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Introduction

The Double was Fyodor Dostoevsky’s second published work, appearing in the journal Notes of the Fatherland in February 1846, hot on the heels of the rapturously received Poor People. The overnight success of his debut story had already made the young man a celebrity, but he was convinced that the follow-up would seal his literary fame for good, writing to his brother Mikhail on the day of publication that “Golyadkin is ten times better than Poor People. Our friends are saying that after Dead Souls there’s been nothing like it in Russia, that it’s a work of genius, and what else aren’t they saying!… I really have made an incredibly good job of Golyadkin.” The reference to The Double alongside Gogol’s chef d’œuvre at a time regarded even then as “the Gogol period” in Russian literature is indicative of the impact the story made in the run-up to publication, when Dostoevsky was reading extracts to the most influential literary circle of the day, grouped around the critic Vissarion Belinsky. Dostoevsky would later recall in his Diary of a Writer that almost from the time he began work in earnest on The Double in the early autumn of 1845, Belinsky expressed great interest in the new story, and Dostoevsky’s own enthusiasm kept him busy revising The Adventures of Mr Golyadkin – its subtitle in the journal publication – until just four days before it made its appearance.

Yet by October 1846 Dostoevsky was already planning to publish a reworked version of the story, and since that time the original text for which such high hopes were held by its author has long been consigned in collected editions of Dostoevsky to the small print of pages headed “Other Versions”. Nowadays only literary scholars are familiar with the text of that first publication, and the translation offered here is of the version eventually reworked
and published by Dostoevsky after his Siberian exile in 1866. It is perhaps ironically fitting that real literary life has reflected the content of Dostoevsky’s story, with a new, more robust Mr Golyadkin completely eclipsing the character’s original incarnation.

The cause of the author’s immediate desire to revise his work was the storm of criticism that *The Double* provoked upon publication. Dostoevsky was particularly upset that Belinsky’s circle, his former champions, had, together with other critics and the reading public, so rapidly turned against him, labelling the story dull, limp and long-winded. For a sensitive and mistrustful young writer the sudden demotion from latest sensation to overrated disappointment was very hard to bear and was an important factor in his break with Belinsky and his allies.

And an even more significant break was not long in coming, for the publication of a series of ill-received short works in the late 1840s was followed by the discovery of Dostoevsky’s involvement with the revolutionary Petrashevsky circle, his infamous near-execution and then exile to Siberia. Upon his return to literary life more than a decade later he toyed with ideas of expanding *The Double* and rewriting it in the light of the new circumstances, both personal and historical, of the 1860s. Ultimately, however, he decided to restrict himself to less drastic changes: the ending was rewritten, certain scenes and elements of the intrigue were cut and, most obviously, a considerable degree of abbreviation took place, involving the exclusion of much of the repetition deemed so superfluous by the critics of the 1840s. Also to disappear were the headings summarizing the content of each of the chapters. These varied in length and complexity, but the heading for Chapter One gives some flavour of their character:

Of how Titular Councillor Golyadkin awoke. Of how he fitted himself out and set off where his path lay. Of how Mr Golyadkin tried to justify himself in his own eyes, and how he then deduced the rule that it is best of all to act on a bold footing and with a
candour not lacking in nobility. Of where, finally, Mr Golyadkin dropped by with a visit.

As well as being amusing in themselves, these mock-epic features served to emphasize the work’s link with the literary traditions of which Dostoevsky was highly aware in his early writings – readers of Cervantes, for example, another author renowned for his treatment of self-delusion and madness, would instantly recognize a possible reference. Their excision might have seemed to signal an intention in the 1860s to break with the past, and yet at the same time, with his alteration of the work’s subtitle, the author arguably actually underscored some of The Double’s key literary links.

The new subtitle, A St Petersburg Poem, immediately recalls Alexander Pushkin’s supreme contribution to the gallery of depictions of Russia’s imperial capital, The Bronze Horseman. Although it was a work of narrative verse, the freedoms sanctioned by Romanticism in relation to genre had permitted its author to define it as A St Petersburg Story, using a word normally associated with prose, and to intertwine its epic themes with the story of a poor civil servant’s decline into madness, set against the background of the foul weather of a St Petersburg autumn. And although the new subtitle did away with his original echoing of The Adventures of Chichikov, Dostoevsky retained arguably no less strong a link with Nikolai Gogol’s Dead Souls by his paradoxical use of the word “poem” for a work of prose; for the latter’s aspiration to transpose Dante’s Divine Comedy to Russian soil in Dead Souls had led him too to affix the heroic genre definition poema to a prose narrative of the most prosaic materialism.

Indeed, just as Gogol’s influence was vital for the very concept of Poor People, so can it be seen in numerous features, both stylistic and thematic, of The Double. A number of the characters – the servant, Petrushka, for example – come straight from the pages of Dostoevsky’s predecessor; the wonderful description of Klara Olsufyevna’s party echoes the rhetoric of the reception scene in
‘The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Fell out with Ivan Nikiforovich’; there is something of ‘The Greatcoat’ in the idea of a Titular Councillor being robbed of all he holds most dear; and, still more clearly, there are unmistakable echoes of two other key Gogolian tales of St Petersburg, ‘The Nose’ and ‘The Diary of a Madman’. The theme of the doppelgänger was very popular in Russian literature in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, when the tales of E.T.A. Hoffmann were widely read and admired, but its oddest manifestation was surely ‘The Nose’, in which an ambitious and libidinous civil servant finds himself outdone both at work and at play by his own newly independent olfactory organ. Here all finally ends satisfactorily, but in Gogol’s other story a Titular Councillor is thwarted in his desire for his superior’s daughter, is stripped of the remnants of his self-esteem, begins to live in a world of fantasy and, having adopted for himself the more prestigious persona of the King of Spain, is finally locked away.

Yet just as Dostoevsky did something new with Gogolian material in *Poor People*, here too he gives themes of Romantic literature of the fantastic a very modern twist, thereby prompting a good deal of subsequent interest from the world of psychiatry. His double is a manifestation of Mr Golyadkin’s troubled psyche, which seems initially to incarnate all his more pitiable, self-effacing features. But once Mr Golyadkin has revealed his intimate secrets to his double (or admitted them to himself), so the double adopts all the negative, despicable characteristics that make up the other side of Golyadkin’s nature. Thereafter he is able to rid himself of feelings of guilt by transferring blame for anything untoward onto his double, whom he endows with all the vices he cannot accept in himself. Golyadkin’s creation of a double is carefully anticipated in the narrative: as early as the first chapter he is seen to be prepared to go so far as to deny his own existence in order to pin his sins on someone who merely looks like him. The allusive manner in which Dostoevsky reveals aspects of Golyadkin’s past and present circumstances to the reader intentionally obscures the whole truth in order to reflect
the character’s own need for obfuscation. And the reader is further introduced into Golyadkin’s world by the tendency of the narrator to see things from the character’s point of view and at times even to slip into his brilliantly evoked mode of speech. The way that the narrator also treats his hero with undisguised irony and the fact that some of the story’s incidents do seem to suggest the actual physical presence of another clerk sharing Golyadkin’s name and characteristics make the whole narrative even more disturbing.

It is perhaps not surprising that many of the elements Dostoevsky found so exciting during his work on *The Double* contributed to its initial critical failure. His delighted borrowing of Golyadkin’s speech patterns in his own correspondence attests to his awareness of their originality, yet the convoluted repetition they demanded was neither understood nor appreciated in the 1840s. The revision of the 1860s did much to improve the readability of the text without detracting from the original concept, and in any event this remains an essential work for an understanding of Dostoevsky’s consistent technique of doubling. He initiated it at the very beginning of his literary career in *Poor People* with Makar Devushkin’s nature and fate reflected in the elder Pokrovsky and Gorshkov, and it would be employed right through to the major novels of his last two decades. It is surely no mere chance that the revision of *The Double* in the 1860s coincided with work on the most famous of all his divided and doubled characters, the hero of *Crime and Punishment* Raskolnikov, whose very name is based on a Russian verb meaning “to split apart”. Had he survived to read the works of the 1860s, Belinsky would doubtless have felt fully justified in his words in defence of their flawed precursors of the 1840s: “*The Double* bears the stamp of a huge and powerful talent, but one that is still young and inexperienced: from this stem all its shortcomings, but from this stem all its qualities too.”

— Hugh Aplin
The Double
A St Petersburg Poem
I

It was a little before eight o’clock in the morning when Titular Councillor Yakov Petrovich Golyadkin came to after a long sleep, yawned, stretched and in the end opened his eyes fully. But for a couple of minutes he lay motionless on his bed like a man not yet entirely sure if he has woken up or is still asleep – if everything now happening around him is in the waking world and in reality or is a continuation of the disordered dreams of his sleep. Soon, however, Mr Golyadkin’s senses began more clearly and distinctly to take in their customary, everyday impressions. He was given a familiar glance by the rather dingily greenish, smoke-darkened, dusty walls of his little room, his mahogany chest of drawers, imitation mahogany chairs, table painted with red paint, reddish-coloured oilskin Turkish couch with little green flowers and, finally, the clothing removed in a hurry the day before and thrown down in a heap on the couch. Finally, the grey autumnal day, dull and dirty, peeped into his room through the grimy window so angrily and with such a sour grimace that Mr Golyadkin could no longer be in any sort of doubt whatsoever that he was not in some fairy-tale kingdom or other, but in the city of St Petersburg, in the capital, on Shestilavochnaya Street, on the third floor of a very large tenement block, in his own apartment. Having made such an important discovery, Mr Golyadkin closed his eyes spasmodically as if in regret over his recent sleep and desirous of bringing it back for a moment. But a moment later he jumped out of bed in a single bound, probably having finally hit upon the idea around which his hitherto scattered thoughts had been circling before being brought into appropriate order. Having jumped out of bed, he immediately ran up to the
little round mirror standing on the chest of drawers. Although the figure reflected in the mirror, sleepy, quite weak-sighted and rather bald, was of just such an insignificant nature that at first glance it would not have held the especial attention of absolutely anyone at all, still its owner was evidently perfectly satisfied with everything he saw in the mirror. “What a thing it would have been,” said Mr Golyadkin in a low voice, “what a thing it would have been if I’d had something missing today, if something had, for example, gone wrong, some extraneous spot or other had appeared, or some other unpleasant thing had happened; but so far, so good; so far everything’s going well.” Very pleased that everything was going well, Mr Golyadkin put the mirror down in its previous place and, despite the fact that he was barefooted and still had on the costume in which he was accustomed to go to bed, he himself ran to the window and with great concern began searching for something in the courtyard of the building onto which the windows of his apartment looked out. What he found in the yard evidently satisfied him perfectly too: his face beamed with a self-satisfied smile. Then – but after first glancing behind the partition into the cubbyhole of Petrushka, his valet, and assuring himself that Petrushka was not there – he tiptoed up to the table, unlocked one of its drawers, rummaged around in the corner at the very back of this drawer, finally took out from under some old, yellowed papers and rubbish of some sort a worn, green wallet, opened it cautiously, and peeped solicitously and with enjoyment into its farthest, secret pocket. The wad of green, grey, blue, red and various multicoloured notes probably looked very amicably and approvingly at Mr Golyadkin too: with a beaming face he put the open wallet onto the table in front of him and rubbed his hands hard to indicate the greatest pleasure. Finally he took it out, his comforting wad of state banknotes, and, actually for the hundredth time since the day before, began counting them, giving each note a thorough rub between his thumb and index finger. “Seven hundred and fifty roubles in notes!” he finally concluded
in a half-whisper. “Seven hundred and fifty roubles... a grand sum! It’s a nice sum,” he continued in a quavering voice that was somewhat weak with pleasure, squeezing the wad in his hands and smiling significantly, “it’s a very nice sum! A nice sum for anyone at all! Would I like to see a man now for whom that sum would be a trifling sum! Such a sum can take a man a long way...”

“But what’s this, though?” thought Mr Golyadkin. “Where on earth is Petrushka?” Still retaining his same costume, he glanced for a second time behind the partition. Petrushka was again nowhere to be found behind the partition, and just the samovar alone, set there on the floor, was fuming, raging, losing its temper, continually threatening to run away, and gabbling something heatedly and rapidly in its queer language, burring and lisping to Mr Golyadkin – probably that, so to speak, you should come and get me, good people, I’m absolutely done and ready, you know.

“The devil take him!” thought Mr Golyadkin. “That idle beast could end up driving a man beyond his final limits; where’s he wandered off to?” In just indignation he went into the entrance hall, consisting of a small corridor, at the end of which was a door into the lobby; he opened this door a tiny bit and saw his servant surrounded by quite a little knot of serving, domestic and chance riff-raff. Petrushka was recounting something, the others were listening. Mr Golyadkin evidently liked neither the topic of conversation nor the conversation itself. He immediately called Petrushka and returned to his room totally dissatisfied, even upset. “That beast is prepared to sell a man, and especially his master, for no money at all,” he thought to himself, “and he has done, he has done for sure, I’m ready to bet that he has, for not even a copeck he has. Well, what is it...”

“The livery’s arrived, sir.”

“Put it on and come here.”

After putting on the livery, Petrushka entered his master’s room with a stupid grin. His costume was inconceivably strange. He had on the green, very second-hand livery of a footman with moulting
gold galloons, evidently made for a man a good two feet taller than Petrushka. In his hands he held a hat, also with galloons and with green feathers, and at his hip he had a footman’s sword in a leather sheath.

Finally, to complete the picture, in accordance with his favourite custom of always going around half-dressed as if at home, Petrushka was even now barefooted. Mr Golyadkin inspected Petrushka all over and was evidently satisfied. The livery had clearly been hired for some solemn occasion. It was also noticeable that during the inspection Petrushka looked at his master with some strange expectation and followed his every move with unusual curiosity, which Mr Golyadkin found extremely troubling.

“Well, and the carriage?”

“The carriage has arrived too.”

“For the whole day?”

“For the whole day. Twenty-five, in notes.”

“And the boots have come?”

“And the boots have come.”

“Twit! Can’t you say ‘have come, sir’? Give them here.”

Having expressed his pleasure about the boots fitting well, Mr Golyadkin asked for some tea and his things for washing and shaving. He shaved very thoroughly and washed in just the same way, gulped his tea down hastily and set about his most important final robing: he put on trousers that were almost absolutely new; then a shirt front with brass buttons, a waistcoat with very nice bright little flowers; he tied a multicoloured silk tie round his neck, and, finally, pulled on a uniform coat, also nice and new and thoroughly cleaned. He glanced lovingly at his boots several times while dressing, every minute raised now one leg, now the other, admired the style and kept on whispering something under his breath, occasionally winking with an expressive grimace at what he was thinking. But Mr Golyadkin was extremely absent-minded this morning, because he barely noticed Petrushka’s little smiles and grimaces on his account as he helped him to
dress. Finally, having done everything that was needed, and fully
dressed, Mr Golyadkin put his wallet into his pocket, had a final
look at Petrushka, who had put on his boots and was thus also
in complete readiness, and noting that everything was already
done and there was no longer anything to wait for, hurriedly,
fussily, with a slight palpitation in his heart, he ran down his
staircase. A cabman’s carriage, blue and bearing coats of arms
of some sort, rolled with a clatter up to the porch. Petrushka,
exchanging winks with the cabman and some idlers, settled his
master into the carriage; in an unaccustomed voice and scarcely
containing his idiotic laughter he called: “Drive on!”, jumped up
onto the footboard, and the whole lot, with a noise and a clat-
tter, a ringing and a cracking, rolled off to Nevsky Avenue. No
sooner had the blue carriage managed to drive out of the gates
than Mr Golyadkin rubbed his hands spasmodically and broke
into quiet, inaudible laughter, like a man with a merry character
who has succeeded in playing a splendid trick, a trick with which
he is himself as pleased as Punch. But immediately after the fit of
merriment the laughter was replaced on Mr Golyadkin’s face by a
strange, anxious sort of expression. Despite the fact that the day
was damp and overcast, he lowered both of the carriage windows
and began carefully scrutinizing passers-by to the right and to
the left, immediately adopting a decorous and respectable air as
soon as he noticed anybody looking at him. At the turning from
Liteinaya onto Nevsky Avenue a most unpleasant sensation made
him shudder and, frowning like some poor soul who has had a corn
accidentally trodden on, he hurriedly, even fearfully, huddled into
the darkest corner of his carriage. The thing was that he had met
with two of his fellow workers, two young clerks from the same
ministry in which he himself worked. And the clerks, as it seemed
to Mr Golyadkin, were also for their part extremely bewildered
at meeting their colleague like this; one of them even pointed his
finger at Mr Golyadkin. It even seemed to Mr Golyadkin that the
other called to him loudly by name, which was, of course, most
improper in the street. Our hero concealed himself and did not respond. “What young pups!” he began reasoning with himself. “Well, what’s so strange about it? Someone in a carriage; someone needs to be in a carriage, so he’s taken a carriage. Just rubbish! I know them – just young pups who need some more thrashing! They’d enjoy just wasting their salaries on games of pitch-and-toss and hanging around somewhere or other, that’s their business. I’d tell them all something, but only…” Mr Golyadkin stopped short and his heart stood still. A lively pair of Kazan horses, very familiar to Mr Golyadkin and harnessed to a smart drosky, were quickly overtaking his carriage on the right-hand side. The gentleman sitting on the drosky, when he by chance caught sight of the face of Mr Golyadkin, who had rather incautiously poked his head out of the window of the carriage, was evidently also extremely astonished at such an unexpected meeting and, bending down as far as he could, he began to gaze with the utmost curiosity and concern into that corner of the carriage where our hero made haste to try and hide. The gentleman on the drosky was Andrei Filippovich, the head of department in that place of work where Mr Golyadkin was also employed in the capacity of assistant to his head of section. Mr Golyadkin, seeing that Andrei Filippovich had fully recognized him, that he was gazing at him wide-eyed and that it was quite impossible to hide, blushed to the roots of his hair. “Bow or not? Respond or not? Acknowledge or not?” thought our hero in indescribable anguish. “Or pretend that it’s not me, but someone else with a striking resemblance to me, and look as if there were nothing wrong? Simply not me, not me, and that’s that!” said Mr Golyadkin, doffing his hat to Andrei Filippovich and not taking his eyes off him. “I, I’m all right,” he forced himself to whisper, “I’m perfectly all right, it’s not me at all, Andrei Filippovich, it’s not me at all, not me, and that’s that.” Soon, however, the drosky had overtaken the carriage, and the magnetic power of his superior’s gaze passed. However, he still blushed, smiled and mumbled something to himself… “I was a
fool not to respond,” he finally thought, “on a bold footing and with a candour not lacking in nobility I should simply have said, ‘It’s like this, Andrei Filippovich, I’ve been invited to the meal as well, and that’s that!’” Then suddenly remembering that he had come a cropper, our hero reddened like fire, knitted his brows and threw a terrible, defiant look at the front corner of the carriage, a look ideally suited to reducing all his enemies to dust in an instant. Finally, all of a sudden, moved by some sort of inspiration, he pulled on the cord tied to the elbow of the cabman-cum-coachman, stopped the carriage and ordered him to turn back to Liteinaya. The thing is that, probably for his own peace of mind, Mr Golyadkin needed to say something most interesting to his doctor, Krestyan Ivanovich, at once. And although he had been acquainted with Krestyan Ivanovich for a very short time, had, to be precise, visited him only once the previous week as a result of certain needs, still, after all, a doctor, as they say, is like a confessor – it would be silly to conceal things, and knowing a patient is his very duty. “Will it all be all right, though?” continued our hero, getting out of the carriage at the entrance to a five-storey building on Liteinaya, beside which he had ordered his vehicle to be stopped. “Will it all be all right? Will it be proper? Will it be appropriate? But then, after all, what of it?” he continued, going up the stairs, catching his breath and suppressing the beating of his heart, which was in the habit of beating hard on all staircases other than his own. “What of it? After all, it’s about me, and there’s nothing reprehensible here... It would be silly to conceal things. So in this way I’ll pretend that I’m all right, and for no reason, in passing... And he’ll see that this is how it should be.”

Reasoning thus, Mr Golyadkin went up to the first floor and stopped in front of apartment number five, on the door of which had been set a beautiful brass plate with the inscription:

Krestyan Ivanovich Rutenspitz,
Doctor of Medicine and Surgery.
Having stopped, our hero hastened to give his physiognomy a respectable air, free-and-easy, and not without a degree of amiability, and prepared to pull on the bell cord. Having prepared to pull on the bell cord, he immediately and quite appropriately reasoned that it might be better tomorrow and that now for the time being there was no great need. But since Mr Golyadkin suddenly heard somebody’s footsteps on the staircase, he immediately altered his new decision and, at the same time, moreover with the most decisive air, he now rang at Krestyan Ivanovich’s door.

2

Doctor of Medicine and Surgery Krestyan Ivanovich Rutenspitz – a very healthy, albeit already elderly man, endowed with thick, greying eyebrows and whiskers, an expressive, flashing gaze, which was evidently all he needed to drive off every illness, and, finally, with a significant decoration – was sitting that morning in his comfortable armchair in his study, drinking the coffee his wife had personally brought him, smoking a cigar and from time to time writing out prescriptions for his patients. After prescribing the last phial for an old man suffering from haemorrhoids and seeing the suffering old man out through the side doors, Krestyan Ivanovich settled down to await the next visit. In came Mr Golyadkin.

Krestyan Ivanovich had evidently not been expecting, nor indeed wishing to see Mr Golyadkin before him at all, because he suddenly became troubled for a moment, and his face involuntarily expressed a strange, even, it could be said, discontented sort of look. Since Mr Golyadkin for his part almost always became somehow inappropriately deflated and bewildered at those moments when he happened to assail somebody for the sake of his own little affairs, now too, not having prepared the first phrase, which in such instances was a real stumbling block for him, he became very considerably embarrassed, mumbled something – actually,
it seemed, an apology – and, not knowing what to do next, took a chair and sat down. But, remembering that he had taken a seat without invitation, he immediately sensed his impropriety and hastened to correct his mistake, one which displayed ignorance of society and good manners, by immediately rising from the seat he had taken without invitation. Then, coming to his senses and noting vaguely that he had done two stupid things at once, he resolved without the least hesitation on a third; that is, he tried to offer some justification, mumbled something with a smile, blushed, became embarrassed, fell expressively silent and finally sat down conclusively and got up no more – and for no particular reason, just in case, he armed himself with that same defiant gaze which had the unusual power of reducing and pounding all Mr Golyadkin’s enemies to dust in his mind. Moreover this gaze fully expressed Mr Golyadkin’s independence, that is, said clearly that Mr Golyadkin was perfectly all right, that he was his own man, like everyone else, and in any event it was no concern of his. Krestyan Ivanovich coughed and wheezed, evidently to indicate his approval of and consent to all this, and directed an inspectorial, enquiring gaze at Mr Golyadkin.

“Krestyan Ivanovich,” began Mr Golyadkin with a smile, “I’ve come to trouble you for a second time and now for a second time take the liberty of begging your indulgence…” Mr Golyadkin was clearly having difficulty with his words.

“Hm… yes!” said Krestyan Ivanovich, releasing a stream of smoke from his mouth and placing his cigar on the desk. “But you need to adhere to instructions; I did explain to you, you know, that your treatment should consist in the alteration of your habits… Well, amusements – well, I mean you should call on friends and acquaintances, and at the same time not be afraid of having a drink; consistently keep cheerful company.”

Mr Golyadkin, still smiling, hastened to remark that it seemed to him that he was like everyone else, that he was his own man, that his amusements were like everyone else’s… that, of course,