

## A Mid-range Episode Reading of Odoevsky's The Cosmorama

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### Recommended Citation

Sucur, Slobodan. "A Mid-range Episode Reading of Odoevsky's The Cosmorama." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 18.2 (2016): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2865>>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

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**Volume 18 Issue 2 (June 2016) Article 13**

**Slobodan Sucur,**

**"A Mid-range Episode Reading of Odoevsky's *The Cosmorama*"**

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss2/13>>

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Contents of ***CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 18.2 (2016)**  
 Thematic Issue ***New Work in the Empirical Study of Literature***. Ed. Aldo Nemesio  
 <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss2/>>

**Abstract:** In his article "A Mid-range Episode Reading of Odoevsky's *The Cosmorama*" Slobodan Sucur argues that a focus on David S. Miall's theories of foregrounding and the mid-range episode may help to minimize ambiguities and contradictions that often emerge in readings of Gothic literature. The example focused on in the article is Vladimir Odoevsky's 1839 novella *The Cosmorama*. Sucur elaborates on the idea that the fantastic and sublime are naturally reader-receptive and anticipate some aspects of Miall's theory. In relation to this Sucur also discusses the possibility that mid-range episode reading may help bridge the gap between some tenets of cognitive philosophy and reader-response criticism that is sometimes at odds with cognitive studies.

## Slobodan SUCUR

### A Mid-range Episode Reading of Odoevsky's *The Cosmorama*

Considering that theories of the fantastic from Tzvetan Todorov to more modern practitioners and its more aesthetically-inclined, historical prototype -- the theory of the sublime -- are often employed as tools in interpretations of Gothic literature and I posit that it is a natural step toward empirical enquiry of the Gothic. The very notion of "literature of the fantastic," as well as the idea of the sublime, and contemporary empirical enquiry are brought in closer proximity through their emphases on the audience's (i.e., readers') role in interpretation. Todorov questions both a literary character's, and by extension a reader's, way of "knowing" a Gothic work, and whether or not that knowledge is clear, produced through marvelous effects, or conjured in that ambiguous middle realm of hesitation that is characteristic of the fantastic. Edmund Burke and later Carl Grosse expanded on the idea of the sublime in such a way that the theory is to be verified by an audience's reaction to the world around them. For what is the sublime other than the impression of sensations upon oneself through the stimuli of scenic arrangements as they appear, for example, in works of Gothic literature? The sublime can also occur as one notices the mind's own abilities to create, enhance, or supplement already created worlds and panoramas with information, worlds both real and fictional. David S. Miall's modification of and elaboration on Alexander Reformatsky's formalist approach to reader-reception theory can be read as following in the footsteps of theories of the sublime and fantastic and Miall's theory lends itself well to new readings of often obscure, sometimes dichotomous examples of Gothic literature. Vladimir Odoevsky's 1839 novella *The Cosmorama* is a case in point: not only does it produce varied responses from students, but the novella benefits further when its convoluted plot is read in relation to Miall's ideas of foregrounding and the mid-range episode, a mid-range reading that fits more broadly into the process of linear, as opposed to vertical, forms of literary interpretation, and that has interesting overlap with some tenets of cognitive studies (see, e.g., Jaén and Simon).

Before I outline student responses to *The Cosmorama* and before links are established between those responses, Miall's theory of foregrounding and mid-range episode and precursors in theories of the sublime and fantastic, it is relevant to give a brief overview of the novella's plot. Odoevsky's novella is a classic example of the Gothic: saturated with motifs, plot twists, and behavioral patterns characteristic of the usual and inflexible definition of the Gothic sub-genre (on Odoevsky see, e.g., Cornwell). The novella opens with a "Publisher's Warning" that alerts readers to the ambiguity of the manuscript that forms the novella itself (the device hearkens back to the opening of that very first of Gothic works, Walpole's 1764 novella *The Castle of Otranto* that was passed off as a late medieval manuscript). Odoevsky's text then brings the audience into the world of a five-year-old narrator, Vladimir, who relates his childhood adventures via first-person voice. His young life is especially marked by the emergence of a "cosmorama" box, a device allowing for three-dimensional viewing of pictures contained inside. The cosmorama, apparently a gift to the family of one Dr. Bin, is supposed to be kept away from the narrator until he is of age. The child breaks this taboo and opens the box possibly acquiring the ability to see into the immediate future. The mechanics of the box are explained to the boy by the aunt, the mystery dissipates, and soon afterwards the audience is taken approximately twenty years forward with the narrator now a "Byronic philanderer" still suffering from strange visions originally produced by the cosmorama and engaging in an illicit love affair with a married woman referred to as the "Countess." A whole gamut of Gothic experiences then emerges with nightmares, obstacles, threats, and all is completed through the presence of the Countess's husband, likely a vampire since on New Year's Eve he destroys the Countess, their children and their home through spontaneous combustion. The entire narrative is made somewhat tentative of course through the needed presence of the narrator, Vladimir, as a frequently bed-ridden hypochondriac and Dr. Bin who acts as the rational pillar in the narrative.

Students familiar with the Gothic often have responses similar to those of students with no previous background in Gothic literature. I have had the pleasure of teaching *The Cosmorama* 2011-2014 at the University of Alberta using a list of seven discussion questions:

- 1) Does the "warning from the publisher" (89-90) that opens *Cosmorama* generate a greater air of authenticity in the novella than would otherwise be the case?
- 2) How does the narrator compare with the possibly vampiric Count B. (eventually Vladimir talks about his own "deformity of ... heart" [132])?
- 3) Discuss the female characters in *Cosmorama*: a) How are the two aunts presented (e.g., one is known by the narrator when he is a child, but he sees her portrait and understands it only as an adult [94], while the other is visited a few times when he is already an adult)? b) What does Countess Eliza B. signify for the narrator? c) What does Sonia represent (e.g., her name mysteriously changes to "Sophia" [101] and in one of Vladimir's visions she emerges through "greenish steam" [120-21])?
- 4) Discuss the use of supernaturalism in the novella: How are occult/supernatural ideas treated here? (i.e., Tzvetan Todorov's idea of "literature of the fantastic": where things are not just uncanny [strange], but truly supernatural and otherworldly as interpreted both by the main characters and readers. Examples include the parallel world and Doctor Bin's double in the cosmorama (95-97), the Count's revival (113-14, 117), Vladimir's clock falling down and breaking of its own accord supposedly (126), the Count's mysterious reappearance (even though the door does not open) and spontaneous combustion (127-28), the burn mark on the narrator's hand and Sophia's strange death (128-29).
- 5) Discuss inconsistencies in *Cosmorama*: Do inconsistencies take away from a fantastic reading of the text or further contribute to such an interpretation? Examples include Sonia becomes Sophia (101), Bin tells Vladimir

that Eliza is okay (128), the narrator hears from others that she is dead (128), he learns from Bin that his aunt and Sophia have died (129), he then tries to forget Eliza for the "sake of [her] happiness" (130).

6) What kind of power does the *cosmorama* bestow on the narrator (keep in mind that Dr. Bin early on ordered its destruction [97])? Who is Dr. Bin?

7) Is the narrator a heroic character?

An initial observation of student responses indicates a pervading "strangeness" in the novella beginning with the Preface and continuing through various twists and fantastic occurrences. Students further supplement their sense of the strange with comments that the novella is mysterious, that some of the characters are often cryptic in behavior or communication, and that something is "off" center in the work. A closer look at the responses indicates that although the narrative is delivered in first-person voice and the narrator is possibly afflicted by strange visions or hallucinations, many students are initially less enthusiastic to talk about the "frame" of the novella than about the content, particularly as relating to women characters. Of note is that several students in each of the classes were confused by the presence of two aunts, the first being presented when the narrator is five years old and the second when he is in his twenties and many students assume that it is the same aunt. Also of interest is that several students believe the married Countess to hold the key to understanding the narrator's life and choices since she is desirable to him, comparable to the role that the *cosmorama* had in his life, and also that she is luring him into a world of greater complexity and mystery.

Asked why they prefer discussing women characters over the narrator, many students suggest that the women are "more Gothic" in the sense of leading double or secretive lives. Although at that point specific tools by which the Gothic may be read are not yet introduced (e.g., Todorov's theory of the fantastic), it becomes obvious that students are responding to several of the characters and their roles in relation to what is or is not Gothic in the novella. When encouraged to explore what is Gothic about the text, descriptions emerge similar to the comments offered for the main discussion questions pertaining to "strangeness," "secrecy," "oddity" and some degree of "weirdness" in the novella. One student wrote that the strangeness is "probably what the Gothic is." I then expanded on the point by suggesting that all things strange are Gothic, but the same student cautioned that "it wasn't that either, but more like a strange old book you pick up" or "are forced to read" commented another (leading to laughter in the room). What several of the student comments on the first three discussion questions seem to have in common is an implicit suggestion of "literariness," one linked to the Gothic sub-genre in this case. Related to the point is their fascination with women characters since their often secretive or double roles present the kind of "bookish" possibilities that students often look for in literature (whether or not this is the product of instruction in literary reading students receive in previous classes requires further research). Miall argues that "little is known about how ordinary readers choose their reading" but it is still possible that literature calls for or initiates a "different mode ... of reading" than other types of texts and that such modes of reading are not necessarily compatible with the type of imposed interpretation of texts that is usually typical of a classroom setting since the "days of T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis in England and the New Critics in the U.S.A." (32).

Students' preference to discuss more thoroughly women characters in *The Cosmorama* may further be linked to the concept of foregrounding. Miall posits that "stylistic features" have always been an important part of literary reading, even though somewhat neglected in contemporary literary interpretation; studies have been done which suggest that the audience looks for twists in discourse or style when reading, also for the "strikingness" of certain expressions (112). In turn, foregrounding defamiliarizes meaning for readers and leads to a search for further context in a given work of literature that will locate or stabilize those newfound meanings; the final outcome is then a "shift in understanding" of the text that takes place "downstream" from the "moment of foregrounding" (113). These effects of foregrounding, Miall argues, are found with both experienced and unskilled readers (112). One of the first important foregroundings in the novella occurs through the repeated use of the word "shuddered." A first shudder takes place when the aunt shudders after the five-year old narrator has tried to explain that he saw in the *cosmorama* someone other than his uncle trying to kiss her hand while the other shudder emerges once the aunt questions the narrator regarding a strange game that he keeps playing, and that the narrator explains as something he saw his uncle doing that morning (93). Soon after, the narrator is in his twenties and, looking upon his aunt's and uncle's portraits, he notices "an absolute chasm" between their expressions (94). The shuddering, in the context of the narrator's young life, is meaningless although curious. Students too perceive this literary signal and feel that it lures them into the strangeness of repeated nervous ticks, thereby forming a peculiar image of the first aunt but also limiting the narrative's meaning. The audience experiences a shift in the message once the narrator returns, now an adult and hinting at possible adultery in the aunt's life. Foregrounding is present with Sonia too, but in more obscure ways beginning with the phrase uttered (by the second aunt) that she had a "German governess" and books in German (100). The narrator then converses briefly with Sonia about her readings: Sonia now as "Sophia" tells the narrator not to laugh "at Auntie" and they debate the merits of a fable entitled "The Dragon-Fly and the Ant," whereupon "Sophia" is now "visibly disturbed" (101). The narrator "burst[s] out laughing" and the aunt remembers the French Revolution as a time "when coffee and sugar went up" in price (102).

The choice of German-language books draws students into giving specific comments about Sonia-Sophia that she is a "bookworm," that she is cryptic, also mysterious, perhaps even a "witch." The name change further defamiliarizes both Sonia and her context, particularly since it occurs immediately before, as several students describe it, the "weird" fable that is discussed. Disturbance

and laughter act as further foregrounding since they, similar to the first aunt's shuddering, limit cognitive meaning but express feeling; the aunt's flippant comment regarding the French Revolution then becomes the new (normal) context that students are struggling to find and refer to as "odd" and "confusing." Foregrounding also takes place during the narrator's first meeting with the Countess, since one day at a ball she "stopped [him] in [his] tracks" and the abruptness of the meeting coupled with the narrator's subsequent use of the phrases "strange metaphysics" and "seductive beverage," lure both the narrator and readers into an unfamiliar and "special world" (107). Here, the accumulated effect creates an impression or feeling, while subduing common or expected meaning; the portrait is then refamiliarized, satisfying the audience's anticipation of subsequent events when it dawns upon the now shocked and disappointed narrator that "the Countess had a husband!" (108). Correlating with these foregroundings are student comments that they more easily remember how the "women enter the text" than the men. Of note here is that there is no clear or memorable foregrounding that introduces the second aunt, which may be one factor that explains student confusion of the first and second aunt.

Further discussion questions while offering more interpretative guidance to students than previously result in a variety of, to paraphrase Earl Miner's comments on lyric poetry, affective-expressive responses (24-25). Students were first informed briefly about the spectrum of possibilities in Todorov's concept of the fantastic, with the scientifically explainable uncanny being at one end of the spectrum, the fantastic that requires character and audience "hesitation" being in the middle, and the marvelous which requires full suspension of disbelief and overlaps with the fairy-tale genre at the other end of the spectrum (see Todorov 25, 33, 47-49, 53-57). Nothing was mentioned at that point about Todorov's preference for first-person voice as more conducive to the emergence of fantastic effects. Students were quick to discuss the examples listed, easily categorizing many of the minor elements (such as clocks dropping) as "uncanny," whereas different interpretations emerged regarding the Count and his return, as well as his "spontaneous combustion" on New Year's Eve. Observable in the student responses when discussing the Count is the feeling with which the comments are given, usually assertive, but with several views emerging: the interesting characteristic being that there is often an even split in the class between students reading the Count's return as fantastic on the one hand or as downright marvelous on the other. In this split reaction, the students' responses echo the ambiguous position that Todorov's notion of the marvelous has in contrast to his more concrete idea of the fantastic. One or two students, out of more than a couple of hundred in those years of teaching *The Cosmorama*, went so far as to characterize the fireworks display provided by the Count's own body as magnificent and "beautiful."

I followed up by asking several of the classes why they prefer talking about the Count more than other characters and especially so in terms of Todorov's theory: the frequent response received was that he is the "most exciting" character in the text and more "easily knowable" than the often "confused" narrator (the Count having a clearly outlined "shape" in the narrative, as vampire or imitative of vampirism). Noticeable in the student responses to Todorov's theory is their enthusiasm and "appreciation" to be able to "categorize" the characters according to a spectrum of behaviors and ideas. A few students also suggested that characters like the Count "add the Gothic feeling" to the novella and make it "fun and creepy" to read. Irrespective of student experience (or lack thereof) in reading the Gothic, what becomes evident here is the primarily emotional reaction to several of the characters, especially dominant ones, and the possibility that it is this emotional underpinning that then inspires many students to begin taxonomizing the text and its characters on a more cognitive level, in this case in relation to Todorov's concept of the fantastic. Compared with Miall's emphasis on foregrounding, the idea of the fantastic (especially when further categorized along a spectrum) becomes a method of "regrounding," to coin a phrase, that is, to categorize the characters' behaviors along such a spectrum becomes a way of "knowing" them, whereas narrative effects not immediately linked with the characters defamiliarize the text, making it "odd" and "confusing." What links both the process of foregrounding and Todorov's concept of the fantastic is the emphasis on reader-reception, with the fantastic as a sort of middle-ground "template" that helps to bridge the gap between feeling and knowing the Gothic.

Comments generated by the fifth question, on inconsistencies in *The Cosmorama*, further contribute to an understanding of theories of the fantastic as reader-receptive and as a kind of counterbalance to foregrounding. The three dominant attitudes that students have regarding the examples listed for the question is that the "Sonia-Sophia" name change contributes to the fantastic, that the other inconsistencies are "irritating" and "break the suspension of disbelief," and that perhaps the narrator and Dr. Bin are hiding something, both from each other and from the audience. The responses are often nearly as enthusiastic as for the previous question, suggesting once again that the uncanny and more broadly any variety of Todorov's framework are not so much reflective of a literary genre such as the fantastic, but that the uncanny is a "reading-effect" that frequently reminds us of or is generated by mixed-genre literature (Todorov qtd. in Cornwell 67). Several students commented that the inconsistencies rather than allowing them to apply Todorov's theory took them in the opposite direction of "exposing" how one "can write a Gothic tale." A few students interjected that they actually found that "more creepy than the content itself" and felt "weird" when reading the contradictions. While this sparked laughter, it did demonstrate how some students dismissed the inconsistencies as working against the novella's plot, whereas several found that the inconsistencies carried further the strange effects generated in the narrative. Both camps exhibited responses that largely began with feeling and then were developed into more categorical explanation of the text. Both responses also allowed me to introduce later modifications to Todorov's theory. A few students, getting away from an initial, feeling-based response to the inconsistencies,

suggested that those contradictions would not be there if they were not delivered in "first-person voice," since the narrator is "crazy" or "is hiding something," as is Dr. Bin. A few more students then responded that they "weren't paying attention to the narrative voice" but were "just irritated" by the contradictions. Claire Whitehead, elaborating upon Todorov's theory, suggests that beyond third- or first-person voice what is fundamental to an understanding of fantastic, marvelous, and other effects is "the question of [narrator] personality" and to some extent of characters as well (48). The idea was shared with several in classes I taught after they had given their responses to the question on inconsistencies. The other idea shared was the possibility that, since those contradictions draw some students towards the machinery of Gothic, they thereby generate an irony "directed at generic conventions" of the genre itself (Whitehead 130).

Overall, it proved beneficial to supplement the class discussion with further critical material after students responded to the inconsistencies and this allowed them to see similarities between critical literature and some of their own thoughts thus supportive of secondary sources rather than being "tunneled" by secondary literature into offering imposed responses to inconsistencies in *The Cosmorama*. It is also noteworthy that contradictions, depending on how they are read by students, as supportive of or detrimental to fantastic effects, can function either as re-grounding (stabilization) or foregrounding (defamiliarization) of plot elements, respectively. But no matter how inconsistencies are read, it is central to an empirical enquiry into Odoevsky's novella that an invitation to respond to Todorov's fantastic becomes less of an imposed framework for students and instead an opportunity to perceive the text's peculiarities and then to reimagine the Gothic in ways that reengage students with the narrative. For ancient Daoist authors, writes Fanfan Chen, the fantastic is about "wisdom, mystery, and the aesthetics of liberty" (20). When responding freely to the Gothic, students often react initially with emotions and a sense of aesthetic relationship to (or disconnect from) the sub-genre, before doing anything else with it. Once given minimal forms of interpretive guidance, they then choose how to read, in this case *The Cosmorama*, based on their initial impressions or apprehensions. Irrespective of their level of grounding in the Gothic, most students seem to think that the idea of the fantastic is less a dry theory and instead describes something more natural to the sub-genre. This may be rooted in the genre's "historicity" (Chen 95), similar to the antiquated and exotic effects and also to the myth-making "tradition of *Märchen*" (95).

Discussion questions 6 and 7 focus on objects and the narrator's behavior, respectively. Students respond in a variety of ways to the object of the cosmorama itself, from simple readings of it as an object of diversion that means more to the narrator than it suggests in the novella, to more esoteric responses that it transforms him into a type of psychic vampire, perhaps all instigated via Dr. Bin's peculiar role since the cosmorama was his gift to the family (*SOGT* 95). One consistency in the responses is that most students read the cosmorama as having some kind of "transformational" power, either physical-supernatural or only as inspiration for the overly-creative narrator. This suggests to students power, change, or more broadly the possibility for the narrator to become someone or something else. Other initial impressions students have of the cosmorama is that it is something the narrator "desires" (or its power) without being aware of this initially, also that it "pops up" everywhere along the plot line. Even after it is destroyed on Dr. Bin's orders (97), its power remains in the text and generates either real, parallel realities for the narrator, or at least potent hallucinatory episodes. A few students suggested that the "box" is more central to the narrative than the narrator himself; once I pursued the question further, several responses were given, largely suggesting that the cosmorama is "very important" since it is "mysteriously" linked with the narrator's visions.

The question of the box's significance was eventually connected with question 7 on the narrator's possible heroism. Several students gave a resounding "no" to that question, that the narrator is, if anything, anti-heroic rather than heroic "because he doesn't love Sonia," but has "fun" with the Countess. Of note is how the student responses in this case link feeling with heroism or lack thereof in the text and further connect their impressions with the women characters, once again suggesting that readers "measure" the narrator's heroics in relation to his emotional depth and relationships in the narrative. Equally important to students is the box and the possibility that the narrator "gets all of his powers that make him heroic" by looking into it; or, as a more cynical student commented, "he cheats" because he has the box, and even when it is destroyed he still has its powers. When pressed to elaborate on how the narrator cheats his way to heroism, considering that even Herakles "cheated" in some of his famous labors, one student suggested that "it's not the same thing since this guy doesn't do anything with his power," rather keeping it in his head. Noticeable in the dialogue generated from this suggestion was an interesting tension between two dominant reactions from the class: one being more of a cognitive, measured reaction, suggesting that the narrator's "tricks" lead to failed heroism, and the other being more affective-expressive, commenting on the narrator's feelings, tensions, anxieties and fears, also his nightmares and hallucinations, and suggesting that the ordeal is "heroic" for his mind. One or two students also commented on the possibility that Dr. Bin "parasitically" feeds on the "fame" of this hero-of-the-mind, hearkening back to Bin's suggestion earlier in the text, that he will trumpet around Europe his marvelous medical report regarding the Count's revivification (117).

Student responses both to the cosmorama's role and the narrator's possibly heroic behavior suggest not only links between the two questions, but also place the cosmorama box along a spectrum of sublime possibilities, paralleling the student comments regarding Todorov's fantastic and character behaviors in the novella. Both the fantastic and sublime, although tools that enhance or give focus to the reading process, are at some level also reader-receptive and overlap with parts of Miall's theory of empirical reading. More specifically, while the fantastic seems more of a natural

fit with foregrounding/re-grounding effects in Gothic literature, its historical predecessor, the theory of the sublime, links more easily with Miall's idea of the mid-range episode as being the normal, linear way by which most readers read fiction. The cosmoramic box as evaluated through student responses is the sublime object of the narrator's, and by extension of readers,' desires in the novella. It is an object of power in Burke's sense of the sublime for as he argues there is "nothing sublime which is not some modification of power" (59) of the power to know, feel, or understand the unseen connections that the narrator is trying to figure out in Odoevsky's novella. The box he connects with first as a child has a continued presence even once it is destroyed as its influence resurfaces throughout the episodes of the narrative, leaving sublime effects (of terror, hallucination, and vampiric potential) in its wake. It is both a Burkean thing of terror and a Grossean object of Romantic heroism in the sense that sublime objects or moments open opportunities for heroic behavior or heroic mental exploration as can be the case while listening to music (see Brillenburg-Wurth 25-26, 58). In fact, the students themselves established connections between the box and the narrator's antics. The cosmoramic box also gives the narrator his emotional highs and lows in the text. In this way, the box builds reader anticipation and excitement, paralleling the addictive qualities it has for the narrator himself: the reader-receptive power of the sublime is thereby revealed.

The exceptionalism of the sublime, particularly in its Burkean form, does to some extent act as a foregrounding effect in *The Cosmorama* via the box's influence. Yet it is most strongly applicable to Miall's theory of the mid-range episode. Reading in a mid-range episodic fashion is a form of linear appreciation of literature that while running contrary to the vertical and/or symbolic way of reading fiction often imposed upon students offers a more realistic view of the receptive and interpretive process that is at work in the minds of readers when they first sit down and engage a text, irrespective of their levels of experience in reading a type or genre of fiction. Miall's theory is a modification and readaptation of several principles emerging in a 1922 article on narrative structure by formalist critic Reformatsky. Of particular value to Miall is that such principles emphasize how a literary text "unfolds in the reader's experience," thereby allowing for flexibility in the "distance" at which "we make our observations" of a work (119). According to Miall, while focusing on sentences and expressions one comes to the level of "affective stylistics" that Stanley Fish advocated in 1980, with its "clusters of phonetic effects" (Miall 120). Miall argues for the naturalness of the episode that is some-where at mid-level and usually characterized by thematic distinctness, "coherence" in temporal and/or spatial setting, and often ends with a "twist" that "motivates reader interest in the next episode" (120). While he applies the theory of the mid-range episode to a short story by Maupassant, it works equally well with Odoevsky's novella.

A summary of the mid-range episodes in the novella indicates once again how the cosmorama as an object or its sublime effects continue to act as a focus around which the episodes are organized or contained even once it has been physically removed from the narrator's world. The reader-receptive power of the box for both narrator and the audience compels readers to follow the narrative through each successive episode. Episodes 1 and 2 contain a vision instigated by the cosmorama or its effects, and these visions act as the focal point around which actions and character behaviors are measured. Episode 3 also contains one major vision in which the Count revives and the narrator understands the Count's morally stained life story. Episode 4 is the exception since it contains two possible major visions, an early one that revolves around "green steam" in which Sonia's *alter ego* may be speaking to the narrator, and a later one in which the Count mysteriously appears in the room in which the narrator and Countess are having their rendezvous. Of note, and in line with Miall's theory of linear reading, is that each of the episodes concludes with a plot twist that tantalizes readers; these twists also act as informal steps or divisions between the episodes, allowing readers to concentrate on the dominant visions in each of those five scenes. What is interesting about Episode 5, the final one, is that it contains a series of very small visions or hallucinations that quickly drop in and out and that thereby fragment the more objective content the narrator wishes to gain access to (i.e., information about the Countess). This leads to inconsistencies that can be discussed in relation to Todorov's concept of the fantastic and foregrounding effects.

Keeping track of the cosmorama's "progress" throughout the novella allows for a more categorical study of how readers not only reflect upon characters and events but also on objects and the placement of objects in the Gothic. The box attains a sublime potency for the narrator; in the reader's mind, its presence (physical and otherwise) becomes equal to the approximate duration of each episode, the length of time it takes for the narrator to drop into and exit each scene that is formative in his development into a possibly occult hero. The reader-receptive qualities of the sublime seem to fit naturally into linear readings of Gothic narratives since readers usually and enthusiastically respond to such effects in the story, and may be looking for such effects to begin with. It has been argued that the Burkean sublime has a kind of unorthodox "corporeality" (Richardson 27) in the history of the theorization of the sublime. This is because when compared to Romantic idealism, it is much more "sensory" and physical, like the Wordsworthian ego of poems such as "Tintern Abbey" (Richardson 43), having a presence that draws in readers' attention and thus more successfully defamiliarizes the contexts (Richardson 49). Sublime effects, therefore -- although most easily apparent through linear readings of representative examples of the Gothic -- are similar in function to Todorov's fantastic. Theorization of the sublime as naturally reader-receptive may also hold the promise of bridging the gap between empirical analyses of literature and cognitivism which often, argues Miall, neglects readers' affective-expressive responses in favor of ideas alone (39).

A focus on the foregrounding aspects and the episodic importance of the cosmorama box in Odoevsky's novella, as well as on its relation to sublime effects achieves two things: first, it draws attention to the reader-receptiveness of such objects within the Gothic, that is, their ability to inspire affective-expressive responses in readers. Second, it indicates a link between such empirical approaches to the text and two important tenets from cognitive philosophy that may lead to a common-ground between cognitive and empirical understandings of literature. The two tenets in question are the problem of misidentification of objects (which is linked to the act of keeping track of objects), and how thoughts about such objects may or may not correspond to an objective, "external world." Both principles are pertinent to the narrator's development in Odoevsky's novella as readers keep track of the cosmorama travelling through the episodes of the work, a movement made more obvious when seen through Miall's mid-range linear reading. What becomes important is the enigma of having the cognitive "subject ... in a position to think a succession of different thoughts about a demonstratively identified object that he keeps track of and watches...disappear in the distance as they [the subject and viewed object] move apart, while continuing to think about it after losing perceptual track of it" (Božičković 156). Episodes 2 and 4 in the novella contain examples of this conundrum of the tracking and identification of objects. In Episode 2, the narrator's contact with the cosmorama, although the box is soon destroyed on Dr. Bin's orders, remains active via his telepathic link with it, the idea of it, or at least its sublime after-effects. The continued linkage compels the narrator to track the cosmorama and its influence through the remaining episodes of the novella. This continued focus expands, in turn, to readers' reception of the narrative since the narrator's impulses to track now absent objects become a kind of conceptual (rather than expressive) foregrounding for the audience, resulting in a sense of strangeness as absent objects are constantly invoked all the while objects which are present in an episode are temporarily devalued by the narrator. The narrator's "misplacement" and prolonged focus on the cosmorama then function in ways similar to Miall's elaboration on the foregrounding-recontextualization cycle. That is to say, new importance is given to mundane things through syntactical and focal twists and literariness becomes "an interactive process" or exchange between reader and text (see Miall 145). In this case, the narrator's misplaced viewing, and re-viewing of the cosmorama, compels readers to misplace their attention as well during the reading process, thereby generating the peculiar effects often associated with the Gothic sub-genre.

This misplacement/prolongation of things or objects is also visible in the narrator's early vision which he has in "green steam" in Episode 4. In that vision, the narrator sees Sonia-Sophia as a sinister character, the darker *alter ego* to the innocent Sonia of the narrator's external world. Demonstrated in such a vision is the concurrent way in which the narrator thinks both positively and negatively about Sonia. She is now the misplaced object that resides within the already misplaced world of the cosmorama box, and by extension of that nested confusion she is seen as several things simultaneously. This translates into fantastic or uncanny effects and students are frequently undecided in terms of how to read this particular vision, as proof of Sonia's double nature or as mere hallucination. The problem raised by this episode and that students almost magnetically respond to it, is the other aspect of cognitive studies raised here, namely whether such visions actually correspond to the narrator's external world. What is noticeable in the enigmatic vision is that the narrator's sense of physicality disappears, and that while he attempts to be scientific and record his observations during the vision, the table and paper upon which he is writing become transparent (121). Immanuel Kant tackles a similar dilemma by arguing that an "order of appearances" is of primary importance, with the order enabling the subject (in this case the narrator) to become aware of "an objective order in time," that is, of the passage from one event to another (Kant qtd. in Božičković 177). To lack awareness of this objective order of successive events or objects is to fall into the trap of subjective perception, a perception that is not linked to the external world. When connected to the vision in Episode 4, the melting away of the narrator's surroundings indicates a disappearance of objective perception of Sonia, who is the object in that vision. Her "evil" nature then cancels out her previous goodness as if the narrator's earlier meeting with Sonia had never happened. Extended to readers, this effect carries forth as indecision, uncertainty, or the hesitation expected following Todorov's concept of the fantastic. But nonetheless, while evil Sonia is cancelling out the good one, the narrator continues to struggle with the visions, students have observed, as if he is still on some deeper level linked to the previous Sonia. The narrator's cognitive dilemma in this vision then parallels the reading process itself, wherein "feeling[s] imbued" by earlier sentences "may remain accessible as part of the ... processing of the episode, even though the reader loses direct conscious access to the [earlier] sentence[s]" themselves (Miall 149).

It is equally relevant to theories of reading and literariness as related to the Gothic sub-genre and more specifically to Odoevsky's *The Cosmorama* that Schopenhauer's response to Kant's problem of cognition dismisses the idea of misinterpreted succession of episodes or objects arguing that a person's sensory perceptions of objects override such effects and that all is "objective succession" within such contexts wherein objects are not necessarily, causally related to one another, but all in their own way are important (see Božičković 177-78). Applied to Odoevsky's novella, this suggests the effectiveness of mid-range, episodic reading since such reading divides the text into smaller sequences of events that are closer to how readers process or absorb a literary work. It further indicates that objects both outside and inside the narrator's hallucinations are equally relevant in the way that readers connect with such items. In this context also interesting is Schopenhauer's appraisal of Kant's response is the minimizing of disconnectedness from the external world outside the narrator's visions and the greater emphasis on empirical verification of

those objects and their reception via an audience. As much as students respond both cognitively and affectively to *The Cosmorama*, so too does the narrator respond both objectively and with feeling to his surroundings in an approximation of the sublime that serves as focus in many of his ordeals and experiences and that by extension guides readers along in the formation of their own responses to the novella. The epigraph to Odoevsky's work leaves readers with the symbol of a Neoplatonic mirror analogous to an understanding of literariness: for whatever is on the outside of a text is also on the inside. This link becomes apparent when we discuss how readers interact with representative examples of the Gothic sub-genre.

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