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From Text to Image: Petr Boklevskii's Portraits in Gogol's Dead Souls

Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls* is a nineteenth-century work that has fascinated many readers and painters by its focus on visual imagery. There are many instances of ekphrasis, where he paints an elaborate image with words. Gogol's love of imagery and emphasis on "seeing" is a recurrent theme in his text, especially in the depiction of his characters, which were representations of social types. His fascination with, and description of facial features in his characters provided material for many visual artists from which to draw upon. Although Gogol designed the cover of the first edition of *Dead Souls*, he rejected attempts by other illustrators to publish graphics for his work. He wanted his readers to visualize his depictions, and considered it the responsibility of the reader to achieve reconciliation with the characters as presented in the text as opposed to a defined picture. Nonetheless, his work proved to be a subject of enduring interest for visual artists.

Alexander Agin and Evstafii Bernardskii are recognized as the first major illustrators of *Dead Souls*. However, the works of Piotr Boklevskii became the most well-known graphical illustrations of *Dead Souls* in Russia, and they are ultimately connected to the image of *Dead Souls* in the minds of Russian readers. Through an interdisciplinary approach in combining elements of art criticism, art history, and textual analysis I will investigate what made these illustrations so influential, and what it was that Boklevskii was able to extract from the text and capture in his work. The scholarship on Boklevskii is limited, but an investigation of his six portraits of the five landowners and Chichikov may provide information as to what aspects or traits of his work allowed these specific images to become the symbols most closely associated with Gogol's *Dead Souls*.