлечению. . . . Написавшись
всelaсть, он ложился спать, улы-
баясь заранее при мысли о зав-
трашнем дне: что-то Бог пошлет
переписывать завтра? ("Over-
coat," p. 146)²⁹

him—what business was it of his? The writings remained the same. Today he returned from there, tomorrow he would go back there. . . ."

27. "No matter how many directors and various chiefs came and went, he could always be seen at one and the same place, in the same attitude, in the same job, just the same copy clerk, so that in time the belief came to be held that he must have been born into the world already completely fitted out, in a uniform and with a bald spot on his head." Gogol, "Shinel," *PSS*, 3:141–74. All further references will be taken from this edition.

28. ". . . the moon stood watch in the sky. . . . and at this late hour all the clerks in the whole wide world have long since ceased copying, but you go on copying. . . . In vain your pen becomes blunt, your reason clouds, and you bury yourself in the paper with the question: My Lord, are there truly such lands and such people in the world? There are. . . . and all in order to set you to copying, for why shouldn't you? Isn't that why Petersburg was built? Isn't that why the sun shines in the daytime, and the moon at night?"

29. "Even at those hours when the gray Petersburg sky grows completely dark, and the whole clerky fraternity has eaten its fill . . . Akakii Akakievich did not give himself up to any kind of entertainment. . . . After copying to his heart's content, he went to bed, smiling in anticipation at the thought of the morrow: what would the Lord send to be copied tomorrow?"

Thus the chief mode of existence for both clerks is isolation—a state of nearly total social exclusion which in both stories is conveyed through an inability to communicate verbally (a handicap which Andrei finally overcomes, but which Akakii only overcomes in afterlife). The “calm flow” of their isolated lives (“Demon,” p. 169, “Overcoat,” p. 146) is not, however, destined to last. External reality intrudes on their closed worlds, introducing the necessity for change: Andrei realizes that his wife’s material wants outstrip his ability to provide for them, and Akakii realizes that his overcoat is inadequate to withstand the rigors of the Petersburg winter. Both face the problem of money; and, for both, what the money is needed for becomes an obsession.

Ensuing events involve fantasy, through the association of the protagonists’ new material concerns with supernatural (diabolic) forces. This association is realized in the following sections of both works: in “The Demon” in the nocturnal scene during which Andrei is possessed by the demonic spirit of his newly raised consciousness, and in “The Overcoat” in Akakii’s dealings with the tailor.³⁰

Having “awakened” to reality (“Demon,” p. 171, “Overcoat,” p. 152), the two clerks have acquired a new purposefulness (“Demon,” pp. 173, 177–78, “Overcoat,” pp. 154–55), which is then tested in confrontations with the city and with the bureaucracy. Carrying his petition (chap. 3), Pavlov’s clerk makes his harrowing trip across Petersburg, assaulted from all sides by the sights and sounds of “egotism” and “greed” (“Demon,” pp. 180–81). Reaching the General’s residence, he has his initial encounter with the System. Clothed in his new overcoat, Gogol’s clerk makes *his* trip across Petersburg, and is assaulted by robbers who take his coat. He also seeks official redress for a wrong, and, like Andrei, finds that his way to the authorities is momentarily blocked by an equivocating underling.

These preliminary encounters are followed by the climactic scene of the interview between the clerk and the General (the rank of Gogol’s Very Important Person is revealed once, p. 165). Gogol’s treatment of this scene closely parallels Pavlov’s: the wait in the antechamber, the clerk’s tongue-tied state, the General’s sense of power, the hyperbolization of the distance separating the adversaries, the General’s taking offense at a mild verbal impropriety, and the enraged order to leave, uttered in a shout. The epilogues of the two narratives reflect their opposite resolution of the Little Man’s confrontation with the System. His obsession fulfilled by means of a fictitious injury, Andrei

30. D. S. Merezhkovsky, in his *Gogol i chort* (Moscow, 1906), offers the first major investigation of the problem of good and evil in Gogol’s works, but Tschizewskij is the first to discuss the role of the devil in “The Overcoat.” See D. Čyževskij, “Zur Komposition von Gogol’s ‘Mantel,’” *Zeitschrift für slavische Philologie*, 14, no. 1–2 (1937): 63–94 and esp. 88–90.

Ivanovich emerges into the daytime world of the capital and sheds his nocturnal aspect, his "spirit" self. The fulfillment of his obsession thwarted by a very real injury, Akakii Akakievich dies, and reappears to haunt the Petersburg nights as a "phantom."

Although these similarities are suggestive of a relationship between "The Demon" and "The Overcoat" which goes beyond their generic kinship, the present argument would be strengthened if their equally obvious differences were discovered to correlate with their similarities. In short, what in Pavlov's story might have prompted a response from Gogol?

It is apparent that Pavlov's resolution of the confrontation between the Little Man and the System is unconventional and, furthermore, is predicated on a cynical view of human nature and society (Reality) which is the antithesis of the idealist world view embodied in the conventions of the *chinovnik* story. Pavlov's clerk is the image of self-interest, and this petty demon triumphs through his accommodation to, and masterful manipulation of, the System and its values. "The Demon" is a travesty of the *chinovnik* story, a comic *quid pro quo* which mocks the reader's expectations of philanthropic pathos. Just as in Pavlov's society stories, where stereotypes of upper-class characters such as the Byronic Hero and the Idealized Heroine are unmasked (cf. in particular the companion pieces of "The Demon" in *New Stories*, "The Masquerade" and "A Million"), in "The Demon" Pavlov offers a critique of the stereotyped features then coalescing in the figure of the unfortunate petty clerk.

Pavlov's satiric intent is signaled in the opening paragraph of the story: "Andrei Ivanovich was either not educated or not rich enough to use a wax candle, but at the same time he clearly had such nobility of soul that he did not spare tallow. A small room served as his study. It was cleaner than any clerk's study in the whole rest of Russia" ("Demon," p. 167). Having pointed the joke with Gogolian hyperbole, Pavlov continues in the same vein with a description of the room's modest accessories:

Moreover, several objects demonstrated that the owner [of the room] was not always swimming in ink, was not always occupied with work, but permitted himself to enjoy life, to diversify his interests, and was sensible to the need of enlightenment and thirsted for poetry. It was particularly evident that, fortunately, he did not read foreign languages, but nourished himself solely on the works of his native land. Consequently, he was in the fortunate position of the Turk who does not see other men's wives. A nice little Alexandrine column made of bronze, several lithographs of Russian manufacture, one issue of some journal or other, two or three volumes of some sorts of stories, and a nightingale in a cage satisfied the whims of mind and heart. . . . I almost forgot the room's most important ornament—a pile of business papers.

Thus, wherever Andrei Ivanovich might turn, he was confronted

with the familiar, with the native: a book by a Russian writer, a picture by a Russian artist, a case from a Russian court, and a nightingale from a Russian grove. ("Demon," p. 168)

At this point, certain of Pavlov's Muscovite friends must have begun to suspect that in this portrait of "patriarchal custom" ("Demon," p. 170) their witty friend was preparing a trap for their proto-Slavophile sensibilities. They would have been right. For while "The Demon" is a demonstration of the universality of human self-interestedness, its protagonist is not simply Everyman, he is emphatically a Russian Everyman. Andrei Ivanovich, the quintessentially Russian Little Man, the "sleepy, patient, useful, virtuous" clerk ("Demon," p. 168), will "awaken" to life as it really is, and will demand his share. Most significantly, in terms of the developing controversies between Slavophiles and Westernizers,³¹ the rebellion of the clerk is pointedly not the result of contagion by foreign notions. Rather, Pavlov's story implies that the true foreign notions are those which are projected on the Little Man by the idealistic Russian intelligentsia.

The thrust of Pavlov's argument did not escape his informed contemporaries, progressives and conservatives alike. Ivan Panaev, Belinsky's close companion at the time, asserted in 1839 that "owing to the strained quality of its content . . . 'The Demon' had to be told *in the most extremely strained manner*, thereby exposing its author's most unpleasant view of life."³² That *unpleasantness*—a worldly, morally detached skepticism—also provoked Shevrev. An erstwhile intimate of Pavlov who in the 1840s had become almost a "disciple" of Gogol,³³ Shevrev commented in 1846: "In an outburst of irritable satire . . . Pavlov described in 'The Demon' the total moral abasement to which that victim [the *chinovnik*] of social conditions could descend. . . . Perhaps 'The Demon' gave rise to Gogol's 'The Overcoat.'"³⁴ Shevrev's comments clearly spring from a consideration of the moral action of the respective stories, and it is evident that from this point of view "The Overcoat" can be read as a direct reply to "The Demon," as a refutation of Pavlov's view of human, or at least Russian, nature.

Pavlov's story presents a harsh picture of human nature as innately and incorrigibly materialistic, and of life as an unceasing round of deception and

31. In which Pavlov outwardly maintained a neutral position through the early 1840s. But in 1847 Pavlov's three letters to Gogol (published in *Moskovskie vedomosti* and *Sovremennik*) criticizing *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* made it clear that he would side, however moderately, with the Westernizers. Pavlov's letters were hailed by Belinsky (*PSS*, 12:351–52, and 3:358), who shortly thereafter wrote his famous "Letter to Gogol."

32. *Ibid.*, 11:422.

33. Merezhkovsky, *Gogol' i chort*, p. 98.

34. S. P. Shevrev, "Peterburgskii sbornik," *Moskvitianin*, 1, no. 2 (1846): 166.

"oppression of one's neighbors" in the struggle for advantages—"money, power, women"—which are distributed by the "injustice of fate" ("Demon," p. 171). Gogol's story, on the other hand, seems to offer the assurance that although human nature and the world itself are tainted with corruption, they are, to some degree at least, perfectible.³⁵ Where Gogol's narrative holds out the hope of a higher moral law, or otherworldly retribution, Pavlov's narrative is thoroughly secular, and he notes only that the efficacy of moral restraints imposed by traditional religious beliefs is subverted by hypocrisy ("Demon," pp. 174–75). Pavlov's General gains the favors of a young mistress. Nothing occurs which would alter his relations with others; indeed, his vanity and sense of power have been enhanced. Gogol's General, accosted by Akakii's ghost, abandons his plan to visit his mistress, and rushes home to his family. From then on he thinks twice before shouting at his subordinates. Pavlov's clerk, who has deliberately gone about losing his wife, is recompensed for this loss by a large share of life's advantages: a spacious apartment in the fashionable quarter of the city, servants, new status, and leisure. His former co-workers gape admiringly at his success, as totally undisturbed as he himself is by the means of its accomplishment. Gogol's clerk, whose coat was torn from him, dies brokenhearted and delirious, and is shoved into a pine coffin. He leaves an estate of quill pens, copy paper, socks, buttons, and a threadbare garment. His death is almost overlooked by his coworkers, and within a week another faceless clerk sits in his place.

Andrei Ivanovich's success is assured by the discovery he makes in the antechamber to the General's office, where he "corrects the false opinions" that he had held of others. He sees that self-interest and obsequiousness before superior rank are concealed beneath the polished exteriors of all those who had formerly seemed so worldly and powerful; he sees that they are all the "same sorts of Andrei Ivanoviches"; and he therefore "recognizes his neighbors as his brothers" ("Demon," p. 183, italics added). But Gogol's reader is led through pathos to a different discovery. For although there can be no denying that "savage coarseness . . . is even to be discovered in the man whom the world considers noble and honorable" ("Overcoat," p. 144), this falls away at the sudden recognition of the communality of humankind:

"Leave me alone. Why do you insult me?" And there was a strange ring in those words and in the voice in which they were uttered. In that voice could be heard something that moved one to compassion—so much so

35. For an interesting hypothesis relating to this point see John Schillinger, "Gogol's 'The Overcoat' as a Travesty of Hagiography," *Slavic and East European Journal*, 16, no. 1 (Spring 1972): 36–41. The parallel between "The Overcoat" and the Life of Saint Acacius of Sinai was noted earlier by F. C. Driessen in his *Gogol as a Short-Story Writer* (The Hague, 1965), p. 194.

that one young man, recently appointed, who followed the example set by the rest and permitted himself to ridicule him, suddenly stopped as though pierced to the quick, and from that time on, everything seemed to change for him and to appear in a different light; some unknown force seemed to repel him from the comrades with whom he had become acquainted because he thought they were decent, well-bred men. And for a long time afterward, during his happiest moments, he could visualize the little clerk with the bald spot on his forehead, and hear his heart-rending words: "Leave me alone! Why do you insult me?" And in those heartrending words, he caught the ringing sound of others: "*I am your brother.*" ("Overcoat," pp. 143–44, italics added)³⁶

Pavlov's *chinovnik* story breaks with convention most markedly in its avoidance of pathos, in its view of the Little Man as a shrewd opportunist rather than as a helpless victim. Pavlov's uncompromising rejection of the philanthropism and neosentimentalism which are prominent in popular Russian fiction at the close of the romantic era was yet another "impermissible" act on his part:

For example, compare "The Overcoat" with a story that has a basic situation which is almost identical to it—"The Demon," by the talented writer N. F. Pavlov. Just compare the scene with the superior officer in each man's story! And by the way, reading "The Demon" you cannot help but acknowledge that talent is clearly present here, that the analysis here is extraordinarily deep. Perhaps it is precisely because the analysis tries too hard to be deep that the talent takes the monsters of its fantastically attuned imagination for real, living creations, and the sufferings of poor Andrei Petrovich [*sic*], who has been possessed by the idea that a poor existence will wear out the life of his pretty little better half, grow to unbelievably colossal proportions, and what is strange is that the more they try to grow, the less capable you become of *sympathizing* with them, and the whole of the author's *pathos* is wasted. On the other hand, how simply told is the clerks' behavior with Akakii Akakievich, and his grief at the loss of his overcoat. *Your heart is wrung*, and at the same time, in a transport of ecstasy, you revel in that *truthful* artistic analysis.³⁷

Thus, in the nationalistically oriented mainstream of post-1840 Russian criticism, "The Overcoat" could be viewed as a standard against which works

36. In an article written in 1918 Boris Eikhenbaum averred that the pathetic element in "The Overcoat" had been greatly exaggerated. Eikhenbaum called attention to ambiguities in Gogol's treatment of his clerk-protagonist which undercut the story's philanthropic aspect. This view has gained wide currency in contemporary criticism, especially in the West. See Boris Eikhenbaum, "Kak sdelana 'Shinel' Gogolia," *Skvoz' literaturu* (Leningrad, 1924), pp. 171–95.

37. Apollon Grigor'ev, *Literaturnaia kritika* (Moscow, 1967), pp. 195–96, italics added. Grigor'ev's remarks were originally published in 1859.

by writers such as Pavlov could be measured in the continuing process of discrediting elitism, cosmopolitanism, and lack of "truth" in Russian prose fiction.³⁸ But Gogol himself appears to reveal a polemical lining in his garment when he implies at the outset of "The Overcoat" that he is coming to the defense of the *chinovnik*, "a person who, as everyone knows, has been sneered at and joked about at will by various writers who have the praiseworthy habit of setting upon those who cannot stand up for themselves" ("Overcoat," pp. 141–42). For whom besides N. F. Pavlov could this gibe have been tailor-made?

38. The assumptions underlying this line of attack are implicit in Belinsky's comment that in "The Overcoat" Gogol "managed to find the tragic not in the comic but in the positive commonplaceness of life. Here is where, it seems to us, one must look to find the essential distinctiveness of Gogol's talent. It is not solely the gift of clearly depicting life's commonplaceness, but something more—the gift of depicting life's phenomena in the fulness of their reality and truthfulness" (Belinsky, *PSS*, 10:44).