

THE MODERN CHICHIKOVS



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Abstract: *The post Break-up period witnessed the birth of many small Chichikovs who would have put the famous character of Gogol to shame. Chichikov's ingenuity was in his scheme of acquiring an estate on the basis of something 'inexistent'. However, the modern-day Chichikovs not only managed to deprive the people of their life-long savings; drove many to suicide, but could also get elected to the State Duma using the support of the very same 'deceived investors'.*

Nikolai Gogol reminisces in one of his "Letters apropos of Dead Souls"; Pushkin having heard the first chapters of the novel, "grew gloomier and gloomier and at last cried, Good Lord, how sad is our Russia!"¹ Around 150 years later, in Lyudmila Ulitskaya's novel "Visyoliye pokhorony" [The Happy Funeral], the dying hero Alik, another Aleksandr, a Russian, a shestidesyatnik, settled in Los Angeles, U.S.A., while witnessing the GKChP' putsch, in his dying breath reiterates the sad refrain that Russia is an "unhappy nation"²

The present essay is an attempt to study the above-mentioned phenomena on the basis of Boris Ekimov's "Chikomasov".³

Keywords: *Boris Ekimov, Chikomasov, Nikolai Gogol, Chichikov, Chichikovshchina, Sergei Mavrodi, MMM, pyramid and Ponzi schemes, zveno, zvenevoi, Perestroika reforms, Privatisation in Russia.*

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- 1 D. Magarshack: Introduction to "Nikolai Gogol's Dead Souls"; Penguin, 1976. p.7.
 - 2 L. Ulitskaya: "Visyoliye Pokhorony" [The Happy Funeral]; Novyi Mir, July 1998, No. 7. p. 46.
 - 3 B. Ekimov: "Chikomasov"; Novyi Mir, October 1996, pp. 10–14.

The post Break-up period of the USSR witnessed the birth of many small Chichikovs who would have put the famous character of Gogol to shame. Chichikov's ingenuity was in his scheme of acquiring an estate on the basis of something 'inexistent'. However, the modern-day Chichikovs not only managed to deprive the people of their life-long savings; drove many to suicide, but could also get elected to the State Duma using the support of the very same 'deceived investors'.

This essay examines the strange repetition of history in Russian society. If Gogol's "Dead Souls" was a work of fiction, then the incidents happening in the post-Soviet times are no less bizarre like life imitating fiction. In Gogol's "Dead Souls", the main hero, Chichikov, thought of an entirely new scheme of buying the 'dead souls' from different landowners in order to acquire an estate for himself. Chichikov travels places to buy the 'dead souls', i.e., the dead serfs, peasants, whose names still existed in the previous census, yet to be struck off till the next one, and for whom, the landlords-owners had to pay the taxes. Therefore, getting rid of the 'dead souls' or serfs by selling off those names to Chichikov, howsoever weird it might have been, came as an easier option for all the parties. Chichikov alone cannot, therefore, be blamed for the entire fraud though he was the mastermind. The landlords, corrupt government officials, are all to be blamed equally. Whether at last Chichikov was successful or not, we do not have any chance to know. However, unlike Gogol's famous character, the present-day Chichikovs hoodwinked people clean of their lifelong savings, assets, and drove many to commit suicide. Whether Chichikov underwent any spiritual transformation⁴ and whether Gogol could find the path of salvation for Russia⁵ or not is another story, but the modern-day Chichikovs found their own way by getting elected to the State Duma on the support of the very same deceived victims.

Whereas Chichikov had personal ambitions of name, fame and riches, Boris Ekimov's hero "Chikomasov"⁶ wanted to help his fellow villagers of the Don region, but like Chichikov, his initial success had suddenly turned into a failure. His cousin from the city first introduces him to the earnings from the high-sounding "commercial banks, like 'Selenga', 'Russkii dom', which simply knew how to roll the money wisely"⁷. The television and the newspapers were long making a clamour about these companies which offered returns of two hundred percent or more on the investments. He shows Chikomasov a small green savings book just like the ones issued by the banks. At first, Chikomasov invests his money in "Selenga" and gets good returns. Then, he comes to know of "Meridian", where the investments simply multiplied. Though some dodginess was involved, but the company had little money, and by borrowing it from others they invested elsewhere. With his earnings, Chikomasov travels to Moscow, buys jogging shoes, sells them at a higher price, and reinvests in some more companies like 'Russkiye mastera', 'Russkoye polye' etc., which competed with each other promising more returns. Though his wife shouted a lot, he took all her savings as well and invested that. Out of pity for his sons, who spent all their savings on small knick-knacks like carpets or bought dollars hoping for the prices to grow, Chikomasov advises them to invest in various companies.

4 D. Magarshack: Introduction to "Nikolai Gogol's Dead Souls"; Penguin, 1976. pp. 11-12.

5 L. Kostyukov: "XX vek: Vozobnovleniye velikoi sudby"; Literaturnaya Gazeta, No.45, 05.11.1997, p.

6 B. Ekimov: "Chikomasov"; Novyi Mir, October 1996, pp. 10-14.

7 B. Ekimov: "Chikomasov"; Novyi Mir, October 1996, p. 11.

People take him seriously and consider him to be a pioneer when he starts giving a pension to his wife, three times more than the government one, and builds houses for his three sons. He even decides to spend his own money on building a concrete road leading to the hamlet, and get the village-shacks replaced by double-row cottages looking like “white swans”. He plans to turn the hamlet into a fairytale by putting up fountains, parks etc. in place of the dirty pigsties, dung and dark barns all-around. Busy calculating with a calculator, he starts thinking a lot like a successful man. He is considered to be a big man of the village, and people come to him for advice.

After seeing the zeroes adding up in Chikomasov’s savings books, the villagers with their last kopecks make a rush for the companies for getting their investments multiplied. An old woman wanted to move nearer to her daughters in the district centre, but could not afford the high prices of the houses there. Chikomasov’s advice to her was the same. She acted accordingly: selling off her only house in the village, investing the money in a company, and while waiting for it to grow so as to afford the house in the district centre, started to while away her time in a neighbour’s empty outhouse. On Chikomasov’s advice, another villager also sold off his ‘Zhiguli’ car and put the money in a company to multiply, hoping to buy a Japanese car later. Chikomasov’s only secret wish is that hopefully after his death, people would put up his bronze or marble statue on a small hillock in the village. They might even place real flowers on the pedestal, wreaths on Fisherman’s Day for his thinking about their welfare and trying. Of course, he would not be alive by then. Such thoughts brought tears to his eyes.

However, within a year, in summer, one such company, called ‘Meridian’ is closed down. One after another, the offices of all such companies with their beautiful names, like ‘Russkii dom’, ‘Russkiye mastera’, ‘Russkoye polye’, ‘Russkoye zoloto’, ‘Nyeft almaz’ etc., close down. People lose all their savings. Overnight Chikomasov, his sons, the pensioners and the other villagers, who had invested their last kopecks, lose everything.

The villagers suspect Chikomasov’s connivance with the companies in swindling them of their savings. Armed with guns, the villagers start hunting for Chikomasov who, on his wife’s advice, hides himself in one of the many islets of the Don river. He pulls away all the fishing-boats to the other bank so that nobody can follow him. All the time, he frantically hopes that the situation will change for the better, improve, or the affected people would simply forget about him. However, that was not to be the case. Except for his kind-hearted youngest son, who brought him food once in a while, his other sons and their wives did not even want to hear about him. Suddenly, people start to curse the once-respected man as ‘Chikoma-asina-aa’, “rhyming with *Chichikovshchina*” (Andrei Nemzer).⁸

With so many weird things happening in the post-Soviet Russian society, with the reports about the ‘Russian trademark crimes, [such as] extortion, fraud, bribery etc.’⁹ filling up the entire print

8 O. V. Frolov: “Tyema derevni v russkoi proze 90-kh godov: Rasskazy B. Ekimova”; Magnitogorskii gosudarst. pedagog.univ., Magnitogorsk, 1999. (<https://www.doccity.com/ru/tema-derevni-v-tvorchestve-borisa-ekimova/958804/>)

9 Thane Gustafson: “Capitalism Russian-Style”, C.U.P., 1999, pp. 134-150.

media' space, the story about 'Chikomasov', or his inadvertent entanglement in a fraud, did not appear to be too shocking as the societies in transition do attract many scavengers. Still, certain questions arise: whether in fact, there were some such instances of commercial banks, companies or schemes closing down suddenly after depriving the investors of their savings; and what was the government's response.

In May 2007, Sergei Mavrodi of the notorious 'MMM' pyramid scheme' (logo type with three capital 'M's, reminds of 'Meridian' above) fame was in the news when he was tried and set free by the court off the tax-evasion charges only. The name of the company carried the first letters of the founders' surnames, i.e., the Mavrodi brothers – Sergei and Vyacheslav; and Marina Muravyova¹⁰ (Vyacheslav's future wife¹¹) or by another account, that of Olga Melnikova¹². In October 2004, he was tried for using a forged passport, and given time to get acquainted with the charges of financial fraud served on him.

Briefly speaking, the 'MMM'-Fund (pyramid scheme) came into existence in 1992 (and by some accounts, in 1993¹³) though it had been operating since 1989 as a cooperative dealing in video cassettes, computers and electronic items. Operating as a commercial bank, it promised investors up to 1000% of returns¹⁴. The company conducted aggressive advertisement-campaigns by using an ordinary character, called Lyonka Golubkov and the pensioners whose investments allegedly grew in geometric proportions. If the ordinary Russians could identify themselves with the simple attire, mannerisms, desires and the meek utterances of Lyonka Golubkov to 'buy a pair of shoes for wife' with his unexpected gains amidst such penury all around, then the pensioners without any money even to repair their spectacles with their meagre pensions obviously must have been influenced by the hopes of leading a comfortable, dignified life, and dreamt of being able to cover their own medical expenses, etc. The young families similarly hoped to supplement their little incomes, if any, as due to high inflation, the salaries received after long delays of months or years together were practically worthless. The ordinary people not only shied away from visiting the big banks with their small deposits, but were also lured more by the short-term deposits with promises of huge returns.¹⁵

In August 1994, Mavrodi was arrested for evading taxes of 49.9 billion roubles for "Invest Consulting"¹⁶, an MMM-subsiary company¹⁷, and reportedly, the entire scheme collapsed. The offices were closed down, and seven KamAZ trucks loaded with money were taken away by the police through the backdoor. Fearing political vendetta, some four thousand "MMM-pyramid

10 S. Dyupin, V. Buze: "Sergeyu Mavrodi vernuli dolzhok: Glava MMM rasplatilsya so sledstviem svobodoi"; <http://www.kommersant.ru/archive/archive-material.html?docId=362127> (01.02.2003)

11 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MMM_%28pyramid%29

12 [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/MMM_\(Ponzi_scheme_company\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/MMM_(Ponzi_scheme_company))

13 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MMM_%28pyramid%29

14 <http://www.kommersant.ru/archive/archive-material.html?docId=362127> (01.02.2003)

15 Larisa Piyasheva: "Kak my iskali dyengi Mavrodi"; <https://www.kp.ru/daily/22978/1864/> (20.02.2003)

16 V. Kovalyov: "Pharaoh of Russian Pyramid Scheme Finally Arrested"; Transitions Online: <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/7056.cfm##13>(10.02.2003)

17 <http://www.kommersant.ru/archive/archive-material.html?docId=362127>(01.02.2003)

investors" gathered outside the Russian Parliament on 19th August 1994 and demanded Mavrodi's release. They hoped to get their investments back once he was released and allowed to function without the government's interference¹⁸ as the MMM-'tickets' (it avoided the term 'shares'¹⁹) were nothing more than useless 'dead souls' for them. Mavrodi nevertheless fought the Duma elections from jail by impressing upon the deprived investors that the company's closure by the government was the root cause of all their misery. Mavrodi's pre-election campaigns were though termed cynical and criticized in the national media²⁰, he, nonetheless, won a seat in the State Duma in October 1994 with the support of the very same 'deceived investors', mostly comprising of the same pensioners, who had lost their last savings.

In 1995, the Parliament deprived him of the powers of immunity as he did not attend any of the Duma proceedings²¹. In 1996, his candidature for the Presidential elections was rejected as most of the signatures collected were forged. The money returned only to some of the investors was pittance as compared to the actual investments made by millions of people who were cheated of everything, at once. In 1997, 'MMM' declared itself bankrupt. By the time the Prosecutor-General's office could revive the old cases of financial fraud in 1998, Mavrodi had either fled the country, or probably operated from Russia itself²². By then, in despair many investors had already committed suicide, or turned away from the police, the Moscow' mayoralty and the Parliament. They expected very little from the courts, which, as such, were flooded with numerous such cases²³. The ordinary citizen's apprehensions of the courts were also not misplaced as the rich and the powerful were being given a mere two months of imprisonment and amnesty for embezzling 252 million dollars whereas the commoners were sentenced to 4-5 years of imprisonment just for stealing food²⁴.

Then, along with his cousin²⁵ or sister-in-law²⁶ Oksana Pavlyuchenko, Sergei Mavrodi started an internet stock-game "stockgeneration.com", registered in the Cayman Islands. By 1998, it cheated millions of dollars from approximately twenty thousand Americans (as they, too, were unaware of the man's reputation²⁷) and a search warrant was issued by the U.S. government. However, he was arrested in February 2003 from an apartment in Moscow, and was given time till January 2006 to get acquainted with the charges levelled against him. In April 2007, he was sentenced to four and a half years imprisonment. One month later, i.e., in May 2007, after allegedly having completed his term, he was set free.

By some queer coincidence, following Sergei Mavrodi's arrest and the closure of the 'MMM'-

18 <http://www.kommersant.ru/daily.aspx?date=20060520> (20.05.2006)

19 Thane Gustafson: "Capitalism Russian-Style", C.U.P., 1999, p. 74.

20 V. Kovalyov: "Pharaoh of Russian Pyramid Scheme Finally Arrested"; Transitions Online: *ibid*.

21 V. Kovalyov: "Pharaoh of Russian Pyramid Scheme Finally Arrested"; Transitions Online: *ibid*.

22 N. Gwozdev: 'Na raskopkakh pyramid'; <http://www.vremya.ru/2003/18/2/50258.html> (03.02.2003)

23 Thane Gustafson: "Capitalism Russian-Style"; C.U.P., 1999, pp. 151-2.

24 Galina Metelitsa: Bolshe ukral-Menshe srok, Justice's Conditional Character; Argumenty I Fakty, No. 42, 2001, p.7

25 <http://www.gzt.ru/rubricator.gzt?rubric=novosti&id=3155000000004270> (02.02.2003)

26 R. Akhmirova: "Kak my iskali dyengi Mavrodi"; [https://www.kp.ru/daily/22978/1864/\(20.02.2003\)](https://www.kp.ru/daily/22978/1864/(20.02.2003))

27 R. Akhmirova: "Kak my iskali dyengi Mavrodi"; *ibid*.

pyramid, the government short-term GKO (Gosudarstvennyiye kratkosrochniye obligatsii) bonds were issued by the state after 1994. Like the 'MMM-tickets', the GKO bonds also grew in gigantic proportions. However, after the 1998 defaults, the results were the same: people again lost their last kopecks and committed suicide. But this time, the whole country was taken for a ride as people believed that the government's schemes could not crash. Only difference is that the GKO's bonds issue was not much discussed. As economist Larisa Piyasheva²⁸, Aleksandr Bekker²⁹ and others³⁰ summarise, Mavrodi showed the path to the government that it was sitting on huge, untapped resources. The Mavrodi brothers and their associated firms were buying huge shares of 'Gazprom', 'AvtoVAZ' (of the Zhiguli, Lada cars' fame), 'UAZ' (Ulyanov Automobile Plant), some precious metal companies, and Sergei Mavrodi's presidential ambitions were never liked by the rich and powerful, like Viktor Chernomyrdin and others. Vyacheslav Mavrodi, Sergei Mavrodi's younger brother and the co-founder of MMM had also started the much smarter 'MMM-96 scheme' allegedly for helping the earlier victims though he was also caught for illegally dealing in precious metals³¹.

By some twist of fate, although the heads of other pyramid schemes like 'Tibet', 'Vlastilina', 'Russki Dom Selenga' were put behind the bars, Mavrodi was unusually successful in evading arrest. Supposedly, he was helped by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy hankering for Mavrodi's money, which appears simplistic and raises questions about the whole affair.

Unfortunately, despite the cases of "MMM", "Vlastilina", "Khoher-Invest" etc. being in public domain, other swindlers like Sergei Osipov of "BazaCard", supposedly dealing in nanotechnology and developing internet programmes, created a "virtual robot" allegedly aiding people in the sale-purchase of things on the internet. His 'research and development' was funded by his 'products' being 'sold and marketed' by a chain of investors roped into a pyramid scheme which promised 20% returns per month. Lured by such profits, some of the "partners-collaborators" had sold off their flats and invested in the scheme. The same Osipov, a doctorate in education and vice-chancellor of a least-known Institute of World Civilisations in a nondescript and quiet alley of Moscow, not only lodged a police complaint in 2007, when his internet software and the "virtual robot" were reportedly destroyed by computer viruses or hackers, but also compelled the investors for more money to revive the programmes so as to return the initial deposits of the investors. With the police investigations dragging on for almost two years, the company and the investors finally reached an out-of-the-court settlement³². It appears that while Chichikov had opted for fleeing from the scene on his fast troika, the latter ones were more confident of their own secure positions.

28 Larisa Piyasheva: "Kak my iskali dyengi Mavrodi"; <https://www.kp.ru/daily/22978/1864/> (20.02.2003)

29 A. Bekker: "Slyed prostyl"; <http://www.vedomosti.ru/stories/2003/02/03-67-01.html> (03.02.2003)

30 A. Bekker et al: "Arrest pionyera"; <http://www.vedomosti.ru/stories/2003/02/03-67-01.html> (03.02.2003)

31 <http://www.gzt.ru/rubricator.gzt?rubric=novosti&id=3155000000004270> (02.02.2003)

32 A. Zyuzuayev, N. Beroeva: "Novyie finansovyye piramidy: Aferisty duryat vkladchikov s pomoshchiu inoplanetyan"; <http://kp.ru/daily/24149/365397/print/> — 20.08.2008

For long “MMM” was considered to be a pyramid scheme^{33 34} (as it is operating now in different places under different names, like “Globus-MMM” or “Gvardiya-M” or “MMM–My meniaem mir” [MMM–We Change the World] etc.³⁵), and later it came to be recognised as a Ponzi scheme.³⁶

The Ponzi³⁷ and pyramid schemes, both based on fraudulent patterns, promise huge returns on investments. As compared to regular investments, these types of “collective investment” or “recurring deposit”³⁸ schemes can offer consistent “profits/returns” as long as the number of investors continues to increase. In a Ponzi scheme, the people controlling the funds merely transfer the funds from one client to another without any real investment activities³⁹ whereas in a pyramid scheme, the initial schemer recruits new investors and gets paid for providing investment opportunities and rights to sell particular products, etc., akin to a multi-level marketing campaign.⁴⁰ The new investors in turn recruit others by expanding the chain. Instances of dietary products, agro-forestry projects, tour packages, or real estate (e.g. Buy-One-Get-Two schemes in Delhi’NCR) being sold similarly in India and other countries have been occasionally reported in the mass media. In such schemes, of which “around 1700 were operating in Russia during the post-Breakup period”⁴¹, the “funds collected from the new investors are employed to repay the older customers further up the chain or pyramid”.⁴² Though the pyramid schemes are difficult to prove due to the number of intermediaries involved, both types crash under the sheer volume of lofty claims and the returns promised, “that no bank could possibly offer”.⁴³

The later pyramid schemes with much smarter tricks than their predecessors advertised the new schemes throughout Russia in the regional TV channels or the billboards in the guise of “discussion forums, lecture sessions, tour agencies, tourist clubs, etc., where the investments were termed ‘gifts or voluntary contributions’, fellow-investors as ‘friends’, company operatives as ‘partners’, and the pyramids itself as ‘charity or mutual aid’; and catchy words like ‘profits’, ‘welfare’, ‘riches’, ‘happiness’ etc., were banded about. The investors were required to ‘voluntarily gift money to other investors-friends or through bank-transfers buy long-term tour packages without any mention of particular places or dates, and also invite and involve others for the same to expand the chain and earn ‘profits’.

33 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyramid_scheme

34 Will Kenton: “What is a Pyramid Scheme”; <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/pyramidscheme.asp> (17.09.2019)

35 R. Akhmirova: <https://sobesednik.ru/dengi/20180816-sergej-mavrodi-umer-no-delo-mmm-zhivet-v-seti-pod-ego-imenem> (17.08.2018)

36 [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/MMM_\(Ponzi_scheme_company\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/MMM_(Ponzi_scheme_company))

37 J. Chen: “Ponzi Scheme”; <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/ponziscHEME.asp> (25.06.2019)

38 Asit Jolly: “This might well be India’s biggest Ponzi Scam”; <https://in.finance.yahoo.com/news/this-might-well-be-india-s-biggest-ponzi-scam-080614621.html> (14.04.2014)

39 A. Pinkasovitch: “Ponzi vs: Pyramid Scheme: What’s the Difference?”; <https://www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/09/ponzi-vs-pyramid.asp> (13.04.2019)

40 A. Pinkasovitch: “Ponzi vs: Pyramid Scheme: What’s the Difference?”; <https://www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/09/ponzi-vs-pyramid.asp> (13.04.2019)

41 Leonid Mishchenko: “Kak my iskali dyengi Mavrodi”; [https://www.kp.ru/daily/22978/1864/\(20.02.2003\)](https://www.kp.ru/daily/22978/1864/(20.02.2003))

42 Asit Jolly: *ibid.*

43 Asit Jolly: *ibid.*

Apart from the native Russian Chichikovs, the tragic situation in the country also lured foreign confidence-tricksters, like the jobless American Robert Fletcher touting his job profile as a millionaire and successfully selling his 'Get-Rich-Quick' Give-1-Get-4' dreams throughout Russia and Ukraine.⁴⁴

It is considered that in his heydays, Mavrodi had created some 300 MMM-auxiliary firms and channelized the profits through his high-sounding bank 'National Pensionary'. Though the bank declared itself bankrupt, those 300 firms-ancillaries probably [continue to] exist and function⁴⁵, for Mavrodi always considered himself to be a financial wizard and utilised his prison-time to fine-tune his methods, created "Mavro" virtual money (akin to bitcoins) though quite confident of an eventual crash. The later MMM-2011/New-MMM (named "Gvardiya-M", with a single 'M') scheme with its low-profile, short-term offices spread across the regional levels in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, masqueraded as clubs, associations, casinos or lottery clubs, where the investors "voluntarily deposited money in the personal bank accounts of the other investors-'friends' or gifted cash to the company workers-'partners', and had to wait for the profits, with bonus touted as trips to the Maldives or Vienna"⁴⁶.

The investments were accepted in the form of club-admission fees or donations. The investor's personal details were only kept in the associations' computers. The entry to the short-lived, non-descript associations (offices) was only by word-of-mouth invitations or through other investors-friends. Even the associates of 'Gvardiya-M', indirectly boasting of no indictment charges against Sergei Mavrodi, were confident of a crash within three and a half years⁴⁷.

After 2008, the police and the Federal Services periodically warned people not to fall a prey to the machinations of forty-six pyramid schemes which were operating and swindling people in Russia and other countries. Of these twenty-nine associates of the former-MMM-pyramid, one belonged to a sitting deputy of the Parliament⁴⁸. Even the Law Enforcement agencies found it difficult to trace the roots of the other seventeen companies some of which had their registered offices in the Dominican Republic or simply maintained mickey-mouse outfits in different regions⁴⁹. In 2014-15, it was also not very surprising to find the flash player-MMM advertisements (in the form of pop-up windows) on the internet in India.

Although the Russian federation banned the pyramid schemes a couple of years ago, they continue to operate under various banners, viz., 'MMM-People's Mutual Aid Fund', 'Social Mutual Aid Group', 'Party of Liberation', etc⁵⁰.

44 R. Akhmirova: <https://sobesednik.ru/obshchestvo/20121217-v-rossii-rastut-novye-finansovye-piramidy> (17.12.2012)

45 R. Akhmirova: "Kak my iskali dyengi Mavrodi"; <https://www.kp.ru/daily/22978/1864/>(20.02.2003)

46 R. Akhmirova: <https://sobesednik.ru/skandaly/20120321-novaya-mmm-sergeya-mavrodi-na-grani-bankrotstva> (21.03.2012)

47 *ibid.*

48 R. Akhmirova: "Nakazaniye pyramidami"; <https://sobesednik.ru/dengi/sobes-14-10-mmm> (20.04.2010)

49 *ibid.*

50 R. Akhmirova: <https://sobesednik.ru/dengi/20180816-sergej-mavrodi-umer-no-delo-mmm-zhivet-v-seti-pod-ego-imenem> (17.08.2018)

The reputation of the man, the author of "The Son of Lucifer", the owner of tens of thousands of bitcoins is such that his close relatives refused to claim his body after his sudden public appearance and death, and many journalists studying his case for long still disbelieve Sergei Mavrodi's death in 2018. The irony of it all is that unlike Chikomasov, who could not have ever dreamt of a memorial service, Mavrodi's funeral expenses were borne by those who idolised him, i.e., the investors of 'Gvardiya-M', which is still successfully operating also through its global subsidiary companies (e.g. 'Cashberry'), and engages known actors in the advertisements.⁵¹

In Ekimov's story "Chikomasov", the inhabitants draw their surnames from the names of different fish, and the hero, Chikomasov, bears the name of the fishermen's hamlet as well. In Vladimir Dal's explanatory dictionary, the surname 'Chikomasov' with its roots in Chekomas or Chikomas, meaning perch in the local parlance, stands for something dirty and unclean. The smelly, miry and predatory perch lending its name to Boris Ekimov's hero, notwithstanding, Chikomasov suffers the most and feels miserable about the wrong turn of events, despite wishing the opposite. Just like Chichikov, Chikomasov, the best fisherman and *zvenoi*⁵²

51 *ibid.*

52 The innocuous mention of Chikomasov, a '*zvenoi*' (unit leader) getting into a precarious situation in the era of reforms in itself conveys the condition of all the experienced and hard-working kolkhozniks and sovkhozniks, who had opted for or coaxed into the 'zveno', which entailed more strenuous work.

In the 1940-s, the '*zveno*' (link) system of grouping of six to ten peasants within a brigade, and paying by the results for working a particular land, doing particular jobs or raising particular crop/s etc., was practiced to increase the accountability of the kolkhozniks. In the 1950-s, though the '*zveno*' existed within, the brigades came to be paid by the results, possibly to discourage 'excessive subdivision of work, lands, and development of any 'ownership feeling' of the small group' members towards the resources.

(N. Nazartsev: "Zveno"; Syelskokhoziastvennaya Entsiklopedia, T.2, 1951, p. 624 – <http://agrolib.ru/rasteniievodstvo/item/f00/s00/e0000653/index.shtml>); (A. Nove: "An Economic History of the USSR 1917-1991", Penguin, 1992, pp. 311-312).

Similarly, the experiment of 'brigade-links/family units' (*zveno*) working 'in agreement' with the kolkhozes/sovkhozes, was conducted briefly during the late fifties and early sixties in certain parts of the Soviet Union. It strived to increase food production, lower the production costs and motivate the members by additional payments for the results and over-fulfilment of the plan allocations. Instead of alternate groups/workers doing different jobs at various stages, the small units/links (*zveno*) within the brigades/teams, allotted the resources for the entire period (e.g., from sowing to harvesting) to raise particular crops etc., got more involved with the results and became more calculative to produce utmost. However, the exercise was discontinued due to the fear of deviating from the socialist path and recreating 'kulaks'.

(B. Ekimov: "Ocherki nashikh dnei: "Itogi" – "Trinadsatoi-pyatiletki"; Novyi Mir, 1997, No. 5, http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1997/5/ekimov.html); (B. Mozhaev: "Zemlya zhdyot khoziaina" (1960), Zemlya zhdyot khoziaina; Russkii put, M., 2003, pp.27-46; B. Mozhaev: "Kakoye ono, schatye na Rusi? (1993), *ibid.* p. 382-384); (A. Nove: "An Economic History of the USSR 1917-1991", Penguin, 1992, pp. 382, 394-404).

During the Perestroika period, the previous experiences of the 'unit-links', small group and family leasing, seem to have been viewed and employed for creating owners-masters, somewhat resembling Stolypin's wager on the strong, though the "strong" conditioned by years of past experiences of periodic policy-changes and abrupt, uncertain experiments, "appeared least enthusiastic about the reforms".

"The 1988' Law on Cooperatives envisaged the 'units' within the sovkhozes, kolkhozes, and the service organisations in the agricultural sector, growing into cooperatives"; whereas, through the "Leasing Law of 1989" and "July 1990' declaration of debt cancellation and incentives for the kolkhozes adopting [new] forms of farming and agricultural practices", the government wished to achieve the previous results of increased food

(unit/work team leader in a kolkhoz), suddenly experiences infamy and becomes the hunted after his brief stint with fame. Though he is only accused of 'Chichikovshchina' [Chichikovism/Chichikovitis], he also ends up as a victim of a bigger fraud committed on the Russian people. What resulted was, more than anybody, Chikomasov the insider, the inhabitant, the 'real expert' and the 'wisest leader', inadvertently fooled himself and led his namesake hamlet, the smallest unit of the nation, to misery. Stuck in an islet just across the hamlet, the hero, Chikomasov, is unable to rescue himself like Chekhov's Vanka Zhukov and the inhabitants of the hamlet Chikomasov find themselves in a similar precarious situation, too.

In a small fishermen's hamlet, Chikomasov is derided as the 'beloved adviser' when things go wrong though he was neither a mastermind in a Ponzi scheme nor was he the initial or intermediate schemer expanding the chain in a pyramid scheme by recruiting other investors

production, and "introduce income differentiation by 'linking' remuneration to output and create conditions for the development of a rural elite". (Stephen K. Wegren, *Dilemmas of Agrarian Reform in the Soviet Union*, *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (1992), pp. 11-21); (A. Nove: "An Economic History of the USSR 1917-1991", Penguin, 1992, pp. 311-312, 382, 394-404).

However, Boris Ekimov, a supporter of the Perestroika reforms initially, in his stories and literary-journalistic essays (*ocherki*) shows how the successive government policies and the Presidential Decrees of the Perestroika and the post-Perestroika periods, variedly interpreted and locally implemented in the absence of clear-cut guidelines, failed both, the kolkhozes, sovkhoses of the Volga-Don area as well as their ordinary members. For the kolkhozes/sovkhoses' sustenance and welfare, the best of the specialists and workers had opted for or were coaxed (at times bribed) into the 'family leases', 'unit-links' (*zveno*) on contract. Despite working sincerely for the kolkhozes/sovkhoses' self-financed projects and earning well in the initial years, they got frustrated due to various reasons like, corruption, non-payment of their dues, lack of coordination among the links, jealousy and denial of resources, highhandedness of the officials, non-cooperation of the kolkhoz and district administrations, legal hassles, etc. As a result, some returned to their old jobs after an initial phase of enthusiasm; some with their shares joined the new cooperatives or the independent farmers later; whereas others remained or were compelled to remain as *zvenivoi* for the sake of the kolkhozes. Save the occasional loan-waivers, the kolkhozes and the sovkhoses faced double jeopardy, when leasing and the contracts were downplayed. The November 1990-March 1991' reforms saw the rural nomenklatura-elite and the specialists, like the agronomists, economists, machine operators etc. becoming independent farmers, lessees, joint-stock entities, mainly at the expense of the kolkhozes/sovkhoses; whereas the December 1991' and October 1993' Presidential Decrees necessitated the kolkhozes/sovkhoses to fend for themselves without the guidance of the specialists, and without the usual state support for fuel, spare parts, repairs, maintenance, etc. Though significant quantities of produce were obligatorily delivered by them to the state at low prices (till 1993' end), and the payments for the goods supplied to the state, processing industries and the intermediaries, received after months and years of delay, were swallowed up by huge inflation; without any redressive mechanism, they were gently bankrupted and driven to their slow death. Thus, Chikomasov's being a *zvenivoi* shows either his lack of resources or willingness to become an independent 'rural elite', or his wish to help the kolkhoz by remaining in it. Without naming it so, Boris Ekimov shows one of the 'links' of the ensuing 'shock therapy' method thrust upon the rural base, which only hastened its further destruction; thoroughly devalued the kolkhoz/sovkhos' lands, which were later conveniently grabbed by other sets of Chichikovs.

(B. Ekimov: "Ocherki nashikh dnei: "V doroge-Poslesloviye Sergeya Zalygina" (Part-I); *Novyi Mir*, 1994, No. 1, http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1994/1/ekimov.html); (B. Ekimov: "Ocherki nashikh dnei: "V doroge-Prodolzheniye" (Part-II); *Novyi Mir*, 1994, No.3. Pp., http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1994/3/ekimov.html); (B. Ekimov: "Ocherki nashikh dnei: "Itogi'-Trinadsatoi-pyatiletki"; *Novyi Mir*, 1997, No. 5, http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1997/5/ekimov.html); (B. Ekimov: "Ocherki nashikh dnei: "Proshchaniye s kolkhozom"; *Novyi Mir*, 2005, No.6, http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/2005/6/); (L. Butuzova, P. Kassin: "The Slow Extinction of Russia's Villages"; *Moscow News*, 4-10 May 2007, <http://www.russialist.org/archives/2007-103-2.php>)

and getting benefitted in the process. He might be blamed for doling out wrong advice, but the 'hamlet Chikomasov's inhabitants' desire to gain some quick money to overcome despair cannot be overlooked, when the ordinary Russian citizens' unawareness of the mechanisms of the new financial institutions was fully taken advantage of by the latter.

But, let alone Chikomasov, even Chichikov could not have dreamt of the successes achieved by an adviser of the Russian government. "The primary adviser on Russian privatisation, the Harvard economist Andrei Shleifer [Andrei Shleifer's research institute], got paid more than \$40 million US Dollars by the U.S. government for advising the Russian government between 1992 and 1997, [despite] his influencing the terms of privatisation for oil and other companies in which he gained ownership interests".⁵³

Whereas, "Andrei Shleifer and Harvard [University] [could be] sued by the U.S. Justice Department in 2001 for alleged improprieties, including his failure to provide 'impartial, unbiased advice' to the Russian government"; not much remedial action seems to have been taken against the perpetrators of the Ponzi, pyramid schemes swindling the Russian people of their lifelong savings and driving thousands to commit suicide; or the "corrupt Russian insiders [who] also profited while the Russian nation, on the advice of Western economists, forfeited its wealth at pennies on the dollar".⁵⁴

After the 1989 elections, the "almost *nomenclatura*" intelligentsia (professors, instructors at the ideological departments of higher educational institutions, editors-in-chief of the mass-media)⁵⁵, like Gavriil Popov, a former Komsomol and CPSU member, the Moscow State University Economics professor became the first democratically elected Mayor of Moscow. Popov, the former editor of 'Voprosy Ekonomiki' and current President of the International University in Moscow, very subtly contributed in institutionalising corruption while in office; justified bribetaking by the bureaucrats through his articles, and surprisingly, they were not objected to. It is also alleged that he also gained the controlling shares in a media house.⁵⁶ However, he is but a small fry as compared to other academics, like the former engineer, mathematician, member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, former deputy of the state Duma, the late Boris Berezovsky, who gained from the privatisation of the state-owned TV-'Channel One' and the 'AvtoVAZ' automobiles, 'Sibneft' oil company among others.⁵⁷

Based on the survey conducted by the Institute of Advanced Politics (RAN) in 1993, the social scientist Olga Kryshtanovskaia, in her article "The New Russian Elite" (1993), mentions the changing nature of bribes, its institutionalised channelization and legalised acceptance: "91

53 Lawrence R. Klein, Marshall Pomer (Eds.): "The New Russia: Transition Gone Awry"; Stanford Univ. Press, 2001, p.17.

54 Lawrence R. Klein, Marshall Pomer (Eds.): "The New Russia: Transition Gone Awry"; ibid.p.17.

55 O. Kryshtanovskaia: "The New Russian Elite" (1993); Sociological Research, Vol.34, No.3, May-June 1995, p. 26, p. 29.

56 O. Gorshenkova: "Spiral russkoi tsivilizatsii: Logika razvitiia Rossii. Istoricheskiye parallelii reinkarnatsii"; Litres, M., 2017. p.

57 A. S. Minaeva (Ed.): "Komu prinadlezhit Rossiya: 10 Lyet kapitalizma v Rossii"; Vagrius, M., 2003. Pp. 361-363, pp. 53-54.

percent of entrepreneurs said that they had to offer bribes every time they came in contact with the organs of power. Moreover, the bribes were not always simply money. Those wielding powers, as a rule, want a share of the company profits in exchange for economic privileges. The Moscow mayor's office is a founder of and shareholder in more than one hundred commercial structures. These firms operate under the most favoured terms".⁵⁸ [The number must have had increased]

According to another public opinion survey (1993), the former Mayor of Moscow, Gavriil Popov and the then Mayor, Yurii Luzhkov, enjoyed the reputation of being ranked the second and the fourth richest persons in Moscow, respectively. According to that survey, businessmen unanimously agreed that one of the highest-earning spheres of activity was state service since it enabled one to take bribes"⁵⁹. It goes without saying, as a corollary to the Gogolian Law, if allowed to name it so; neither investments nor expenditures were ever needed to be made, whereas one could nonetheless 'legally' reap the benefits out of the 'inexistent investments', out of thin air by some sort of magic, just for "carrying out one's duties"⁶⁰. That is where the modern Chichikovs surpass the escapades of the Famous One. It also comes without any surprise that the spouses or the close relatives of such former office bearers suddenly started owning companies abroad or took their friends to exotic places on their personal jets. However, the methods of institutionalised corruption seem to have been reinvented during the Perestroika period.

Under the supervision of Egor Ligachyov, one of the chief architects of the 'Perestroika' programme, the "Komsomol Economy" was launched in 1987 for the "benefit of the Komsomol members". Under the CPSU Central Committee and the Komsomol, the Centres of Scientific and Technical Creativity of the Youth (TsNTTM) were created which developed into commercial structures and "private firms".⁶¹

"By 1990 more than 17,000 youth cooperatives were set up. They were sponsored by a youth commercial bank and enjoyed direct patronage and involvement of the Nomenklatura-elite. These newly set up youth cooperatives remitted 5% of their profits to the CPSU Central Committee from their businesses that included international tourism, computer and videos production companies, fashion, consumer goods manufacturing units, retail trade, banking, import-export of raw materials and goods and much more." They established joint ventures with foreign firms and organisations, set their own [inflated] prices for the imported goods and were relieved of all customs duties. The "state enterprises did not enjoy many of the 'rights', 'advantages' and 'privileges in the import-export operations"⁶² extended to the elite-controlled concerns, youth 'firms'. Though the youth organisations' retail sale of the items at inflated prices was in crude violation of the laws, their activities were simply termed "inappropriate"

58 O. Kryshtanovskaia: "The New Russian Elite" (1993); Sociological Research. Ibid. pp. 28-29.

59 O. Kryshtanovskaia: "The New Russian Elite"; Sociological Research, ibid. pp. 28-29.

60 O. Kryshtanovskaia: "Anatomiya rossiskoi elity"; Zakharov, Moscow, 2005. P. 162.

61 O. Kryshtanovskaya, S. White: "From Soviet Nomenklatura to Russian Elite"; Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 48, (Jul., 1996), No. 5. pp. 716-717.

62 O. Kryshtanovskaya, S. White: "From Soviet Nomenklatura to Russian Elite"; ibid. pp. 716-723.

by Gorbachyov in April 1990. With their close links with the highly-placed officials, the youth centres could obtain “advantageous credits in foreign currency” at the abysmally low “government exchange rates” for a period, and return the loans to the State again at the official rate of exchange after selling the foreign currency in the black market and making huge profits in the process. The first commercial banks, thus operating with the support of the state itself, were able to make profits in the same way.⁶³ During this period, the nomenklatura-controlled joint enterprises and firms started to enjoy the profits from the rentals of a large number of government buildings like hotels, clinics, rest homes, tourist bases, etc., and subsequently many of the earlier state property came under the control of such firms, e.g., the ‘Most Group’.⁶⁴

If *Chichikovshchina* means profiting out of something ‘inexistent’, then the reversed process of it, i.e., making something impoverished, insignificant, worthless and inexistent by weakening it at first, and then letting it grow back and making profits at the opportune times later; is equally beneficial for achieving the desired goals. It seems to be a time-tested formula, somewhat akin to the *Panchatantra* tale of the ‘Brahmana and his Goat’, when simply by dubbing the goat as three different animals, three thugs swindled him of it.

Starting from 1987, while the state got systematically impoverished and stripped off its assets, a handful could gain instantaneous riches when the “Russian big business based largely on Party-State resources was being privatised long before the beginning of the official privatisation. The most profitable state enterprises under the Union ministries became concerns and joint stock companies, in which the ministers typically by retiring became consultants or presidents and received the controlling shares.⁶⁵ With the direct participation of the Ministry of Finance officials, the government banks, viz. Gosbank, Promstroibank, Zhilsotsbank and their affiliates collapsed into multitude of commercial banks by simply renaming or adding the word “commercial” to their names and inherited the equipments, premises, staff, etc. of the former. Though the new commercial structures were headed mainly by young people, the narrow circle of people with very close connections with the political establishment controlled the large capital.”⁶⁶ The department heads at the Ministry of Finance became presidents of the commercial banks, and the ministers – the major shareholders in the privatized companies and leading officials, became managers, and so on.⁶⁷ Among others, the Komsomol secretary at the Mendeleev Chemistry Institute, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, was one such outcome of this experiment, starting his journey from a youth centre, through the chairmanship of one of the first commercial banks “Menatep” (which also began as a youth centre under the CPSU’ Frunze district committee in 1988), where the shares of the Gosbank officials and highly-placed Ministry of Finance’ staff exercised a dominant influence⁶⁸, to the Yukos Oil Company.

The commercial banks through their holding companies and financial concerns further funded

63 O. Kryshtanovskaya, S. White: “From Soviet Nomenklatura to Russian Elite”; pp. 718-719.

64 O. Kryshtanovskaya, S. White: “From Soviet Nomenklatura to Russian Elite”; p. 719.

65 O. Kryshtanovskaya, S. White: “From Soviet Nomenklatura to Russian Elite”; pp. 718-720.

66 O. Kryshtanovskaia: “The New Russian Elite”, Sociological Research, *ibid.* pp. 27-28.

67 O. Kryshtanovskaya, S. White: “From Soviet Nomenklatura to Russian Elite”; p. 720.

68 O. Kryshtanovskaya, S. White: “From Soviet Nomenklatura to Russian Elite”; pp. 720-721

other companies dealing in computers, building and construction, etc., by accumulating more capital and setting up their own banks, insurance companies, philanthropic funds; and acquired their own newspapers, lobbyists, political parties or security services⁶⁹, thus by creating their own new structures and securing their own positions.

Initially, Gogol's work was entitled "The adventures of Chichikov [in small letters] or [the] Dead Souls [in bold letters]", as compared to the subsequent famous title. The galaxy of modern Chichikovs and their weird escapades, each surpassing the other, seemed to have played a crude joke on the nation and stupefied the ordinary Russians caught in the game of one-upmanship of the policies. When "many caught their own golden fish in the murky waters of the reforms' process"⁷⁰, the small Chikomasovs, the victims as well as the inadvertent perpetrators, got caught in the scheming of the bigger Chichikovs, the 'Lords of the Depths', the 'Son[s] of Lucifer'.

If the Glasnost period assuaged the reader-hunger by publishing the previously censored works⁷¹ about the horrors of the past, the same period also created a new set of horrors for the future.

During the Perestroika and the post-Breakup period, when the state was hacking away itself and squandering its riches, Sergei Mavrodi's cooperative, dealing in computers and office equipments and growing into a Ponzi scheme in the guise of a joint-stock company/bank, could not have been possible without the cooperation of the bigger Chichikovs. Only that, the "legalisation of the shadow economy", resulted in "the triumphal entry of the Chichikov[s], the enterprising operators-acquirer[s], swindler[s] as national hero[es] on [their] lightning-fast troika[s] onto the stage...[while] the Soviet government [was] looking sideways and standing aside"⁷².

In conclusion, it would not be wrong to suggest that during the "Voucher Privatisation" exercise, for the ordinary populace, bereft of hardly any government support, salaries, income or real money to buy something with against the backdrop of hyperinflation, and literally thrown to the vagaries of fate, the "vouchers" must have been like "dead souls". Only that, the smart Chichikovs-'Sackmen/Bagmen' happily collected them by the cartloads from all around to acquire the huge national enterprises, which for the State had also probably become something like the 'dead souls' to get rid of at the first opportunity. To the utter surprise of the protagonist, Andrei Borodin, in Boris Mozhaev's "Muzhiki i Baaby" ["Peasant Folks", 1978-80], the common thief Vasya Belonogii [Vasya White-legs] supports the liquidation of private property, welcomes *dekulakisation* and *collectivisation* in 1924 with his own simple logic:

69 O. Kryshstanovskaya, S. White: "From Soviet Nomenklatura to Russian Elite"; p. 723.

70 T.Kh. Gdlyan: "V mutnoi vodye reform mnogiye poimali svoyu zolotuyu rybku"; http://www.ng.ru/ng_politics/2010-04-06/9_reforms.html#SE (6th April 2010)

71 Andrei Nemzer: "Zamechatelnoye desyatiletiye-O russkoi proze 90-kh godov"; Novyi Mir, 2000, No. 1. pp. (http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/2000/1/zamechatelnoe-desyatiletie.htm)

72 Boris Paramonov: "Vozvrashcheniye Chichikova" [The Return of Chichikov]; Nezavisimaya gazeta, 10.09.1991, p. 8. (https://yeltsin.ru/uploads/upload/newspaper/1991/nzv09_10_91/index.html).

"A thief will always find some work for himself: [Obviously, after *collectivisation*] there will be no private property, a common one will appear. [You see,] this public property is easier to steal: firstly, it is always within easy reach; secondly, you do not risk anything, you do not offend anybody and nobody has any ill feelings towards you. If you get caught,... then as per the Law – get a sentence, enjoy your holidays,...well-earned! But, [if] you touch any private [property] – then you are done for, you sure will get a bullet on all accounts... and so much of hatred. No, I am [categorically] against private property. It should be done away with....uprooted... Karla [sic] Marx has said it rightly..."⁷³

In a strange repetition of history, during the privatisation process and the so-called "*rekulakisation*" and "*decollectivisation*" efforts, the ordinary thief Vasya Belonogii's logic seems to have been applied to the utmost when the national assets, the 'common property', despite being built after so much of atrocities, pain, dedication and efforts, could be frittered away so easily. No wonder, the caustic former kolkhoz' foreman Petrovych's outbursts in Boris Ekimov's "Pinochet" seems apt:

"- See the milkmaids sitting over there [watching television]? The old and the young, you can't just pull them away. Three programmes. In all – one and the same [story]: factory stolen, city robbed, killed, slaughtered, stole again. If one [programme] shows three billions [stolen], the other simply falls behind: two and a half. And, yesterday, they all were equals with only seventy roubles. And, mind you, they are not thieves. Not in a-n-y sense! [They are] Privatisers! Wisest of wise men! Professors, academics. – And what edged off bandits are they?!...that's our future. They grabbed and became – azure-flowers, respected citizens... And, that is how, [they] tried to convince us...We all know that only too well: [they] go on stealing, whatever is within reach. Gazprom - you say. Norilsk is in bad condition. [Simply] pocket it! Norilsk is out of reach? Can't figure out how?? That means – [just] grab a pig from the farm. And then declare that privatisation is the third step. Steal, as much as you can! Because, for stealing the leggings/foot wrapping off the fence, the policeman can take you in. But [before] arresting for a million –will be scared, and for two – will pay homage. This we all know, [we are] convinced. Isn't that so?"⁷⁴

Given the Russian penchant for chess, it's not very surprising to note that every smart Ivan or Aleck always thought ahead in order to checkmate and find easy preys. The sudden transformation of the factory managers-into-proprietors or the billionaires-oligarchs appearing with their riches amidst dire conditions all around give the impression as if the whole country was truly infected with Chichikovshchina/Chichikovitis. Hence, it is difficult to say as to who is the real Chichikov. In all fairness, it can be said that the Original One at least did not drive anybody to commit suicide, nor rob people of their lifelong savings. He was simply looking for the willing sellers of the goods, which he wanted to buy; or simply put, find out other crooks, just like him.

As Nikolai Gogol reminisces in one of his "Letters apropos of Dead Souls", Pushkin having heard the first chapters of the novel, "grew gloomier and gloomier and at last cried, Good

73 Boris Mozhaev: "Muzhiki i baaby" (1978-80); <http://lib.ru/PROZA/MOZHAEW/muzhiki.txt>

74 Ekimov, Boris: "Pinochet" (Novella); Novyi Mir, No. 4 (888), Apr. 1999, p. 24.

Lord, how sad is our Russia!"⁷⁵ Around 150 years later, in Lyudmila Ulitskaya's novel "Visyoliye pokhorony" [The Happy Funeral], the dying hero Alik, another Aleksandr, an ailing Russian artist, a *shestidesyatnik* settled in America, while witnessing the GKChP' putsch on television, in his dying breath reiterates the sad refrain that Russia is an "unhappy nation".⁷⁶

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75 D. Magarshack: Introduction to "Nikolai Gogol's Dead Souls"; Penguin, 1976. p.7.

76 L. Ulitskaya: "Visyoliye Pokhorony" [The Happy Funeral]; Novyi Mir, July 1998, No. 7. p. 46.

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