

Title: The Architectonics of Insanity: Tracing Golyadkin's Descent into Madness
Author: John Lyles, College of William and Mary

In his work, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Tzvetan Todorov asserts that one key condition for the fantastic is that the reader must “hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described” (33). When reading Dostoevsky's second work, *The Double*, the reader is left wavering precisely between these possible interpretations. Do we suspend our disbelief and accept that Jr. is a living, breathing character, just like the others in the story? Or do we immediately write the entire tale off as an episode of delusion on the part of Golyadkin? Or, more difficult still, do we accept the appearance of Jr. as a supernatural event that has no logical explanation? In depicting Golyadkin's descent into madness, Dostoevsky expertly weaves support and clues suggesting alternately one or the other of the above interpretations. In this paper, I will elucidate the many ways in which Dostoevsky keeps his readers, much like Golyadkin himself, off balance and guessing about what is real and what is fantasy. I will then outline and examine what is a consistent narrative device – the use of blackouts – to show how Dostoevsky traces and amplifies Golyadkin's growing madness. What begins as clear signals to the reader that something is wrong with Golyadkin and his perception of the world, becomes increasingly unclear and confused, as Golyadkin's breaks with reality become less and less differentiated from his “real” life and the boundary between what is real and what is fantasy becomes more and more obscured. In tracing out the many signals Dostoevsky includes in this early work, this paper seeks to shed light on the young Dostoevsky's concern over the structure and organization of his novel, as well as deepen our understanding of it.