

Doc. dr Slobodan D. Jovanović¹
Fakultet za pravne i poslovne studije
„Dr Lazar Vrkatić“, Novi Sad
Brankica Todić², B. A.
York University

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VICTIMS IN GOGOL'S *THE VIY* AND *NEVSKY PROSPECT*

SUMMARY: In *Nevsky Prospect* and *The Viy* Nikolay Gogol offers insight into his inner ego and id. In both stories Gogol deals with love, criticism, and victimization. *Nevsky Prospect* and *The Viy* are impregnated with the author's self-struggle not to be a victim of love and social circumstances. The author feels that there is not and there simply cannot be a destruction and decay more terrible than the one of one's growing a victim of his personal emotional selfishness. When this does happen, life turns into a fortress with no windows, becomes a tomb to which there is no light. As for the characters in these two stories, they genuinely felt that they loved, on that emotion building their golden castles of love, however also building their revolting dungeons of hate. It is true that love motivates life and living, in this being the force that stimulates activity and inspires. However, it is at the same time a mighty source of illusion. In presenting such ideas, Gogol's selection of symbolic themes and style are amazing. Expressiveness in both characters and self-hesitation is conspicuous. The sphere of superior and the malevolence in victims are presented in rather abnormal style; his motivation was the Russian and Ukrainian ethnological stories, however not tending to use elements of folk life as a source and means of producing effects of something extraordinary. This is why the parallel could be placed and written about that both characters are victims of self-consciousness.

KEY WORDS: *love, criticism, victims, social victim, self-consciousness.*

¹ jovanovic072@sbb.rs.

² lukalu@alumni.yorku.ca.

The divided soul

In his famous stories entitled *Nevsky Prospect* and *The Viy* Nikolay Gogol presents in fact his inner ego and id. The author deals with love, criticism, and victimization in both stories, or rather *tales*, as understood by the translator Constance Garnett. (Kent, 1985) Both *Nevsky Prospect* and *The Viy* are impregnated with his own self-struggle, with his striving not to be a victim of love and a victim of social circumstances. All victims have their demonic and their saintly sides (Troyat, 1975), and this is exactly why Gogol tried to present those in both of these stories.

The eternal *mêlée* between good and evil, between sufferings and love, is just a component of thematic adaptation of victims, the philosopher and the artist. Some certain malevolence and the feature of superiority in characters is just what could be recognized as the emblem of Gogol's inner-self victim. Everything is possible in love, everything can be expected to happen to victims – miracles, sorrow, as well as happiness. Victims of love are seen as living for their beloved, however their tragic endings are also witnessed. Victims of love live in the greatest utopia of all, and they are utopists of self-pity.

Victimization is Gogol's obvious confrontation about love and his point of view with love reality. The philosopher and the artist live with a certain confusion of beauty of something abnormal and illusory. They feel like they were without the necessary spiritual balance and guidance. At the beginning it looks like their emotions are lifted with egocentric and egotistic force of love, but as the stories go they realize that they are lost. They are victims because they have tried to love selfishly, and first of all, they have wanted to dominate as the masters of their beloved.

Gogol used a lot of hyperboles in *The Viy* and *Nevsky Prospect*, through rhetoric of a true artist. His idiosyncratic vision of love victimization is certainly characteristic, although he used the Ukrainian folklore motifs as the starting point. As for the folklore, connected and intertwined with elements of fantasy and grotesque, the word is of ingredients that are always present, employed by Gogol even when portraying some seemingly entirely realistic events and circumstances. (Janković, 2007)

There can be no bigger destruction than to turn a self-victim of one's own emotional selfishness. It is like a fortress without windows. It is like a tomb without light. As characters in the stories, they really felt they

loved, they both built their golden castles of love and they both built the terrible dungeons of hate.

Love is the motive for living, and love is also the motivating force initiating action and bringing inspiration. It is the powerful source of illusions as can be clearly seen in *The Viy* and *Nevsky Prospect*. To love and to be loved is the privilege of the divine gift. As the author presented his characters as victims, this can perhaps be compared with Christian mortification and considered partial paradox in literature.

The All-seeing Eye

Gogol presents agonizing, atrocious, and horrendous settings, as well as inner inconsistency in his characters. In *The Viy*³ we can notice theological and paganism-related motifs, juxtaposition of philosopher's hedonistic way of life that passes into a paranormal phenomenon. (Woodward, 1982) Hence the story has two different parts; it begins describing social gatherings and the way of life people lived, to go then into modification of Khoma Brut's personal tussle. The character named Khoma Brut indicates luscious living, because he enjoys everything with his senses, being especially happy while smoking and eating.

In their bizarre living and the constant tussle with their inner selves, both characters succumbed because of weakness and psychopathological tribulations. The combination of religious, satanic and paranormal is obviously characteristic for romanticism. The theme of altercation of the philosopher (Khoma Brut) and the artist (Piskarev) as victims goes even further as a sexual connotation. (Peace, 1981) The truth is that love and

³ 'In a note to the title of the story, Gogol explains that "Viy is a colossal creation of the folk imagination. This is the name that the Little Russians use to refer to the chief of the gnomes, whose eyelids reach right down to the ground..." However, Viy is unknown in Ukrainian folklore; so, in fact, are gnomes, who in all likelihood migrated into Gogol's story from Grimm's fairy tales. Viy therefore is a creation not of the imagination of "the folk" but rather of Gogol himself. And the word "Viy" was most likely derived by Gogol from the Ukrainian *viya*, meaning "eyelash". In any event, the long eyelids of the "chief of the (Grimm brothers!) gnomes, and his name, which serves as the title of the story, are both associated with a glance, with eyes, with vision' (Stilman, 1974: 377).

death, the two inseparable for the victims of chaotic confusion, in their heads also indicate what Jung⁴ called *arche*,⁵ as seen as good and evil.

Special emphasis in *The Viy* is placed, as the title tells, on the Ukrainian ethnology, and a lot of supernatural motifs, describing women as witches, grotesque-beautiful scenery and nature. An allegorical significance in *The Viy* could be about sexual death. (Ibid: 56) As always is the case with Gogol (Janković, 2007), his artistic approach here again is that of realism, without any doubt, however also bearing strong marks of fantasy.

At the end, in the final scene taking place in the church, Khoma Brut is left as a victim, with all the monsters, the Viy and the witch, and that indicates a simple connotation 'ultimately linked with sexuality'. (Peace, 1981: 57)

Gothic horror in description of monsters described as human organs might point out that Gogol really wanted to concentrate on personal dissatisfaction. Khoma Brut has a personality best described as an empty one. He is actually not satisfied with his way of living and he has a lack of self-confidence as seen at the end as his death, which is symbolic.

⁴ Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist who founded analytical psychology. Jung proposed and developed the concepts of extraversion and introversion; archetypes, and the collective unconscious. His work has been influential in psychiatry and in the study of religion, philosophy, archeology, anthropology, literature, and the related fields. Jung developed an understanding of archetypes as universal, archaic patterns and images that derive from the collective unconscious and are the psychic counterpart of instinct. They are autonomous and hidden forms which are transformed once they enter consciousness and are given particular expression by individuals and their cultures. Being unconscious, the existence of archetypes can only be deduced indirectly by examining behavior, images, art, myths, religions, or dreams. They are inherited potentials which are actualized when they enter consciousness as images or manifest in behavior on interaction with the outside world (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Gustav_Jung).

⁵ *Arche* is a Greek word with primary senses *beginning*, *origin* or *first cause*. Later, *power*, *sovereignty*, *domination* as extended meanings were accepted by some. This list is extended to *ultimate underlying substance* and *ultimate undemonstrable principle*. In the language of the archaic period (8th-6th century BC) *arche* (or *archai*) designates the *source*, *origin* or *root* of things that exist. In ancient Greek Philosophy, Aristotle for egrounded the meaning of *arche* as the element or principle of a thing, which although undemonstrable and intangible in itself, provides the conditions of the possibility of that thing. If a thing is to be well established or founded, its *arche* or starting point must be secure. The most secure foundations are those provided by the gods – the indestructible, immutable and eternal ordering of things (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arche>).

Food and drink seemed to satisfy and restore Khoma Brut, but Gogol in a way resorted to an ironic emphasis because it is not in a philosopher's nature to be that hedonistic, but rather with stoical way of living. Gogol used a lot of metaphors indicating Khoma Brut's dissatisfaction of his spiritual persona. Brut has his knowledge about his life, but actually Gogol indicates that it is ambiguous.

As stated in the story, one cannot blame, or grieve, the tragic end of Khoma Brut because he himself is responsible in believing in satanic and witchcraft love life. The significance of the role for the Viy lies in the fact that he is described as a being with closed eyes. This could also have a symbolic meaning and significance of the character for not accepting the way of living. As a satanic profound being, the Viy is in fact malevolence as an emblem. Khoma Brut is certainly a victim of self-consciousness, a struggle of his inner *Eros* and *Thanatos*.⁶ (Karlinsky, 1976).

The Viy presents the allegory of evil, which can force Brut to acknowledge his fears and make him to face the truth. The contradiction of *seen* and *not seen* is Brut's psychological ethics, vengeance as devout agony. The story follows the pattern of demonic ambiance. The point is that Khoma dies from fear the moment Viy sees him:

“Raise my eyelids. I cannot see!” said Viy, in a voice that seemed to come from the depths of the earth – and the whole swarm of creatures rushed to raise his eyelids. “Don't look!” an inner voice whispered to the Philosopher. But he could not resist, and he looked.

“There he is!” shouted Viy, and pointed an iron finger at him. And all, the whole swarm of creatures, hurled themselves on the Philosopher. He fell lifeless to the ground, and his soul fled from his body in terror. (Stilman, 1974: 377)

We understand that Viy sees Khoma the moment Khoma himself looks, unable to resist and heedless of the inner voice. Khoma is betrayed

⁶ Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) theorized that the duality of human nature emerged from two basic instincts: *Eros* and *Thanatos*. He saw in *Eros* the instinct for life, love and sexuality in its broadest sense, and in *Thanatos*, the instinct of death, aggression. *Eros* is the drive toward attraction and reproduction; *Thanatos* toward repulsion and death. One leads to the reproduction of the species, the other toward its own destruction (http://www.dunev.com/archive/eros_i_thantatos/eros_en.html).

by his own glance, so that *not to look* here means *to be invisible* – you must not look at something horrible. The temptation is great, but you must not yield to it; if you do look, then you yourself will be seen, and there is no salvation for you.

The Main Avenue

Nevsky Prospect is Gogol's short story written between 1831 and 1834, published in 1835. (Lindstrom, 1966) The title itself relates to the main street⁷ in the city of St. Petersburg.

This story again deals with the theme of good and immorality. The artist's approach to the situation of being humiliated and mocked in front of his friends indicates a pathetic personality. He rather lives in an illusory world; instead of accepting reality that the girl he loves is a prostitute, Piskarev is simply rejecting the idea that she is an immoral person, and thus he becomes a victim of love fantasy. Piskarev's ethical failing also tells that Gogol presented mental and physical attractiveness in this character.

The character has been tortured with satanic fluctuation in his dreams, as he sees something more beautiful than reality. Gogol presents the girl's beauty as an epitome of endless beauty like many writers in their works. Piskarev's illusion leads him into death, as being weak to accept the reality. His way to save the girl from the unmoral has a deep

⁷ Nevsky Prospekt – Nevsky Avenue – is the main street in the city of St. Petersburg, Russia. Planned by Peter the Great as beginning of the road to Novgorod and Moscow, the avenue runs from the Admiralty to the Moscow Railway Station and, after making a turn at Vosstaniya Square, to the Alexander Nevsky Lavra. The chief sights include the Rastrelliesque Stroganov Palace, the huge neoclassical Kazan Cathedral, the Art Nouveau *Bookhouse*, Elisseff Emporium, half a dozen 18th-century churches, a monument to Catherine the Great, an enormous 18th-century shopping mall, a mid-19th-century department store, the Russian National Library, and the Anichkov Bridge with its horse statues. The feverish life of the avenue was described by Nikolai Gogol in his story *Nevsky Prospekt*. Fyodor Dostoevsky often employed the Nevsky Prospekt as a setting within his works, such as *Crime and Punishment* and *The Double: A Petersburg Poem*.

The Nevsky today functions as the main thoroughfare in Saint Petersburg. The majority of the city's shopping and nightlife are located on or right off the Nevsky Prospekt (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nevsky_Prospect).

connotation of wanting to become a hero. And as Piskarev, "trembling all over", hurries along in pursuit of his goal, he in many respects resembles Khoma Brut during the "fantastic gallop with the witch on his back". (Maguire, 1974: 399)

The question could be asked of whether the social circumstances manifested themselves in both physical and mental ways of living? Gogol's view is very reflective about these subjects. The discrimination between women and men is an archaic issue, but it seems that Gogol has reversed the typical roles; in his stories men are the victims, not women.

As one of Gogol's strongest and most effective stories, *Nevsky Prospect* emphasizes the contrast between life in misery and riches, produced and brought about by the development of capitalism. The introduction describes Nevsky Prospect, the central avenue of St. Petersburg, and its population at different times of the day. The narrator revels in the delights of the street, but he is filled with *poshlost*, a Russian concept similar to *kitsch*, possible to be defined as "self-satisfied inferiority". (Mirsky, 1926, 1927). This is, for instance, exemplified in the repeated admiring descriptions of mustaches, "to which the better part of a life has been devoted." However, the description of the street ends abruptly, and the story shifts to the conversation of two acquaintances who have decided to split up, each to pursue a different woman seen in the street.

Gradually we come to see that Gogol paints before us a picture in which honest and sensitive people perish, the prosperous ones being those who are nothing more than vulgar and selfish career pursuers. The merciless ones manage "to finally get married to a merchant's daughter who is skilled at playing the piano, who brings along one hundred or approximately one hundred in cash, and who has a host of bearded relatives." (Lalić, 1956: XXXII) People of this type of character are in constant pursuit of income or of light and trivial pleasures and enjoyment, and as such they are never bothered by any serious and grave social or moral dilemmas. In such a vulgar and heartless environment dreamers and idealists can simply not survive. Piskarev, who is an artist, sees in the street a girl of unusually refined beauty, and falls in love with her. When he finally discovers that the beauty is a prostitute, fitting in the devilishly reversed and trivial standards and principles of her horrible milieu – he is not able to endure, he is too weak to accept the blow, and he commits suicide. This is how he ended, in the translation offered by David Magarshack (1957: 187-188):

He shut himself up in his room, let no one in, and asked for nothing. Four days passed, and his locked room was not opened once. At last a week passed, and still his room remained locked. People knocked at his door and began calling him, but there was no reply; in the end they broke down the door and found his lifeless body with the throat cut. ... So perished the victim of a mad passion, poor Piskarev, the gentle, shy, modest, childishly good-natured man, who carried a spark of genius in his breast which might with time have blazed forth into a great bright flame. No one shed any tears over him; there was no one to be seen by his dead body, except the ordinary figure of the district police inspector and the bored face of the police surgeon. Quietly and without any religious service, his body was taken to Okhta, and the only man who followed it was a night watchman, an ex-soldier who did not indeed weep, but only because he had a glass of vodka too many...

The story concludes with the narrator's warning that "Nevsky Prospect deceives at all hours of the day, but the worst time of all is at night... when the devil himself is abroad, kindling the street-lamps with one purpose only: to show everything in a false light."

Khoma Brut and Piskarev went through rapture because of beautiful girls, and they both ended tragically. Certain schematic paths when describing stages of emotions through his characters as seen with the eye of Gogol – this is nothing less than his personal reflection of feelings. In these victims the author opens many doors for new questions to be answered and solved. Gogol draws a line of gender deviation, latently emphasizing femininity. His view of femininity is such that it can be understood as superior, while masculinity is rather described as passé. His characters are the reflection of an unambiguous kind of his personal view of personality maturation.

At some point of view, the reader gets the feeling that Gogol thought that happy existentialism is not acceptable in masculinity; thus both characters end up as victims, tragically. Contrary to the victims, the girls are described as demonic but with beauty of sacrosanct beings. Neither Brut nor Piskarev are respected and dominant. A certain discrepancy can be noticed in the dialogues between the victims and the beautiful girls. Both

girls in these two stories are seen as idolatry, however as impossible. In Gogol's stories we have typical epitome of love victimization.

Death of Khoma Brut is seen as hyperbola because actually he died of fear. Was that fear of his – the fear of being faced with reality, or just Gogol's easy way to escape the reality? This is a question that invokes a good insight into the reality itself and Gogol's perception of it. In Gogol's point of view there is no reality or unreality itself, no right or wrong, certainly because people believed in ridiculous things. His stories are impregnated with tragic and comic elements in order to establish the narrative pattern.

A very significant metamorphosis is the one when the witch in *The Viy* turns into a beautiful girl, which indicates Gogol's inner tussle with love torture. Khoma Brut is described as a simple and rather ordinary character until the night with the witch. He was lethargic and pragmatic in his way of living, but later Gogol develops the complexity of his character, through Brut's behavior in the particular occasion.

Like in the story *The Two Ivans* (appeared in 1833) Gogol also used a pig as a symbol, of which the 'appearance indicates that sex and violence cannot be far away'. (Karlinsky, 1976: 89) And here again the role of a special kind of symbol belongs to the number three in Gogol's *The Viy* because the number three is in a way significant number in all fairy tales, starting with Grimm Brothers and Andersen fairy tales. (Bely, 2009: 315; Frank, 2010)

It is very specific that sex is not dominant, but Gogol would rather want to indicate domination in power of gender, as males are victims. However, as we have an implicit progression and regression throughout the stories we cannot expect the obvious tragic ends of Khoma Brut and Piskarev. The dénouement of both characters is with implications of something profound.

As going through the stages during the three nights, during the second night we have very interesting creatures but this time Gogol decides to present them as genderless i.e. as neuter, which means nothing significant is going to happen yet. In the culmination in *The Viy*, however, Gogol cannot offer anything more than death itself to his character. In *Nevsky Prospect* the author offers through his character an idiosyncratic vision of the world, as well as through describing the city and people and their activities during the day. This produces an impression of naïvety in

the beginning of both stories, but the culmination and varieties are magnificent in Gogol's work.

Throughout *The Viy* and *Nevsky Prospect* Gogol also occasionally uses digression, describing things irrelevant to concentrate on, just to break the pattern and to lead the expectation of the readers towards culmination. Generally, absurdity, lavish detail, and abundant digressions (Fanger, 1979) are literary techniques that in all Gogol's writing coexist, interact, and augment each other, and here again Gogol (or the narrator) deviates from the plotline and the significance of it. We see, for instance, that the implicit syntheses of Piskarev's thoughts are Gogol's own thoughts about Nevsky Prospect, that street of delights but filled with *poshlost*.⁸ However, that easy escape of Piskarev's is not so courageous, using drug for the personal diversion, not so optional and typical. The compassionate stance when Piskarev approaches the girl shows a slight indication that something is going to happen and that Gogol has announced the potential victim in the story. The external and internal elucidations of Piskarev are seen as a satiric point of view.

Gogol possibly developed a hypothesis that female beauty brings only evil and pain, i.e. self-destruction, and that men can expect nothing ecstatic about it. He tried to explain that ethical beauty is more pertinent and going to last longer than just corporeal beauty, unless one becomes a victim of self-pity. Piskarev is a victim of fanatical infatuation, unable to deal with and accept the status that his beloved girl featured at the time. (Lalić, 1956: XXXII)

Instead of a Conclusion: Presenting a degraded society realistically

The particular vulnerability in the ability of satanic distortion is present in both *Nevsky Prospect* and *The Viy*. Christian morality, unethical constructions of stories and paganism are common for Gogol's works.

⁸ In addition to a rather brief explanation of *poshlost* as "self-satisfied inferiority" (Mirsky, 1926, 1927), perhaps a more comprehensive and easier to grasp definition can be offered quoting the author Svetlana Boym (1994: 41): 'Poshlost is the Russian version of banality, with a characteristic national flavoring of metaphysics and high morality, and a peculiar conjunction of the sexual and the spiritual. This one word encompasses triviality, vulgarity, sexual promiscuity, and lack of spirituality.'

Disreputable works of evil spirits are present throughout the stories. Gogol tried to present a degraded society and to explain that actually everything is in people's psyche, so if people actually tried to look around they would find the revelation of moral life. Physical expression of evil is just a symbol of victimization. Generally speaking, it seems that in the whole of his literary opus Gogol paid his greatest attention exactly to his characters, being probably aware that this was the area where his talent, his gift, was the mightiest. (Janković, 2007: 116)

The idea of doomed, being sought by evil spirits and the Devil, and of being a victim is typical for common artistic themes in works of romantic writers. However, romanticism of a kind only characterizes Gogol's beginnings, while the essence of his work can be said to belong to the Russian realistic literature. What more, Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol is deemed to be, together with Alexander Pushkin, the pioneer and founder of realism in the Russian literature. And what makes the Russian literature so attractive for other peoples and gives it such a prominent position in the world of literature is exactly its realism as well as its deep humanism. (Lalić, 1956: VII) Speaking very generally, to be a protagonist of a realistic art creation means to be true to life reality; translated into the language of history this means to portray realistically the society, the social classes and interrelations thereof, which are again to be understood as relations between the oppressed and the oppressors, between the working people and parasites, between those who suffer and those who produce and cause other people's misfortunes and suffering. Gogol's importance and his contribution to establishing prose as the vehicle of this realism in the second half of the nineteenth century is perhaps best described by the University of Minnesota professor Gary R. Jahn, in his study notes entitled *The Rise of Prose: Nikolai Gogol* (<http://www1.umn.edu/lol-russ/hpgary/Russ3421/lesson6.htm>): '... Pushkin was the greatest poet of the time. The writer who did most to establish prose as a force in Russian literary culture, however, was Gogol. Gogol's example, combined with the authoritative literary pronouncements of the greatest literary critic of the period, V. G. Belinsky, established prose as the literary medium of the future.'

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ЖРТВЕ У ГОГОЉЕВИМ ПРИПОВЕТКАМА *ВИЈ И НЕВСКИ ПРОСПЕКТ*

РЕЗИМЕ: У приповеткама *Виј* и *Невски проспект* Николај Васиљевич Гогољ износи пред читаоца најтананије структуре своје унутрашње личности, инстинктивне и критички морализаторске, које раздиру посредничку, организовану и реалистичну страну духа. И у једној и у другој причи он је опседнут љубављу, критиком и моралношћу, а онда и жртвом и страдалништвом. И *Виј* и *Невски проспект* прожети су и оптерећени његовим личним упињањем да не буде жртва љубави и друштвених околности. Он осећа да нема и не може бити веће пропасти од оне у којој се постаје жртвом властите емоционалне себичности. Тада живот постаје тврђава у чијим зидинама нема прозора, претвара се у гробницу без трачка светлости. Што се тиче ликова у посматраним причама, они су збиља осећали да воле, на тој емоцији су изградили сопствене златне замкове љубави, али у њима и страхотне тамнице мржње. Истина је да је љубав покретач живота и живљења, а тако је и сила која подстиче делатност и доноси надахнуће. Ипак, она је при томе и моћан извор илузија, што јасно може да се види у приповеткама *Виј* и *Невски проспект*. Волети и бити вољен – привилегија је поседовања небеског дара. У томе што писац приказује своје ликове као жртве можда може да се види поређење с хришћанским страдањем и страдалништвом, можда се долази до некаквог парадокса у књижевном стваралаштву.

Симболизам Гогољевих тема и примењених стилова допире до читаоца као нешто чудесно, док је експресивност коју он постиже и ликовима и сопственом колебљивом неодлучношћу снажна и убедљива. Издигнута сфера оног надграђеног, и оног злоћудног у жртвама и страдању, излазе пред посматрача ношени стилем који одудара од нормалног, обичног, с мотивацијом и мотивима које он црпе из украјинских и руских народних прича. Познато је да је у оквиру стваралачког рада на својим приповеткама Гогољ предано прикупљао етнографски материјал и проучавао податке о народним обичајима, ношњи, односу према свакодневном животу и раду, веровањима. У свему томе, међутим, нема тежње да се у народном животу види извор и средство за постизање ефекта некакве егзотике, нечег што би пуком необичношћу изазивало радозналост. У пишевом ставу према народу и народном нема ни трага од некаквог узвишеног, узнесеног тона; суштина је управо супротна – Гогољев искрени демократизам огледа се, између осталог, и

у његовом честом уживљавању у народне интересе, у схватања и психологију. А као што је касније и у својој комедији настојао да прикаже нас сáме, наше пороке и недостатке, тако се односио и према личностима у својим причама. На тај начин је и читаоцу омогућио да посматрањем главних јунака у овим два приповеткама некако дође до психолошке паралеле њиховог страдања од свести о сопственом духу и постојању.

Кључне речи: *љубав, критика, жртве, жртва друштва, свест о себи.*