Jillian Porter. *Economies of Feeling: Russian Literature under Nicholas I*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017. xi + 198 pp. ISBN 978-0-8101-3544-4.

Jillian Porter's *Economies of Feeling: Russian Literature under Nicholas I* manages to find a refreshing angle on the well-trodden ground of nineteenth-century Russian literary study by focusing on the relationship between economy and emotion in literature that was produced during the reign of one of Russia's most reactionary tsars. Porter's book explores the narrative potential of ambition by examining Russian tales of social striving and comparing them with histories of French ambition. Porter brings together insights from *The New Economic Criticism* with perspectives of literary scholars, sociologists, and historians whose works have contributed to the recent "affective turn" in the humanities, focusing on Russian texts by Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Faddei Bulgarin, analyzing the notion of ambition and exploring "the myriad of ways in which literary form both registers and shapes economic and emotional experience" (4). These works, as well as Porter's study, capitalize on these narratives of ambition, thereby blurring the supposed opposition between economics and poetry, the antimony between economic and aesthetic value.

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, ambition was a considered a clinically treatable mental disorder. The word entered the French language in the thirteenth century, defined as a "passionate desire for honors and dignities." By the eighteenth century, "ambitious monomania," with Napoleon as the primary example, had become a widely debated topic in psychiatric literature. As Porter points out, "What female hysteria would be for psychiatrists in the second half of the nineteenth century—namely, a central object of study around which a profession coalesced—male ambition was in the first half" (23). Porter shows how nineteenth-century French literature helped to normalize ambition by entertaining the possibility that ambition might be rewarded, and thus a useful and normative concept and not a mental disorder. In fact, by the twentieth century, ambition came to be conceptualized as a "natural and vibrant" quality, a "lively desire to elevate oneself as to realize all the possibilities of one's nature" (23).

Russian literature had its own approach to ambition: "Stemming from the Latin *ambire*—to go round, or more specifically, to go round canvassing for votes—it propels movement through space and time. But seminal texts of the nineteenth-century Russian prose tradition harness this dynamism only to curtail it" (21). In the wake of the Decembrist uprising and post-

Napoleonic France, ambition, claims Porter, became “a staging ground for experiments with transnational literary exchange.” Porter’s book tells a new story about the Russian literary tradition’s persistent engagement with the European, or non-Russian, novel. Russian literature produces plots of “mad or blocked ambition,” such as Alexander Pushkin’s “The Queen of Spades.”

In the first chapter, “Mad Ambition,” after comparing ambition and the Russian variations of *chestoliubie* and *ambitsiia*, Porter examines the Russian patients suffering from this disorder in Faddei Bulgarin’s “Three Pages from the Madhouse,” Gogol’s “Diary of a Madman,” and Dostoevsky’s *The Double*, setting up as the ultimate aim of this chapter the exploration of “how the dissonance between French and Russian cultural understandings of ambition produced the discordant narrative tonalities of both Gogol’s and Dostoevsky’s tales” (14). Bulgarin in his “Three Pages from the Madhouse” follows the French treatment of ambition as a disease, going so far as to offer a cure. The doctor-narrator locates the origin of the disease not in the physiological but the social sphere, describing ambition as a worm gnawing at the young man’s soul. Porter claims that the image of the worm adds a religious subtext to Bulgarin’s condemnation of ambition. All stories of blocked ambition, Porter tells us, rely on the isolation of the hero; he is always out of place. This restlessness might be a motivating force for the plot as the reader follows the hero’s roaming—but Bulgarin’s hero has already been paralyzed by unrealizable ambition before the story begins, which allows the doctor-narrator to examine his static hero and offer a cure. Just as the disease leads the hero to political criticism, so does the cure turn out to be political in nature. The cure, which can be achieved only through example, requires the sufferer to renounce political action as well as the ambition to improve himself. Only after reading an account of a successful renunciation of ambition, by focusing on the private rather than public domain, is the hero cured. This “treatment,” of course, elevates the status of Bulgarin’s own text.

Print culture plays a key role in the second text analyzed in this first chapter, namely Gogol’s “Diary of a Madman.” Porter rightly claims that critical treatments of this text would be enhanced by a consideration of the French conceptualization of ambition as pathology and the press that presented this conceptualization to the Russian public. In her view, Gogol’s removal of the narrator also removes the possibility of epistemological and emotional detachment. It might, however, create that distance if we imagine the reader assuming the position of the doctor instead of relating to the first-person narrator. Interestingly, in Gogol’s tale, social ambition is linked with erotic desire, a connection that seems to foreshadow the link between vanity and lust in Tolstoy’s *Father Sergius*. Gogol’s account of the madman’s escapades, as in Bulgarin’s “Three Pages from the Madhouse,” turns into a critique of social stratification, thereby revealing a curious phenomenon. Only madmen, it seems, could allow themselves such a cri-

tique. Art and life come together in an intriguing manner when we recall the consequences of Pyotr Chaadaev's criticism of Russia in his *Philosophical Letters*. After the first letter was published, a year after Gogol's "Diary of a Madman," Chaadaev was put under house arrest and proclaimed a madman. Perhaps under a reactionary tsar, social critique belongs only in the madhouse, and the isolation is either self- or state-imposed.

The removal of the possible distancing the reader can assume, which Porter sees in Gogol's resetting of Bulgarin's "Three Pages from the Madhouse," actually happens when these plots of blocked ambition reach the pen of Dostoevsky. Porter suggests reading Dostoevsky's *The Double* "not only as an homage to Gogol's 'Diary of a Madman' and *Dead Souls*, but also as an inversion of Balzac's *Lost Illusions*" (49). Porter's analysis of the relevance of "knowing one's place" in society as a requirement of "good tone"—an idea prevalent in *The Double*, as well as the desire produced by ambition to cross those borders and the subsequent feeling of being "out of place"—makes for fascinating analysis. Porter's own readings of these texts by Bulgarin, Gogol, and Dostoevsky suggest that her thesis could be stated much more strongly in this chapter. Not only did the Russian writers follow "the French precedent of treating ambition as a curious form of madness," presenting plots of "curtailed" and "blocked" ambition, but by entirely subverting it, they made use of the very notion of madness as a vehicle of social critique.

Moving away from its clinical treatment, chapter 2, "Gogol's Gift," remains focused on ambition and discusses the role it plays in Gogol's *Dead Souls*. The chapter emphasizes the distasteful nature of hospitality in the novel and how "Gogol both props up and erodes the distinction, cherished in the Romantic era and ever since, between the apparently foreign impulse to acquire and the purportedly Russian imperative to give" (14). Gogol's *Dead Souls*, in Porter's reading, takes notions of hospitality to distasteful extremes, and he structures the entire narrative around this "botched" hospitality. In Porter's exposition, giving and taking turn out to be two sides of the same coin, namely ambition. Giving, or gifts, while altruistic on the surface, are obligatory and self-serving and establish a position of power. Shifting attention from Chichikov's attempts to acquire the pervasive instances of "disgusting hospitality," Porter offers us a new lens through which to read Gogol's novel.

Chapter 3, "Dostoevsky's Money," revisits *The Double*, "shifting attention from the hero's ambition to the primary tool he employs in pursuit of it: money" (14). Porter is right in claiming that money operates as "a connective tissue" through Dostoevsky's fiction. In this context, the reviewer wonders how Porter would address Dostoevsky's use of money in *Notes from the House of the Dead*, where money proves to be a kind of glue for social relations also reflected in the natural world, and a potential stark contrast to the famous money scenes from *The Idiot*. Money exudes this narrative potential, as it makes explicit what is otherwise implicit in social relations.

This was an urgent concern in Dostoevsky's own life, as is apparent from his own financial struggles. Porter's reading makes me wonder whether Dostoevsky's casting of *The Double* in "fantastic colors" does not in fact allude to the phantasmagorical nature of money-regulating social relations and self-worth. Marx, as well as Dostoevsky, links money to supernatural forces—after all, there is nothing natural about a coin or a piece of paper being imbued with value, yet there is something essentially natural in the human ability to bestow value and create meaning. In this cleavage lies money's social and narrative power. Goliadkin's approach to spending, in Porter's exposition, becomes uncannily close to the madman's linguistic economy in Gogol's "Diary of a Madman": the signifier and the signified are simply too divorced from one another. Given hierarchical self-proclamations devoid of the social recognition upon which they depend, in defining oneself through the value of money one has to wonder whether one is not a counterfeit or "a double." Money, given too much power, successfully conquers its own creator. Potentially the more one tries to control money, the more one is subjugated to its artificial value system, as we can see in the character of the miser.

Chapter 4 of Porter's book, "The Miser Never Dies," "ponders the surprising vitality of the classic character type of the miser at a time when ambition had replaced avarice as the quintessential economic passion" (14). Type, Porter correctly points out, becomes realism's primary currency. In the context of representing economic ambition and its existential implications, the type of the miser proves the perfect character to undermine what it stands for. The miser type takes its relation to money to such an extreme that it becomes obnoxious, regardless of the value system in place—even the normalization of greed by capitalism does not do away with the literary significance of the miser. Pushkin's miser in *The Covetous Knight*, imbued with poetic imagination; Gogol's Plyushkin from *Dead Souls*, who "erodes the distinction on which evaluative judgments rely" (127); and Dostoevsky's Prokharchin all utilize and subvert the miser type, much as Russian literature subverts tales of ambition.

Porter's *Economies of Feeling: Russian Literature under Nicholas I* is an impressive study of the relationship between literature and economics, and an important contribution to the growing fields of interdisciplinary research.

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