

**NIKOLAI GOGOL**  
**AND**  
**THE MEDIEVAL ORTHODOX SLAVIC WORLD-VIEW**

**by**

**Philip Harttrup**

**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures  
University of Toronto**

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## **Abstract**

### **NIKOLAI GOGOL AND THE MEDIEVAL ORTHODOX SLAVIC WORLD-VIEW**

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This thesis examines Nikolai Gogol's creative and publicistic writings in the context of the medieval Orthodox Slavic literary and cultural tradition. Though Gogol wrote his entire corpus during the Romantic period and clearly shared a great deal with the Romantics in both Russia and the West, his thought and writings reveal his strong affinity for the heritage of Kievan Rus' and Muscovite Russia. The particular aspects of the pre-Petrine tradition most prevalent in Gogol's work include the following: the notion of the writer's role as divinely inspired, the monastic vocation, eschatological thought, aesthetic values, the influence of the demonic, and the ethical matrix of the culture.

While it was once believed that Gogol had undergone a religious crisis, a close examination of his correspondence and creative output shows that his religious and moral views

remained relatively constant throughout his life. Indeed, what he says in his early works reappears, only more overtly, in his final book, *Selected Passages From Correspondence With Friends*. As Gogol adapted and assimilated various aspects of the medieval tradition throughout his writings, *Selected Passages* may be viewed as the ultimate and most explicit testimony to his medieval world-view.



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## NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Transliterations from the Cyrillic are based on the system used by the Library of Congress. The soft sign (Ь) is omitted in proper names; therefore, Gogol instead of Gogol'. The adjectival ending -ii- is rendered by a -y- only for common Russian surnames; therefore, Belinsky instead of Belinskii.

## WORKS BY GOGOL CITED IN THE THESIS

The following is a list of works by Gogol cited in this thesis. Only the English titles are used in the text. Certain works are referred to by a shorter title (e.g. *Dikanka*.) (Inconsistent with the transliteration is *Hanz* (*Kiuchelgarten*) instead of *Gants*.)

<i>Gants Kiuchel'garten</i>	<i>Hanz Kiuchelgarten</i>
<i>Get'man</i>	<i>The Hetman</i>
<i>Zhenshchina</i>	<i>Woman</i>
<i>Boris Godunov. Poema Pushkina</i>	<i>Boris Godunov. A Long Poem by Pushkin</i>
<i>Vechera na khutore bliz Dikan'ki Sorochinskaia iarmarka</i>	<i>Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka The Fair at Sorochinsky</i>
<i>Vecher nakanune Ivana Kupala</i>	<i>St. John's Eve</i>
<i>Maiskaia noch', ili Utoplennitsa</i>	<i>A May Night, or The Drowned Maiden</i>
<i>Propavshaia gramota</i>	<i>The Lost Letter</i>
<i>Noch' pered rozhdestvom</i>	<i>Christmas Eve</i>
<i>Strashnaia mest'</i>	<i>A Terrible Vengeance</i>
<i>Ivan Fedorovich Shpon'ka i ego tetushka</i>	<i>Ivan Fedorovich Shponka his Auntie</i>

*Zakoldovannoe mesto*

*A Bewitched Place*

*Arabeski*

*Skul'ptura, zhivopis' i  
muzyka*

*O srednikh vekakh*

*O prepodavanii  
vseobshchei istorii*

*Neskol'ko slov o  
Pushkine*

*Ob arkhitekture  
nyneshnego vremeni*

*Al-Mamun*

*Zhizn'*

*O malorossiiskikh  
pesniakh*

*Mysli o geografii*

*Poslednii den' Pompei*

*Zapiski sumasshedshego*

*Nevskii Prospekt*

*Portret*

*Starosvetskie pomeschchiki*

*Taras Bul'ba*

*Vii*

*Povest' o tom, kak  
possorilsia Ivan Ivanovich  
s Ivanom Nikiforovichem*

*Koliaska*

*Arabesques*

*Sculpture, Painting  
and Music*

*On the Middle Ages*

*On the Teaching of  
Universal History*

*A Few Words About Pushkin*

*On Present-day Architecture*

*Al-Mamun*

*Life*

*On the Songs of Little  
Russia*

*Thoughts on Geography*

*The Last Day of Pompei*

*Diary of a Madman*

*Nevsky Prospect*

*The Portrait*

*Old-World Landowners*

*Taras Bulba*

*Vii*

*The Story of how Ivan  
Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan  
Nikiforovich*

*The Carriage*

Nos	The Nose
Shinel'	The Overcoat
Revizor	The Inspector General
Mertvye dushi	Dead Souls
Teatral'nyi raz''ezd posle predstavleniia novoi komedii	Leaving the Theatre After the Performance of a New Comedy
Peterburgskie zapiski 1836g.	Petersburg Notes of 1836
Zapisnaia knizka 1846 g.	Notebook for 1846
Razmyshleniia o Bozhest- vennoi liturgii	Meditations on the Divine Liturgy
Avtorskaia ispoved'	An Author's Confession
Vybrannye mesta iz perepiski s друз'iami	Selected Passages From Correspondence With Friends
Zhenshchina v svete	Woman in the World
Znachenie boleznei	The Meaning of Sickness
O tom, chto takoe slovo	On the Meaning of Words
O pomoshchi bednym	On Helping the Poor
Ob Odissee, perevodimoi Zhukovskim	The Odyssey in Zhukovsky's Translation
O lirizme nashikh poetov	On the Lyricism of Our Poets
Predmety dlia liricheskogo poeta v nyneshnee vremia	Subjects for the Lyrical Poets of Our Time
Nuzhno liubit' Rossiiu	It is Necessary to Love Russia
Nuzhno proezdit'sia po Rossii	It is Necessary to Travel Through Russia

*Russkii pomeschchik*  
  
*Istoricheskii  
zhivopisets Ivanov*

*The Russian Landowner*  
  
*The Historical Painter  
Ivanov*

*Chem mozhet byt' zhen  
dlia muzha v prostom  
domashnem bytu, pri  
nyneshnem poriadke  
veshchei v Rossii*

*What a Wife Can Do for Her  
Husband in Simple  
Domestic Matters as  
Things are Now In Russia*

*Chto takoe  
gubernatorsha*

*What The Wife of A  
Provincial Governor Is*

*Strakhi i uzhasy Rossii*

*Fears and Horrors in Russia*

*Blizorukomu priiateliu*

*To A Near-Sighted Friend*

*Zanimaiushchemu  
vazhnoe mesto*

*To One Occupying An  
Important Position*

*Khristianin idet vpered*

*The Christian Goes Forward*

*Naputstvie*

*Parting Words*

*V chem zhe, nakonets,  
sushchestvo russkoi  
poezii i v chem ee  
osobennost'*

*On the Essence of Russian  
Poetry and On Its  
Originality*

*Svetloe voskresen'e*

*Bright Resurrection*

## INTRODUCTION

Nikolai Gogol is demonstrably one of the most enigmatic writers in the history of Russian literature. Accordingly, his work has attracted the attention of scholars for over a century and a half. Much of the extensive scholarship devoted to the diverse aspects of Gogol's creative output has focused on the literary connections between his writings and the works of earlier writers in an effort to determine his literary origins. Several scholars, for instance, have labelled Gogol a romantic based on the thematic and compositional parallels between his writings and the works of other Russian and West European romantics.<sup>1</sup> Others have claimed that at least part of Gogol's literary heritage may be traced back to the writings of such classical writers as Homer and Aristophanes.<sup>2</sup> Numerous studies tracing the influence of early Ukrainian and Russian folklore on Gogol

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, the concise study by T. E. Little, "Gogol and romanticism," in *Problems of Romanticism*, ed. Robert Reid, (Aldershot, Hant, England, 1986), pp. 96 - 126.

<sup>2</sup>For example, on Gogol's use of Homer, see Carl R. Proffer, "Gogol's *Taras Bulba* and the *Iliad*," *Comparative Literature* Vol. 17 (1965), 142 - 50. On Gogol's connections to Aristophanes' work, see Chauncey E. Finch, "Classical Influence on N. V. Gogol," *The Classical Journal* Vols. 48 - 49 (1952 - 54), 291 - 96.



have also been published.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, it has been argued that such eminent writers as Shakespeare, Cervantes, Dante, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Sterne, and the Ukrainians, Orest Somov and V. T. Narezhny, among others, have played a role in shaping Gogol's creative work.<sup>4</sup>

Any study of extant research on Gogol's literary origins shows an amazing diversity of opinion, much of it very thoughtful. For example, it does seem that there are allusions to Cervantes' *Don Quixote* in Gogol's *Diary of a Madman* as Donald Fanger states, just as there are ties to Aristophanes in Gogol's creative work. Similarly, certain

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<sup>3</sup>For some of the best studies in this area, see Madhu Malik, "Vertep and the Sacred/Profane Dichotomy in Gogol's Dikanka Stories," *Slavic and East European Journal* Vol. 34 No. 3 (1990), 332 - 47; Felix Oinas, "The Transformation of Folklore into Literature," *American Contributions to the Eighth International Congress of Slavists, Volume II: Literature*, ed. Victor Terras, (The Hague, 1978), pp. 570 - 604; Natalie Moyle, "Folklore Patterns in Gogol's *Vij*," *Russian Literature* Vol. 7 (1979), 665 - 88; A. V. Samyshkina, "K probleme gogolevskogo folklorizma (Dva tipa skaza i literaturnaia polemika v *Vecherakh na khutore bliz Dikanki*)," *Russkaia literatura* Vol. 22 No. 3 (1979), 61 - 80; J. M. Holquist, "The Devil in Mufti: The Marchenwelt in Gogol's Short Stories," *PMLA* Vol. 4 (1967), 352 - 62; Dmitro Chyzhevskii, *A History of Ukrainian Literature From the 11th to the end of the 17th Century*, translated by Dolly Ferguson, (Colorado, 1975), pp. 315 - 28.

<sup>4</sup>On Gogol's being likened to Shakespeare, see Richard Peace, *The Enigma of Gogol: An Examination of the Writings of N. V. Gogol and their Place in the Russian Literary Tradition* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 16. On Gogol's connection to Cervantes, Hoffman and Sterne, see Donald Fanger, *The Creation of Nikolai Gogol* (Cambridge, 1979), esp. pp. 114 - 20; to Dante, see T. Baroti, "Traditsiia Dante i povest' Gogolia Rim," *Studia Slavica* Vol. 29 (1983), 171 - 83; to Somov and Narezhny, see Chyzhevskii, *History of Ukrainian Literature*, p. 433, p. 451.

parts of Gogol's writings may be discussed in the context of romanticism, while at least part of his literary output clearly has roots in folklore.

While it is obvious that Gogol was too complex not to have made use of many literary traditions and conventions, I argue that it was the medieval Eastern Orthodox Slavic tradition that served as the major source of influence on Gogol's thought and writings. It is well known that Gogol was fascinated with the history, customs, and written and verbal works of art of the early Eastern Slavs. It should, however, be noted that this was not just a passing interest in early Slavic culture. In part fostered by the spirit of the times (i.e., the spirit of romanticism),<sup>5</sup> and in part due to the circumstances of his life, Gogol's vision of the world --- both intellectually and spiritually --- was fundamentally shaped by the medieval Eastern Orthodox Slavic tradition. The following are some of the most prevalent features of this tradition: the medieval notion of the writer's vocation as divinely inspired, the importance of monasticism, eschatological thought, aesthetic values, the presence of the demonic and the ethical matrix of the culture, to name a few of the most important.<sup>6</sup> These aspects of the medieval

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<sup>5</sup>Indeed, the romantics' marked affinity for things medieval indirectly supports the contention that the medieval tradition was instrumental in shaping Gogol's writings.

<sup>6</sup>There were, of course, other features of the medieval (particularly Muscovite) literary and cultural

Orthodox Slavic tradition inspired and influenced much of Gogol's intellectual and creative activity, from his early "Ukrainian" tales, to his final and most controversial book, *Selected Passages From Correspondence With Friends* [hereafter, *Selected Passages*].

In this thesis I examine Gogol's thought and writings with special reference to the medieval East Slavic, both Kievan (up to the end of the fourteenth century), and particularly Muscovite, literary and cultural traditions. While there has been an overwhelming tendency to refer to the literature of the pre-Petrine period as "Early/Old/Medieval Russian," I prefer to use the designation "East Slavic" as that literature was part of the cultural tradition belonging not only to the Russians, but also to the Ukrainians and the Belorussians. I also use the modifiers "early/old/medieval"

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tradition such as the centrality of the liturgy, anti-intellectualism and anti-Western feelings. However, these categories, though significant to varying degrees in Gogol's writings, will not be dealt with here as they are not as pervasive in his work. Furthermore, although the role of women is both an important aspect of medieval East Slavic literature and of Gogol's writings, this category will not be dealt with as it has already been discussed in this context by Joe Andrew in his *Women in Russian Literature, 1780 - 1863* (Basingstoke, England, 1988), esp. pp. 79 - 111. Andrew argues that Gogol's female characters are "positively and specifically medieval in orientation," (p. 79) citing, among other factors, their descriptions based on medieval stereotypes. In particular, the studies by Fedotov (1975) and Obolensky (1971) have been extremely useful in providing an overview of the Slavic medieval world. I am also indebted to Professor Richard Marshall for helping me to narrow down the aspects of the medieval tradition most prevalent in Gogol's writings.

synonymously to refer to the literary and cultural tradition from the tenth century up to the age of Peter the Great. The installation of the Romanov dynasty in 1613 marked a turning point in Russian history, both spiritually and culturally. At this time Western literature started to have a greater influence on Russian literature. However, as some Slavic medievalists have pointed out, "although the embryo of a new literary system was created (at the turn of the seventeenth century), it would take the Petrine age to bring it to full maturation."<sup>7</sup> Thus, my study examines the literary monuments and the world-view of the Orthodox Slavs up to the age of Peter the Great.

The approach I take is comparative in that I compare various motifs and themes of Gogol's writings to some of the main motifs and themes characteristic of medieval Eastern Orthodox Slavic literature. I examine the medieval tradition from a cultural and historical perspective in which I also note Gogol's references to the medieval works and figures I discuss. Thus, I look at the parallels in themes and trends between Gogol's writings and those of the earlier tradition, as well as examine the world views of the authors and works of the respective periods. In particular, I focus on Gogol's

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<sup>7</sup>See Riccardo Picchio and Harvey Goldblatt, "Old Russian Literature," in *Handbook of Russian Literature*, edited by Victor Terras (New Haven, 1985), p. 321.

adaptation and assimilation of various models and patterns of the early Orthodox Slavic literary tradition.<sup>8</sup> While I show that specific thematic aspects of this tradition cited above had an influence on Gogol throughout his life, I also suggest that his final book, *Selected Passages*, represents a summation of Gogol's religious, ethical and aesthetic views, and may be viewed as the ultimate and most explicit testimony to his medieval world-view.

To date no comprehensive study of the influence of the medieval tradition on Gogol has been done. True, a few studies have been published suggesting Gogol's ties with medieval Russian literature. However, most of these have been attempts to show the connection between only one of Gogol's stories and one specific work or genre of early Russian literature. For example, in 1902, I. Mandelshtam advanced the theory that the famous Old East Slavic monument, *The Igor Tale* (*Slovo o polku Igoreve*) had an influence on Gogol's novella *Taras Bulba*. Specifically, Mandelshtam cited quotations from *Taras Bulba* which he held to be adaptations

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<sup>8</sup>It is beyond the scope of this study to examine in detail any stylistic similarities between Gogol's writings and the works of the medieval period. It should be noted, however, that the influence of medieval literature on Gogol's writings clearly implies that his work would also reveal stylistic similarities to the earlier monuments. Indeed, many of Gogol's main literary devices --- oxymoron, juxtaposition, exaggeration, etc. --- force the reader to confront what is real and what is apparently real. These tropes and devices are an integral part of both medieval and NeoPlatonic thought and writings.

and borrowings from the celebrated poem.<sup>9</sup> More recently, the Russian folklorist N. S. Demkova likened Gogol's *Vii* to the seventeenth-century *Tale of a Certain Poor Youth* (*Povest' o nekoem ubogom otrotse*).<sup>10</sup> The Dutch scholar, F. C. Driessen, suggested that Gogol modelled the hero of his short story, *The Overcoat*, Akaky Akakievich, on a sixth-century Orthodox saint, Acacius of Sinai.<sup>11</sup> The German scholar, K. D. Seeman, in his article, "Eine Heiligenlegende als Vorbild von Gogols *Mantel*," also pointed to the thematic and compositional parallels between Gogol's *The Overcoat* and the medieval genre of hagiography.<sup>12</sup> The British Slavist, Richard Peace, in his study of Gogol's literary output, also contends that Gogol's writings have connections to medieval Russian literature. According to Peace, although Gogol's attraction to history and to the history of the Middle Ages may be partly ascribed

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<sup>9</sup>I. Mandelshtam, *O kharaktere gogolevskogo stilja* (Gelsingsfors, 1902), esp. pp. 47 - 50.

<sup>10</sup>N. S. Demkova, "Iz istorii russkoi povesti XVII v. Ob odnoi drevnerusskoi paralleli k povesti N. V. Gogolia *Vii* (*Povest' o nekoem ubogom otrotse*)," *Trudy otdela drevnerusskoi literatury* Vol. 42 (1989), 401 - 07.

<sup>11</sup>F. C. Driessen, *Gogol as a Short-Story Writer. A Study of his Technique of Composition*, translated by Ian F. Finlay, (The Hague, 1965), p. 194. This theory was later taken up by John Schillinger. See his "Gogol's *Overcoat* as a Travesty of Hagiography," *Slavic and East European Journal* Vol. 16 (1972), 36 - 41. Although St. Acacius was not a part of the medieval Slavic tradition, his *Life* may have had an influence on later Slavic *Lives*. Nevertheless, the possibility that Gogol knew of St. Acacius suggests that he was also familiar with the pre-medieval tradition.

<sup>12</sup>K. D. Seeman, "Eine Heiligenlegende als Vorbild von Gogols *Mantel*," *Zeitschrift fur Slavische Philologie* Vol. 33 (1967), 7 - 21.

to romanticism, "his [Gogol's] affinity with the Middle Ages is deeper than this: there are certain features of his writings which are typical of an earlier Russian literary tradition."<sup>13</sup> Moreover, he says that in Gogol's art there is a tension between the old and the new: "the dispassionate eye of the medieval chronicler combines with the emotional, sensitive nature of modern man."<sup>14</sup> Finally, the most recent study of Gogol's writings in the context of the earlier literary tradition is Gavriel Shapiro's book, *Nikolai Gogol and the Baroque Cultural Heritage* (1994). Shapiro's study deals specifically with the connections between Gogol's writings and such so-called Baroque forms as the *lubok*, the *facetiae* and the *vertep*, as well as various Baroque *topoi* and the use of figurative language.

Although I propose to show that specific features characteristic of medieval Orthodox Slavic literature can be found in Gogol's thought and writings, it is important to bear in mind that many aspects of this tradition came from an even earlier Christian tradition. Clearly, medieval Slavic literature in its turn was influenced by both biblical and patristic texts. Thus, similarities to the Bible or to the writings of the early Fathers of the Church in Gogol's work

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<sup>13</sup>Peace, *The Enigma of Gogol*, p. 10. For example, Peace sees the description of the towns and country fairs in Gogol's early stories as medieval.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, p. 10.

may be due either to the direct influence of these writings on Gogol, or to the Slavic literary works which themselves were influenced by the Christian texts. In certain cases it is unclear if one or the other or even both sources were influential. But I hope to show that the pre-Petrine, especially the Muscovite ethos *per se*, was the dominant influence on Gogol's life and work.

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter one deals with romanticism and Gogol's place within the Russian romantic movement. The aim of chapter two is to outline some of the main features of the pre-Petrine literary and cultural tradition and to note Gogol's familiarity with the writers and works of the period. In chapter three, I discuss Gogol's religiosity. Just as religious and ethical values were important for the medieval man, so, too, were they for Gogol. My focus, however, is on Gogol's supposed religious crisis. While the general consensus today is that Gogol did not suffer from a specific religious crisis and that he did not therefore undergo a marked transformation in his religious world-view, few critics have explained fully why the old theory of a crisis has been abandoned. Accordingly, I present some of the main views on the "crisis" as well as my own. In chapter four I examine Gogol's major creative works in light of the medieval trends discussed in chapter two. Chapter five deals specifically



with *Selected Passages*, which I suggest may be viewed as the ultimate testimony to Gogol's medieval world-view. In this chapter I also attempt to determine the ultimate source of Gogol's religious and moral views as reflected in his writings.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **GOGOL AND ROMANTICISM: THE OBSESSION WITH THE PAST**

This chapter outlines the main themes of romanticism and the major concerns of the romantic writers in both Western Europe and in Russia as a preliminary step to establishing Gogol's place within the romantic movement. Gogol wrote his entire literary corpus during the period of Russian romanticism and clearly shared much with both the early and late romantics in theme, style and outlook. In spite of this, he should not be regarded solely or even primarily as a romantic writer. Rather, Gogol's interest in and attraction to romanticism were based mainly on those aspects of the movement which particularly appealed to his medieval world-view.

Romanticism was a diverse movement which spanned much of the first half of the nineteenth century. It arose primarily in direct reaction to and rejection of neo-classicism and the Enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> Initially Russian

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<sup>1</sup>Although Dmitrii Chyzhevskii argues that this was more the case in Western Europe than in Russia, where "orthodox classicism was represented rather weakly," the Russian romantics still held contempt for the rationalism of the (neo)classicists (and in any case, were very much

romanticism was a very derivative and imitative movement. At the turn of the nineteenth century, V. A. Zhukovsky and K. N. Batiushkov, among others, initiated the first phase of Russian literary romanticism by translating and adapting the writings of such European romantics as Goethe, Schiller, Byron and Scott. Not until the 1820s did an original "local" blend emerge and literary romanticism in Russia become the dominant mode. This was marked by an all-out revolt against the neoclassical principles and the appearance of A. S. Pushkin's "Byronic" verse tales. Until the end of that decade, poetry was the dominant genre. It was superceded by prose in the 1830s and scores of historical novels and prose tales under the influence of Scott and Byron flooded the literary scene.<sup>2</sup>

The Russian romantics were aware of developments in the West European romantic movement and were indebted to their European counterparts. However, in order to create an original national literature, in time the Russians began to try to free themselves from foreign influence. Nevertheless, the romantics in both Western Europe and Russia continued to

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influenced by the Western romantics who rejected the Enlightenment.) See Chyzhevskii's views in his *History of Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature Volume I: The Romantic Period*, ed. Serge A. Zenkovsky, translated by Richard Noel Porter, (Nashville, 1974), esp. pp. xi - xiii.

<sup>2</sup>The literature on Russian romanticism is immense. For a succinct account of the movement, see Lauren G. Leighton, "Romanticism," in *Handbook of Russian Literature*, ed. Victor Terras (New Haven, 1985), pp. 372 - 76.

share a number of concerns and experiences. Both groups were preoccupied with the supernatural, folklore, the real versus the unreal, dreams, individualism, love and passion, exotic landscapes, Christianity, the development of the literary language, the role of literature and of the artist, history and historiography, the demand for national originality and the Middle Ages, among other concerns.<sup>3</sup>

A few preliminary examples will illustrate that all of these themes are present in Gogol's writings.<sup>4</sup> To begin, there is an abiding concern in Gogol for the supernatural. This fascination is, for example, central to his *Dikanka* stories in which wizards and devils abound. In *The Lost Letter*, for instance, the devil is represented as a thief and a card game is played with devils. In *Christmas Eve*, the devil steals the moon and witches ride on brooms. Aspects of folklore are also evident in Gogol's "Ukrainian" stories. For example, the folk (and pagan) belief in water-nymphs (*rusalki*) is the subject matter of *A May Night, or the Drowned Maiden*. *Vii* is also reminiscent of a folktale, although it is debatable whether Gogol's gnome in the story

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<sup>3</sup>Of course, several of these themes or concerns took on their own local (i.e. national) colouration. Other preoccupations of the romantics included a fascination with premonitions, insanity, the grotesque and the spoiled *enfant du siècle*.

<sup>4</sup>A further discussion of several of these themes in relation to Gogol's work will be dealt with in chapters four and five of this thesis.

came from the folk tradition as he claimed.<sup>5</sup> These are but a few examples of many which could be adduced.

The romantics' revolt against the rationalism of the eighteenth-century was translated into a non-rationalistic approach to the arts. In literature, rules were more or less abandoned, which permitted freedom of style, composition and language. The author's creativity was of utmost importance and intuition and imagination dominated over reason and logic.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, as the romantics believed foremost that the world, history and man were mysterious, many romantic writers became fascinated with the unconscious areas of the mind, the world of dreams and the notion of

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<sup>5</sup>On this point, see, *inter alia*, Mark Altshuller, "The Walter Scott Motifs in Nikolay Gogol's Story *The Lost Letter*," *Oxford Slavonic Papers* Vol. 22 (1989), 83, who minimizes folkloric elements in most of Gogol's Ukrainian stories; Victor Erlich, *Gogol* (New Haven, 1969), p. 68; Simon Karlinsky, *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 97 - 103. While discounting the existence of gnomes in Ukrainian folklore, Karlinsky points to similar motifs in Russian, Siberian and American myths. For an opposing view, see V. V. Ivanov, "Kategoriia vidimogo i nevidimogo v tekste: esche raz o vostochnoslavianskikh fol'klornykh paralleliakh k gogolevskomu *Viiu*" in *Structure of Texts and Semiotics of Culture*, ed. Jan van der Eng, (The Hague, 1973), pp. 151 - 76.

<sup>6</sup>As Professor Richard Marshall has rightly pointed out to me, Russian medieval culture, as it grew into its Byzantine heritage, manifested the post-iconoclastic anti-intellectualism which had characterized late Byzantine culture, the same which was brought to Rus' in the tenth century and after. So Rus'ian culture (as influenced by late Byzantine culture), Muscovite culture, romanticism and Gogol all shared this preference for feeling and intuition over logic and reason, in general, and, specifically *à propos* the nature and function of art and the artist.

other worlds.<sup>7</sup>

The real versus the unreal and the world of dreams are part of *The Portrait*, *Nevsky Prospect* and *The Diary of A Madman*. All of the main characters in these stories, (Chertkov, Piskarev and Poprishchin), have trouble distinguishing between reality and fantasy. Chertkov does not know whether the portrait is really staring at him or if it is part of his imagination. Piskarev questions the meaning of life because of his conflict between dreams and reality. He realizes that his dream to save the prostitute was more pure and good than the reality of being rejected by her. Poprishchin goes insane when he discovers that his dream to have his boss's daughter will not be realized.

Another common denominator of the romantics was an emphasis on individualism. Whereas the rationalists stressed the equality of man, the romantics were preoccupied with the unique qualities of individuals. They aimed to explore the depths of the individual soul and psyche and were fascinated with the destiny of the individual. Therefore, several romantic heroes were depicted as unique individuals --- as outsiders, rebels and star-crossed men and women. Gogol's *Taras Bulba* exemplifies a romantic hero,

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<sup>7</sup>cf. also Chyzhevskii, *History of Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature*, p. xv.

a rebel and an outsider, fighting for a noble cause. In *Taras Bulba* we also find the romantic traits of passion and love. Taras's son, Andrii, betrays his countrymen and meets his death because of his intense feelings for a Polish girl.

The beauty of nature was particularly important to the romantics for they felt that it left an "imprint on the soul."<sup>8</sup> Gogol's descriptions of nature and landscape likewise occupy an important part of his creative work. For example, he describes the Ukrainian countryside in his early stories in the mellifluous and emotional language typical of the romantics. In *A May Night, or The Drowned Maiden*, for instance, the onset of night is lyrically described as follows:

И вечер, вечно задумавшийся,  
мечтательно обнимал синее небо,  
превращая все в неопределенность и  
даль. Уже и сумерки; а песни все не  
утихали. (I, 153)<sup>9</sup>

And the eternally pensive evening  
dreamily embraced the dark blue sky,  
transforming everything into vagueness  
and distance. It was already twilight  
but the singing did not subside.

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<sup>8</sup>H. G. Schenk, *The Mind of the European Romantics. An Essay in Cultural History* (London, 1966), p. 164.

<sup>9</sup>It is worth noting that Gogol uses a similar style to describe the Russian countryside in *Dead Souls*. All citations of Gogol's work are from his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, (Volumes 1 - 14), (Akademiia nauk: 1938 - 52.) After each citation, Roman numerals indicate the volume number and Arabic numerals indicate the page number. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own.

While Christian beliefs during the Age of Reason were at a low, the early nineteenth century ushered in a revival of interest in Christianity. Man sought a reason for his existence and the romantics began to look for it in religious belief, often in the Christian faith.<sup>10</sup> The beauty of Christianity and the significance of man's life with Christ are expounded throughout Gogol's writings, but nowhere more forcefully than in his essay "Life" in *Arabesques* and in his final book, *Selected Passages*. As he writes in "Life," all the great civilizations of the world came to a standstill with the birth of Christ. (VIII, 84)

Gogol also shared the romantics' interest in the development of a national literary language. Although he did not write any truly theoretical works on the subject, the importance and supremacy of the Russian language are dealt with in such essays as "Subjects for the Lyrical Poet of Our Time" and "On the Lyricism of Our Poets" in *Selected Passages*. The role of the artist was also of central importance to the romantics. Unlike their classical predecessors, the romantic writers believed in the primacy of feeling over intellect. At the same time, however, the romantics did not wish to imply that writers were mere entertainers. As in ancient times, they felt their vocation

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<sup>10</sup>For an elaboration, see Schenk, *European Romantics*, pp. 76 - 81.



to be a "lofty calling."<sup>11</sup> Gogol was always preoccupied with the work of the poet and the writer, as evidenced throughout his correspondence, as well as in his "manifestos" on the subject: "A Question of Words" and "On the Essence of Russian Poetry and On Its Originality," both contained in *Selected Passages*.

Because Gogol clearly shared many of the romantic beliefs and concerns cited above, at this point one may argue that he should be considered a romantic writer. In addition, there is one other aspect of romanticism that Gogol fully endorsed. It was the romantics' attraction to the past. Indeed, as several literary critics have rightly pointed out, an attraction to the past was one of the most characteristic features of romanticism.<sup>12</sup> However, while many romantic writers were fascinated with the past, Gogol's attraction to the past was greater than that of most of his contemporaries. He was almost obsessed with the past. Before turning to Gogol's interest in (or even obsession with) his country's heritage, however, it is first worthwhile examining why the romantics found the past so fascinating and inspirational.

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<sup>11</sup>Howard E. Hugo, *The Romantic Reader* (New York, 1957), p. 21.

<sup>12</sup>See, for example, Schenk, *European Romantics*, p. 33; Hugo, *Romantic Reader*, p. 12.

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One of the main reasons the romantics turned to the past for inspiration was because of their concern for national identity and national originality.<sup>13</sup> In Russia this was stimulated by the influx of romantic literature from the West, ranging from the teachings of Madame de Staël to the Schlegels, among others. From the works of these writers, the Russians learned about national originality. Gradually they assimilated and modified the writings of their West European counterparts to suit their own national values. The most influential of the West European romantic writers to reach the Russians was the Scottish novelist, Sir Walter Scott, who became extremely popular for his historical novels, several of which were translated into both French and Russian. Scott was especially admired for his depiction of history, free of classical constraints. His mixture of romantic and medieval themes gained him enormous popularity amongst a generation of Russians who wished to rediscover their cultural heritage.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Similar factors stimulated both the West European and the Russian romantics to turn to their national pasts. Any real differences may generally be seen as one of degree rather than of kind. In line with the scope of this study, I examine why the Russian romantics in particular became attracted to their national past.

<sup>14</sup>Peter K. Christoff, *The Third Heart. Some Intellectual - Ideological Currents and Cross Currents in Russia, 1800 - 1830* (The Hague, 1970), pp. 60 - 62.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, both the West Europeans and the Russians wished to assert their own independent national feelings in a rising general tide of nationalism.<sup>15</sup> They felt that the cultural and literary heritage of their national pasts could help them attain this goal. But unlike the West Europeans, the Russians did not have a literary tradition of national concern. Thus, their concern for national distinctiveness was accompanied by the desire to create an original national literature. So, while national distinctiveness was an important concern for all the romantics, its manifestation in literature became far more central for the Russians than for the West Europeans. By the 1820s, the concern for national originality, (or *narodnost'*<sup>16</sup>), had become the quintessential concern of the

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<sup>15</sup>D. S. Likhachev has pointed out that this was not the first time that Russians turned to their national past for inspiration. He argues that when Muscovite Russia was ascending to power in the fourteenth century, the struggle for national liberation brought about a revival of interest in Kievan heritage. See his "Further Remarks on the Problem of Old Russian Culture," *Slavic Review* (March, 1963), 115 - 20.

<sup>16</sup>*Narodnost'* became part of the Russian vocabulary in 1819. The writer-poet, translator and archivist, Prince Petr Andreevich Viazemsky first used the term to imply "the embodiment of the national spirit of Russia [...] the saturation of literary works with local [national] features and colour." Cited in Christoff, *The Third Heart*, p. 23. Viazemsky derived the term from the Polish *narodowość*, though he developed his concept based on the teachings of Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*. Ibid. The term also has the meaning of "national consciousness." See Hans Rogger, *National Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p. 3.

Russian romantics.<sup>17</sup>

Over time the Russian romantic writers became obsessed with *narodnost'*. At first it was sought in folklore, poetry and history, but soon this quest was extended to all areas of life: music, art, religion and philosophy. The common goal of the early Russian romantics became the search for whatever was uniquely Russian. They concentrated on chronicles, folk songs and legends, considered by the romantics to be the best sources of information about the past.<sup>18</sup> In this, the Russians were in part inspired by German philosophies of history which prompted them to look for what was unique in their history. In part, the Russians were enthusiastic in their search because they believed that Russia herself was unique. She was unlike any other nation because she was "Holy Russia".<sup>19</sup>

Another important factor that contributed to Russians' interest in their national past was the growing interest in Russian history which somewhat predated the age of

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<sup>17</sup>Leighton, "Romanticism," p. 373.

<sup>18</sup>Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *An Obsession With History. Russian Writers Confront the Past* (Stanford, 1994), esp. pp. 1 - 6.

<sup>19</sup>On Russians' belief in Russia's uniqueness, see Wachtel, *An Obsession With History*, pp.1 - 6; Michael Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel* (Princeton, 1977), p. 9.

romanticism.<sup>20</sup> As early as the eighteenth century, (especially after Peter the Great's death), Russians had a desire to learn more about their history, which they felt was not on a par with that of many nations in the West.<sup>21</sup> The most notable Russian historian who attempted to respond to these rising concerns was Nikolai Karamzin. He produced a twelve-volume *History of the Russian State* (*Istoriia gosudarstva Rossiiskogo*). (The first eight volumes came out in 1816, the ninth in 1821, the tenth and eleventh in 1824 and the last volume, which was incomplete at the time of Karamzin's death, in 1826.) For many Russians, Karamzin's work helped to substantiate the belief that Russia really did have a glorious past of which they could be proud. Karamzin made reference to numerous early manuscripts and chronicles rarely studied before. At the time of its publication it was certainly successful in awakening an interest in the past.<sup>22</sup>

The spirit of patriotism that prevailed in early nineteenth-century Russia as a result of the Napoleonic war and its aftermath further disposed Russians to reflect on

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<sup>20</sup>See also Margaret Ziolkowski, *Hagiography and Modern Russian Literature* (Princeton, 1988), p. 8.

<sup>21</sup>This may have been due in part to the fact that the Western nations shared a Roman Catholic Middle Ages or Renaissance which Russia did not. See Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel*, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup>On the reception of Karamzin's *History* in Russia, see Anatole G. Mazour, *Modern Russian Historiography*

their historical past. The hostilities between France and Russia promoted a sense of Russian nationalism which found ready expression in literature.<sup>23</sup> Many writers (e.g., Katenin, Küchelbecker, Odoevskii, Ryleev) considered history to be the ultimate source of Russian patriotism and found the chronicles to be an excellent source for revealing their history.<sup>24</sup>

Eventually, Russia's victory over France was considered by many conservative nationalists to be providential, as one of the most significant moments in Russian history, and as a true reflection of Russia's greatness. This further contributed to the spirit of nationalism prevalent among the Russian romantics.<sup>25</sup>

A group of Russian intellectuals known as the Slavophiles also took a keen interest in the past. A

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(Princeton, 1958), pp. 68 - 70.

<sup>23</sup>Even before the French invasion, a plethora of highly patriotic works devoted to Russia's "glorious" past was produced. S. N. Glinka's founding of the journal *The Russian Herald* (*Russkii vestnik*) in 1808 was especially significant in fostering a spirit of nationalism. For further examples and an elaboration on this point see Edward C. Thaden, "The Beginnings of Romantic Nationalism in Russia," *Slavic Review* Vols. 13 - 14 (1954 - 55), 513 - 14; Ziolkowski, *Hagiography and Modern Russian Literature*, pp. 7 - 8.

<sup>24</sup>Thaden, "The Beginnings of Romantic Nationalism," 513 - 514.

<sup>25</sup>Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles. A Study of Romantic*

distinct Slavophile ideology arose in the late 1830s based on discussions between Ivan and Petr Kireevskii and Aleksei Khomiakov. These men were initially stimulated by the writings of the eminent philosopher, Petr Chaadaev, who believed that societal and social problems would eventually be solved by Russia.<sup>26</sup> Finding their inspiration in the Russian Orthodox Church and in Russia's past, the group aspired to create a Russian national state that would promote and embody the traditional values of Holy Russia.<sup>27</sup> Advocating communality and brotherly love, they believed that only Russia was holy and truly Christian. For the Slavophiles, Russia's religious past was the path to the future.

In their search for national self-awareness, the Slavophiles collected and edited folk songs and the works of the reformers of the Russian Orthodox church. They also wrote treatises and books about Russian Orthodoxy, Russian history, and the Russian peasantry, which they venerated. The contribution made by the Slavophiles towards the

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*Ideology* (Gloucester, Mass., 1965), p. 3.

<sup>26</sup>For the Slavophiles' influence on Russian society, see Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West*, pp. 187 - 213.

<sup>27</sup>The importance of the Church and a return to a religious view of the world (after the anti-ecclesiasticism which had characterized the Petrine era) began even in the eighteenth century and increased in intensity under the reign of Alexander I. See V. V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy. Volume I*, translated by George L. Kline,

development of nationalistic thought in nineteenth-century Russia cannot be overstated.

Thus, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, with the rise of the Russian romantic movement, a number of factors stimulated an interest in the past: the influence of Western romantic literature, an overwhelming concern for *narodnost'*, a growing demand for a knowledge of Russia's history, a prevailing spirit of patriotism and the rise of the Russian Slavophiles.

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Nikolai Gogol, like his contemporaries and predecessors, was also inspired by the cultural and literary heritage of Russia's past. Indeed, according to one Gogol specialist, "Gogol's past --- that of his country and that of his family --- and the early period of his own personal history, were exceptionally important in the making of Gogol the man and the artist."<sup>28</sup> In his *An Author's Confession*, Gogol testifies to his admiration for the past and the inspiration it can provide:

Взять событие из минувшего и обратить  
его к настоящему --- какая умная и  
богатая мысль! [...] старина даст тебе

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(New York, 1953), pp. 171 - 72.

<sup>28</sup>Leon Stilman, *Gogol*, ed. Galina Stilman, (New York, 1990), p. 33.



краски и уже одной собой вдохновит  
тебя! Она так живьем и шевелится в  
наших летописях. (VIII, 278 - 79)

To take an event of the past and to  
change it to the present --- what a  
clever and rich idea! [...] The past  
will give you its colours and of itself  
will inspire you! It is so alive and  
stirring in our chronicles.<sup>29</sup>

Although one must be cautious in taking everything Gogol wrote at face value,<sup>30</sup> on balance, as we shall see, there is far more evidence of his interest in the past than there is any disclaimer of such interest.

The question which naturally arises when dealing with Gogol and his attraction to the past is: to which past in particular was Gogol attracted? Gogol (Hohol) was born a Ukrainian and as a child spoke Ukrainian at home. Once he finished his schooling at Nezhin, with the exception of a few short visits home to his mother, he spent the rest of his life between St. Petersburg, Moscow and Western Europe. All of his creative literary output and almost all of his correspondence, including the letters to his mother, were written in Russian, though he made occasional use of Ukrainianisms. The majority of scholars have, therefore,

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<sup>29</sup>This quote is from Gogol's *Selected Passages*, (Pss VIII), which has been translated into English by Jesse Zeldin (1969). I have cross-referenced my translations with Zeldin's and made changes where necessary.

<sup>30</sup>Gogol himself said he did not know how to talk about himself frankly. See Pss XII, 394.

rightly labelled Gogol a Russian writer. It was not unusual for Russian romantic writers to be attracted to what they saw as the exotic life of Ukraine and the Caucasus. For Gogol, however, as a denationalized Ukrainian, he felt it was "a sense of national consciousness [...] to draw his readers' attention to the Ukrainian people and to its history."<sup>31</sup> (This is particularly evident in his early cycle of stories, *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* as well as in his articles in *Arabesques*.) Thus, similar to --- and even moreso than --- the other Russian romantic writers, Gogol was attracted not only to the heritage of the East Slavs in general, but also to the customs and beliefs of the Ukrainians in particular.

Why, then, was Gogol, a native born Ukrainian, so much a Russian? One possible answer is that Ukrainian writers were aware that if they were to be widely known they could not write in what was still commonly perceived as a "Little Russian dialect." In many ways, Ukraine was seen as less developed, more provincial than Russia. If a Ukrainian wished to compete with any of the great Russian writers, he, too, would have to write in Russian. Gogol was well aware of this. He was so determined to succeed as a writer that he left for St. Petersburg to test his talent.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Chyzhevskii, *History of Ukrainian Literature*, p. 449.

<sup>32</sup>For an elaboration on these points, see George Luckyj, *Between Gogol and Shevchenko: Polarity in the*

Nevertheless, he would never forget his Ukrainian ancestry. Gogol always believed that he was of noble background and that his paternal grandfather was a colonel. According to George Luckyj, "this belief reinforced Gogol's deep attachment to his land to which he was linked, so he thought, by the ties of historical distinction. [...] Still, his passion to become a writer which drove him away from home (often) made him quite oblivious of his attachment to Ukraine."<sup>33</sup>

Whether or not one chooses to classify Gogol as primarily a romantic writer, he, together with the acknowledged Russian romantic writers, was very much influenced by the concerns of the day. The main concern of the Russian romantics, *narodnost'*, was also of interest to Gogol. In an article in *Arabesques* entitled, "On the Songs of Little Russia," which has been called his "panegyric to *narodnost'* in general and to the genius of the Ukrainian people in particular,"<sup>34</sup> Gogol praises the folksong:

Это народная история, живая, яркая,  
исполненная красок, истины, обнажающая  
всю жизнь народа [...] Они ---  
надгробный памятник былого, более

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*Literary Ukraine: 1798 - 1847* (Munich, 1971), pp. 88 - 99. Luckyj also suggests that Gogol's benefactor, the former Minister of Justice, Dmitrii Troshchinskii, also influenced Gogol's Russophile inclinations (p.99).

<sup>33</sup>Ibid, p. 99.

<sup>34</sup>Victor Terras, *Belinskij and Russian Literary Criticism. The Heritage of Organic Aesthetics* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1974), p. 26.

нежели надгробный памятник: камень с красноречивым рельефом, с исторической надписью --- ничто против этой живой, говорящей, звучащей о прошедшем летописи. (VIII, 90 - 91)

They [folk songs] express the lively, bright, colourful, truthful history of the nation. They reveal the whole life of the people [...] They are the monument of the past; nay, they are more than a monument: they are like a stone with an expressive design. A historical inscription is nothing next to this living, speaking, resounding chronicle of the past.

Gogol does warn the historian not to search in folk songs for accurate data from the past. However, he asserts that if one wishes to learn about the true lifestyle of the people, with all its nuances of feelings and sufferings, folk songs will provide the answer, for in folk songs, the spirit of a passed age is laid bare in all its grandeur. (VIII, 90 - 91) Although here Gogol is specifically referring to the songs of Little Russia, he sees these monuments as a part of the heritage of the Russian lands in general: Кто не проникнул в них глубоко, тот ничего не узнает о протекшем быте *этой цветущей части России*. (VIII, 90) (Anyone who has not delved deeply into them (folksongs) can know nothing about *this flowering part of Russia*. (italics mine).) Moreover, in a letter dated March 6, 1834 to the editor of Ukrainian folklore materials, Izmail Sreznevskii, Gogol claims he could not have written about history had his country not had such a rich collection of folksongs. (X, 299) Gogol truly believed that through

folksongs, one could learn the spirit of a nation and its people.

Gogol is also known to have shared his contemporaries' interest in the works of the West European writers. In his *Peterburg Notes of 1836* (published in 1837), he praised Schiller and Lessing. In Rome, in 1840, he was engrossed with Dickens and Georges Sand. And in 1842, he spent a great deal of time reading Scott.<sup>35</sup>

While many of these writers likely had an influence on Gogol's writings, it is evident that Sir Walter Scott's historical novels were especially influential on Gogol. For example, parallels can be drawn between Scott's novels and Gogol's novella, *Taras Bulba*. Both the battle scenes and the depiction of the Zaporozhian Cossacks in *Taras Bulba* are believed to have been influenced by Scott.<sup>36</sup> A convincing argument has also been put forth showing corresponding motifs in Gogol's *The Lost Letter* and parts of Scott's *The Red Gauntlet*.<sup>37</sup> Gogol's admiration for Scott is also evident in his essay in *Arabesques* entitled "On Present-day Architecture." He praises Scott for revealing the true

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<sup>35</sup>A. N. Veselovskii, *Zapadnoe vliianie v novoi russkoi literature* (Moscow, 1896), pp. 214 - 15.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid, p. 214.

<sup>37</sup>See Altshuller, "The Walter Scott Motifs," pp. 83 - 89.

beauty of Gothic architecture and credits him for spreading the taste for the Gothic. Like Scott, Gogol extolled Gothic architecture whose beauty he felt had yet to be repeated and surpassed. (VIII, 66 - 67) Thus, there is little doubt that Scott played more than a marginal role in influencing at least part of Gogol's thought and writings.

Gogol also shared the romantics' preoccupation with history. He endorsed Karamzin's *History* and even devoted a chapter of his *Selected Passages* to the writer-historian. His admiration for Karamzin and his work is evident in the following excerpt:

Никто, кроме Карамзина, не говорил так смело и благородно, не скрывая никаких своих мнений и мыслей, хотя они и не соответствовали во всем тогдашнему правительству, и слышишь невольно, что он один имел на то право. Какой урок нашему брату писателю! (VIII, 266 - 67)

No one but Karamzin has spoken so boldly and nobly, without hiding any of his opinions and thoughts, even though they have not corresponded at all to the official policy of the day, and you cannot help feeling that he alone had that right. What a lesson for our fellow writers!

Apart from this, we can glean from Gogol's correspondence that he was interested in history. He wrote that nothing calms a person as much as history (X, 284), and he often turned to his mother for historical information and

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material on early Ukrainian customs. The history Gogol was interested in, however, was not always the specific historical details (as he proved in his *Taras Bulba*); rather, it was the colourful stories that could be extrapolated from the facts.<sup>38</sup> The frequent requests Gogol made to his mother support this. On February 2, 1830, he wrote:

[...]вы не сердитесь, моя великодушная маминька, если я вас часто беспокою просьбою доставлять мне сведения о Малороссии, или что-либо подобное. Это составляет мой хлеб. Я и теперь попрошу вас собрать несколько таковых сведений, если, где-либо услышите забавный анекдот между мужиками в нашем селе, или в другом каком, или между помещиками. Сделайте милость, вписуйте для меня также нравы, обычаи, поверья. (X, 166)<sup>39</sup>

[...] don't be angry, my magnanimous Mama, if I often bother you with requests to obtain for me information on Little Russia, or something similar. This is how I earn my bread. I now ask you to collect some of this information, if you hear a funny anecdote among the muzhiks in our village or any other place, or among the landowners. And be so kind and also write down for me any mores, customs and popular beliefs.

After 1830 Gogol devoted considerable time to studying both history and geography which he felt were interconnected. He intended to produce a multi-volume work on world history and geography, but was perhaps a little too

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<sup>38</sup>cf. Vsevolod Setchkarev, *Gogol* (New York, 1965), pp. 30 - 31.

<sup>39</sup>Similar requests were made on April 23, 1825, April 30, 1829, May 22, 1829, and September 19, 1831. See,

ambitious. A posting as an adjunct professor of history of the Middle Ages in 1834 at St. Petersburg University proved disastrous.<sup>40</sup> Although Gogol never completed his research project, some of the sources he used in his study such as Bantys-Kamenskii's *History of Little Russia (Istoriia maloi Rossii)*, Ukrainian folksongs, folk epics (*byliny*) and the old chronicles, served as sources for his novella *Taras Bulba*.

Gogol also published a series of essays on history and geography in 1835 (under the collective title *Arabesques*) which provide a clue to his understanding of these fields. History, he says in his "On the Middle Ages" is connected to everything and has to be studied from its very beginnings. Gogol firmly believed that a knowledge of the past was a necessary component for knowing how to live in the present.<sup>41</sup> In other words, as Robert A. Maguire points out, "[For Gogol] history was not so much to explain the present as to teach people to look through the glittering surfaces of the present to the leading idea that lay beneath."<sup>42</sup> For Gogol, everything could be learned from the past; he was

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respectively, *Pss* X, 53, 141, 144, 209.

<sup>40</sup>On Gogol's teaching experience at St. Petersburg University, see V. Veresaev, *Gogol' v zhizni* (Moscow, 1933; Reprint: Ann Arbor, 1993), pp. 134 - 42.

<sup>41</sup>Robert A. Maguire, *Exploring Gogol* (Stanford, 1994), p. 269.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid*, p. 270.



obsessed with the past.

Gogol's close relationship with the Slavophiles, who were known for idealizing the Middle Ages, was also instrumental in shaping his views of the past. Gogol first became acquainted with the prominent Slavophiles, Sergei and Konstantin Aksakov, in 1832 through the historian Mikhail Pogodin. The Aksakovs took an instant liking to Gogol and frequently invited him to read his work. Through the Aksakovs, Gogol met such well-known Slavophiles as the Khomiakovs, the Kireevskiis, and later, Iurii Samarin. The Aksakovs, in particular, considered Gogol to be a creative genius, and, when the need arose, defended him, even ranking him above Pushkin as a writer.<sup>43</sup> As Peter Christoff put it, "the Aksakovs made Gogol their personal and family idol."<sup>44</sup> However, the relationship between the Aksakovs and Gogol was marred in the late 1840s by the publication of Gogol's *Selected Passages*. Sergei Aksakov considered the book harmful and "filled with satanic pride, not Christian humility."<sup>45</sup> His son, Konstantin, said that the book was "a lie [...] in the sense of its insincerity" (это ложь [...])

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<sup>43</sup>See Peter K. Christoff, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Russian Slavophilism: A Study in Ideas, Volume III* (Princeton, 1982), esp. pp. 69 - 75; 120 - 27.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid, p. 123.

в смысле неискренности).<sup>46</sup> Yet in spite of the Aksakovs' attacks against Gogol, Gogol's friendship with the Aksakov family lasted until his death.

Although Gogol was no doubt inspired to a certain degree by the Slavophiles' views, one should be cautious in labeling him an "orthodox" Slavophile. For the one thing, Gogol defended both serfdom and the autocracy, neither of which were fully endorsed by the Slavophiles.<sup>47</sup> He also firmly believed in what he wrote about on the role of peasants, the clergy, and the Russian landowner in *Selected Passages*, and it was these sentiments that were called insincere by the Slavophiles. Nevertheless, there was still a close relationship between Gogol and the Slavophiles. He spent a great deal of his time in the company of these men. He took part in their salon discussions and frequent dinner debates. Their thoughts, philosophies and writings were well known to him. The Slavophiles' idealization of medieval Russian culture and the significance they placed on Russian Orthodoxy, among other things, no doubt left an impression on Gogol and therefore played a role in shaping his thoughts and writings.

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid, p. 124; cf. S. T. Aksakov, *Istoriia moego znakovstva s Gogolem* (Moscow, 1960), pp. 188 - 89.

<sup>47</sup>Jesse Zeldin, *Gogol's Quest For Beauty. An Exploration Into His Works* (Lawrence, 1978), p. 183.

All of these concerns of the romantics which dealt with the past were particularly appealing to Gogol for they "connected" with his medieval world-view. As mentioned, Gogol may be considered a romantic writer in the sense that he shared many of the romantics' beliefs and concerns. However, it was his medieval mind that drew him towards romanticism because of romanticism's own interest in things medieval. This will become even more evident as we examine Gogol's writings in greater detail.

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The foregoing has established that Gogol was indeed attracted to Russia's literary and cultural heritage. However, before we can examine the nature and extent to which the medieval tradition played a role in Gogol's writings and on his thought, first we must examine some of the main features and currents of the works of the medieval period and identify some of the main characteristics of the pre-Petrine world-view. This will be the focus of the following chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PRE-PETRINE LITERARY AND CULTURAL TRADITION

Whether one accepts or rejects the idea of a collective mind, certain commonly accepted views and attitudes do exist in a given society, permitting us to give at least a general picture of its mindset. The task of describing the world view of the medieval man, of course, is more challenging than capturing the *Weltanschauung* of modern man. One must rely almost entirely on written sources concerning that society's history, religion and literature, among other things, in order to form any hypotheses. Furthermore, the available sources are often of uncertain value and we must conjure with possible influences from other societies, later political opinion or alterations by scribes of another era. With these caveats, we must attempt to outline the salient features of the pre-Petrine Russian outlook.

The following emerge as some of the dominant characteristics of the pre-Petrine literary and cultural tradition: the notion of the writer's vocation as divinely inspired, the importance of the monastic vocation, the preoccupation with eschatological concerns, the particular

aesthetic values, an abiding concern for the presence of the demonic in the world, and the ethical matrix of the culture.

## **2.1 The Function of the Writer and his Place in Society**

Sometime shortly after Rus's official conversion to Christianity (*circa* 988) came the birth of Old East Slavic literature.<sup>1</sup> Initially the bulk of the early literature consisted of translations from Greek which had come to Rus' by way of the South Slavic lands. The earliest translations were those designed to meet the religious and spiritual needs of the newly-converted Eastern Slavs. Written material was needed for catechetical instruction, liturgy or worship, and, moral edification. After the liturgy proper, the Scriptures and Greek patristic works, particularly of the fourth and fifth centuries, were the most widely translated. Of the Church Fathers, the writings of St. John Chrysostom, Gregory Nazianzus and Ephrem the Syrian were immensely popular for their spiritual and practical guidance. Saint's Lives in various collections (the *Prolog*, the *patericons* and the *Cheti Minei*) and apocrypha were also

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<sup>1</sup>It is believed by many, however, that a certain level of literacy did exist prior to the advent of Christianity. cf. *Nachalo russkoi literatury. XI - nachalo XII veka. Pamiatniki literatury drevnei Rusi*, ed. D. S. Likhachev, (Moscow, 1978), pp. 46 - 67.

part of the corpus of early translated literature. By the thirteenth century, the chronicles of John Malalas and George Hamartolos, together with Flavius Josephus' *History of the Jewish War* (*Povest' o razorenii Ierusalima*) and the epic poem *Digenis Akritas* (*Devgenievo deianie*), as well as other secular works, were also known to the East Slavs in translation.<sup>2</sup>

Because of the growing Byzantino-East Slavic cultural affinity in the early Middle Ages, scholars have spoken of a "transplantation" of Byzantine culture onto the East Slavs (albeit, via the South Slavic lands.)<sup>3</sup> Over time the

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<sup>2</sup>Of the histories of Early Rus'ian Literature available, *A History of Russian Literature 11<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, (Moscow, 1989), edited by D. S. Likhachev and translated into English by K. M. Cook-Horujy, is, in my opinion, the best. Likhachev's "Introduction" (pp. 9 - 42) provides an excellent and succinct overview of the pre-Petrine literary tradition. cf. Riccardo Picchio and Harvey Goldblatt, "Old Russian Literature," pp. 316 - 22.

<sup>3</sup>On the notion of "transplantation," see D. S. Likhachev, *Razvitie russkoi literatury X - XVII vekov. Epokhi i stili* (Leningrad, 1973), pp. 22 - 44; also his "The Type and Character of the Byzantine Influence on Old Russian Literature," *Oxford Slavonic Papers* Vol. 13 (1967), 14 - 32; Henrik Birnbaum, "The Balkan Slavic Component of Medieval Russian Culture," in *Medieval Russian Culture. California Slavic Studies XII*, eds. Henrik Birnbaum and Michael S. Flier, (Los Angeles, 1984), pp. 3 - 30. As Birnbaum points out, the Byzantino-Bulgarian impact varied in different areas of Kievan Rus'. Kiev and the South were more affected than the North because of the role of Kiev as capital and its geographic proximity to Bulgaria and Byzantium (pp. 11 - 12). In spite of the general acceptance of Likhachev's notion of transplantation, it is important to remember that Byzantinization was a gradual process and that there were other influences (e.g., Western, Scandinavian, even Near Eastern) on early Kievan culture until the time of the Tatar Yoke.

translated literature was adapted to suit the needs of the East Slavs, who gradually assimilated and transmuted<sup>4</sup> the tradition, especially after the end of the Tatar Yoke.<sup>5</sup> This process of "Russification" or integration became the basic source of native Russian culture.<sup>6</sup>

Initially most writing activity in Old Rus' took place in the monasteries and churches and was carried out almost exclusively by the clergy.<sup>7</sup> Although certain high-ranking figures holding secular power often commissioned or even directed what was written, the clergy were primarily

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<sup>4</sup>As Dimitri Obolensky points out, the process was not simply passive as "it was made possible by the Russians' willingness to "reach out" for its fruits." See his "The Relations between Byzantium and Russia (Eleventh to Fifteenth Century)," in his *The Byzantine Inheritance of Eastern Europe* (London, 1982), Chapter V, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup>This being the case, it is nevertheless important to bear in mind that the degree and type of influence of specific Byzantine works on Old Slavic works is still an understudied area. On the problems associated with studying such influence, see Richard Pope, "O kharaktere i stepeni vliiania Vizantiiskoi literatury na original'nuiu literaturu iuzhnykh i vostochnykh slavian: diskussia i metodologiya," in *American Contributions to the Seventh International Congress of Slavists, Volume II: Literature and Folklore*, ed. Victor Terras, (The Hague, 1973), pp. 469 - 93.

<sup>6</sup>Alexander Schmemmann, *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*, translated by Lydia W. Kesich, (New York, 1963), p. 299. Although Schmemmann specifically refers to Russian literature and culture, the same may be said of all the East Slavs.

<sup>7</sup>There were, however, non-ecclesiastical writers such as Vladimir Monomakh and the author of *The Igor Tale* by the early- and late-twelfth century.

responsible for the actual production of the texts. These ecclesiastical writers decided what was acceptable and what did or did not deviate from the official or "right doctrine," that is, from Orthodoxy.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the Old East Slavic writer had to adhere to a strict set of principles. He would be answerable to God if, in his writings, there were something that deviated from the correct doctrine. In writing well and expressing sound doctrine, the writer, who considered himself and his work as a divine calling, strove to further the advent of the Kingdom of God.

After Rus''s conversion to Christianity, society at large was enjoined to make salvation its primary preoccupation. The medieval man was counseled to do those things that would work towards his salvation. The writer's task, therefore, was to guide people along the path to salvation. As D. S. Likhachev points out, his aim was to be the "transmitter of Truth" (*peredatchika istiny*).<sup>9</sup> In other words, the only way the medieval writer could speak of man's life and purpose was in light of the Truth. The resultant writings were all of a didactic and moralizing character.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Riccardo Picchio, "The Impact of Ecclesiastic Culture on Old Russian Literary Techniques," in *Medieval Russian Culture*, pp. 252 - 55.

<sup>9</sup>D. S. Likhachev, "U predystokov realizma russkoi literatury," *Voprosy literatury* Vol. 1 (April, 1957), 75.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.* Much the same can be said of the growth of literature throughout medieval Europe.



Although in one sense all literature is didactic in some way, however obliquely, Kievan and Muscovite literature was openly didactic in that it was devoted expressly to the proselytization of Christianity and the Christian life.

Because literature was almost entirely limited to religious purposes, its thematic range was relatively narrow. The Bible, followed by the writings of the Church Fathers, was the model for imitation. Hence, biblical citations, and, quotations and selections from or adaptations of the writings of the Church Fathers, were interspersed throughout most works of Old East Slavic literature. These writings "represented the Truth" and served as a guide for instruction.<sup>11</sup> While the scriptural references remained a constant part of medieval Orthodox Slavic literature, their frequency and impact varied over the centuries depending on the genre of a work and on cultural and historical factors.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the bulk of medieval East Slavic literature was intended to provide the "reader" (or say, the intended audience) with the Truth. This didactic purpose of pre-Petrine literature and the didactic role of the pre-Petrine writer remained relatively constant until at least the seventeenth century and was central to shaping the world-view of the medieval East

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<sup>11</sup>Picchio, "Impact of Ecclesiastic Culture," p. 277.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

Slav.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.2 The Importance of the Monastic Vocation

Pre-Petrine Russian culture must also be understood against the background of monasticism. Indeed, as Dmitrii Obolensky suggests, in no other area was the "wholesale nature" of the transplantation of Byzantine culture to the Slavs more evident than in monasticism.<sup>14</sup> Three kinds of monastic practice were inherited from Byzantium: eremitic, semi-eremitic and cenobitic. A combination of these types was practised by the monks of the Kievan Caves Monastery (Kievo-pecherskaia lavra), the most famous monastic community of the pre-Mongol period. Their organized community life became the standard to emulate and one of its founding fathers, St. Theodosius, became the central monastic figure of the medieval period.<sup>15</sup> Theodosius's

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<sup>13</sup>Even in more secular genres, such as the military tale, there is a level of didacticism. In the works devoted to the Kulikovo cycle, for instance, the writers frequently stress the need for brotherly love and unification. God helps righteous princes, and infidels must fear His wrath.

As I will show, Gogol also believed in the religio-didactic purpose of literature and in the supremacy of the Word, and in many ways he considered himself to be the "transmitter of Truth."

<sup>14</sup>Dmitrii Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth. Eastern Europe, 500 - 1453* (London, 1971), p. 295.

<sup>15</sup>St. Antony, who practised eremitic monasticism, founded the monastery in 1051, but it was organized more into a cenobitic community by his disciples. On the early history of monasticism in Kievan Rus', see Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, pp. 294 - 301.

influence on the history of Russian monasticism cannot be overstated.

Because of the Tatar incursions of the thirteenth century, a lot of monasteries were destroyed. Indeed, in the first fifty years or so after 1240, much of life, not just monastic life, was dislocated. However, the late- and post-Mongol period saw a revival of monastic life. Many of the displaced monks sought refuge in Russia's massive forests north of Moscow.<sup>16</sup> This "flight to the desert"<sup>17</sup> in search of a safe haven brought about a revival of semi-eremitic and cenobitic monasticism. St. Sergei of Radonezh played the key role in this revival. He and his disciples, who helped to establish monasteries throughout the Russian lands, brought in what has been referred to as "the golden age of Russian monasticism."<sup>18</sup> Therefore the Church in

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<sup>16</sup>Although the monastic revival of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries took place mainly in outlying areas, Moscow was not left out of the picture. Under the guidance of Metropolitan Alexis, a large number of churches were constructed in the city which further helped to establish the monastic revival. As James Billington points out, "not only did such a revival help to consolidate the special position of Moscow within Russia, but also it inspired Russians everywhere with the sense of destiny, militance and colonizing zeal on which subsequent successes depended." See his *The Icon and the Axe. An Interpretative History of Russian Culture*, (New York, 1968), p. 49.

<sup>17</sup>This term, (used by Obolensky in his *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, p. 306), is customarily used to describe the urge to monastic life which began in the fourth century after Constantine made Christianity the state religion.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

general, and the monasteries in a particular way, came to serve as the focus of East Slavic national consciousness in a gloomy age when life was so disrupted.

The monastic revival in fourteenth-century Rus' was deeply influenced by Hesychasm, a mystical movement whose origins can be traced back to fourth-century Byzantium, and, which later spread to the South and East Slavs. Hesychasm was a form of devotional practice whose adherents sought a path to spiritual perfection and the ascent of the soul towards God through strict meditation and prayer.<sup>19</sup> The popularity among Muscovite monastic communities of the Hesychast spirituality underlines yet another link with the Byzantine matrix of pre-Petrine culture. In both periods, it was believed that heavenly truth, through divine light, would permeate the earth and that Easter Sunday would mark the triumph of light over darkness.<sup>20</sup>

In Russian monasteries, it was preached that the world had to be transformed. Man had to strive to bring heavenly

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<sup>19</sup>For a succinct account of the history of Hesychasm, see George A. Maloney, *Russian Hesychasm. The Spirituality of Nil Sorskij* (The Hague, 1973), esp. pp. 103 - 110; G. M. Prokhorov, "Isikhazm i obshchestvennaia mysl' v Vostochnoi Evrope v XIV veke," *Trudy otdela drevnerusskoi literatury* Vol. 23 (1968), 86 - 108.

<sup>20</sup>Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, p. 25. Zenkovsky also rightly points out this similarity to Gogol's views on Easter Sunday (which Gogol writes about in *Selected Passages*.)

truth to the earth and to purify it so as to attain the Kingdom of God on earth. This could most certainly be achieved by following monastic ideals.<sup>21</sup> In their struggle for salvation, the East Slavs believed that worldly cares prevented them from attaining their true Christian destiny. Therefore, the only sure road towards a true Christian life was through monasticism. This belief was the cornerstone of Christian spirituality especially during the Muscovite period.<sup>22</sup>

### **2.3 The Preoccupation with Eschatological Concerns**

One of the most significant features of the medieval mentality was its preoccupation with eschatological questions.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the impact of eschatology on Russian

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<sup>21</sup>It was common practice among Byzantine rulers to take monastic vows as their lives drew to a close. This was no doubt known to the East Slavs, (and to Gogol, which may explain his overwhelming desire to become a monk later in life. See *Pss VIII, 301; XII 34; cf. Chapter Five of this thesis.*)

<sup>22</sup>Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, pp. 31 - 32. Gogol's "*summa*" on monasticism (*Selected Passages XIX and XX*) testifies to his complete endorsement of this vocation. (It should be noted that there was also a growth in monasticism in the West at this time, too.)

<sup>23</sup>By eschatology I am referring to that Christian set of beliefs concerning the end of the world and the ultimate destiny of mankind. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition eschatology concerns and encompasses a belief in the Second Coming, the resurrection of the Dead, and the Last Judgement.

The main distinction I draw between eschatology and apocalypticism (which is often used in conjunction with eschatology) is that the latter specifically refers to the

culture has been acknowledged by two of the most eminent students of Russian cultural history, the philosopher, Nikolai Berdiaev, and the structuralist and semiotician, Iurii Lotman, among others.<sup>24</sup> Both men contend, each in his own way, that eschatological thought has deeply influenced Russian culture from its beginnings and has therefore played a major role in the Russian literary tradition.

In his seminal work, *Russkaia ideia*, Berdiaev states that the beliefs about the end of the world have always held a special appeal for the Russian people, and that in Russian Christianity, the eschatological expectation is stronger than in Western Christianity. Berdiaev views Russians as "a people of the end" (*narod kontsa*).<sup>25</sup> Moreover, he sees Russians as "wanderers" (*stranniki*) in search of God's Truth:

Эсхатологическая                    устремленность  
принадлежит к структуре русской души.  
Странничество --- очень характерное  
русское явление, в такой степени

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*Revelation of John*, or the *Apocalypse* as it is known by its Greek name, and the genre of apocalypse is thus influenced specifically by the Johannine text. Moreover, eschatology is neutral in affect; it is a branch of theology and hence, was a "science" for the medieval man. Apocalypticism is a loaded word, usually referring to a preoccupation with impending doom, destruction and judgement.

<sup>24</sup>This has also been pointed out by David Bethea in his *The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction* (Princeton, 1989), p. 12ff.

<sup>25</sup>Nikolai Berdiaev, *Russkaia ideia* (*Osnovnye problemy russkoi mysli XIX veka i nachala XX veka*) (Paris, 1932), p. 195.

незнакомое Западу. Странник ищет правду, ищет Царства Божьего, он устремлен в даль [...] к Граду Грядущему. [...] Но по духу своему странниками были и наиболее творческие представители русской культуры, странниками были Гоголь, Достоевский, Л. Толстой, В. Соловьев и вся революционная интеллигенция. Есть не только физическое, но и духовное странничество. Оно есть невозможность успокоиться ни на чем конечном, устремленность есть ожидание, что всему конечному наступит конец, что окончательная правда откроется, что в грядущем будет какое-то необычайное явление.<sup>26</sup>

An eschatological tendency is a main characteristic of the Russian soul. Wandering is very characteristic of Russians to a degree unknown in the West. The wanderer searches for the truth, for the Kingdom of God; he is directed to the distance [...] toward the City-to-Come. [...] The most creative representatives of Russian culture --- Gogol, Dostoevsky, L. Tolstoy, V. Soloviev, and all the revolutionary intelligentsia --- have also been wanderers in spirit. There is not only physical wandering, but also spiritual wandering. This is the impossibility to be at peace with anything finite. This tendency is an expectation that everything finite will come to an end, that a final truth will be revealed, and that in the future some sort of extraordinary event will take place.

It is clear that the Russians' eschatological expectation is also messianic. They are waiting for the Kingdom of God, which to them means the end of this world and its transfiguration into a world of beauty. They hold a belief

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid, p. 199.

in a final Truth, a revelation which is to come to them.<sup>27</sup>

Iurii Lotman also speaks of the eschatological type of thinking which has dominated Russian religious and social thought. Together with his colleague, Boris Uspenskii, Lotman has published a semiotic approach to the study of Russian culture.<sup>28</sup> They argue that the cultural values of Russia have "always been distributed on a bipolar field, divided by a sharp boundary without an axiologically neutral zone."<sup>29</sup> In other words, Russian culture can be viewed as always having sets of binary oppositions or dualities. These oppositions have had a significant impact on the Russians' eschatological view of history and culture over the centuries.<sup>30</sup>

To illustrate their point, Lotman and Uspenskii compare the cultural values and eschatological concerns of the medieval East and West. In Western Catholicism, for example, the world beyond the grave was always divided into

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid, pp. 195 - 97.

<sup>28</sup>See their interesting, though controversial article, "Binary Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture (to the End of the Eighteenth Century)" in *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History. Essays by Iurii M. Lotman, Lidiia Ginsburg, Boris Uspenskii*, edited and translated by Alexander D. Nakhimovsky and Alice Stone Nakhimovsky, (Ithaca, 1985), pp. 30 - 67.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid, p. 31.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.



three spheres or zones: "the unconditionally sinful, the unconditionally holy, and the neutral [purgatory]."<sup>31</sup> In contrast, unlike the three-tiered West, the Russian medieval system had no neutral sphere; the world beyond the grave was divided into heaven and hell. Behaviour in real life was also viewed only in terms of corresponding dualities. It could be either "good" or "evil," or "holy" versus "sinful."<sup>32</sup> Extending this notion into all spheres of extra-ecclesiastical life, Lotman and Uspenskii point out, for example, that "secular power could thus be interpreted as divine or diabolical, but never as neutral."<sup>33</sup>

To the student of Russian history it is clear that this overwhelming concern for "the last things" is not simply a modern phenomenon in Russia. From very early in its history, as far back as Kievan Rus', eschatological themes have loomed large. One of the most important and influential figures of the early medieval period, known for his eschatological concerns, was Abraham (Avramii) of Smolensk (d. circa 1220). His views on this topic can be gleaned mainly from his *zhitie*, written by his disciple, Ephrem.<sup>34</sup> For the most part, Abraham's eschatological ideas

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid, p. 32.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>The complete text (with its full title) is in *Pamiatniki literatury drevnei Rusi XIII vek (Vol. III)*, ed.

were taken from the extensive patristic and apocryphal literature in which the Second Coming is depicted as a time when the soul is tried before the terrifying God.<sup>35</sup> Abraham foresaw fires destroying the earth and the suffering of men as their souls were ripped from their bodies. Yet, in spite of this, he insisted that through repentance man could be saved. Abraham also believed that with the Final Judgement, the earth would be transfigured by God. Abraham's eschatology formed an important part of Russian eschatological thought throughout the medieval period.<sup>36</sup>

From the late-thirteenth to the late-fifteenth centuries there was also a heightened expectation of the imminent end of the world. This was precipitated by such factors as the cataclysmic Tatar-Mongol invasion and the Fall of Kiev and the devastation which accompanied it. These events were viewed by some as a result of God's wrath for the sins they had committed.<sup>37</sup>

With the establishment of an autocephalous Russian church in 1448 and the fall of Byzantium five years later,

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D. S. Likhachev, (Moscow, 1981), pp. 66 - 105; [hereafter, PLDR.]

<sup>35</sup>George A. Maloney, *A History of Orthodox Theology Since 1453* (Massachusetts, 1976), p. 19.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Marcia A. Morris, *Saints and Revolutionaries. The Ascetic Hero in Russian Literature* (New York, 1993), p. 79.

Ivan III considered himself the only remaining Orthodox leader. He saw himself as both head of Church and State, (most likely largely in imitation of his Byzantine predecessors), believing that God had given him this power.<sup>38</sup> Religious leaders started to develop theories about his divine election. In the sixteenth century, a Pskovian monk, Philotheus (Filofei), developed a theory which has come to be known as "Moscow the Third Rome." It has been suggested that Philotheus derived his theory from an earlier ideological work, *The Tale of the White Cowl* (*Povest' o belom klobuke*), which itself has been traced to the *Book of Daniel*, in particular to chapter 7:27.<sup>39</sup> The theory implied that "all Christian realms would come to an end and would unite into the one single realm of our sovereign, that is, into the Russian realm, according to the prophetic books. Both Romes fell, the third endures, and a fourth there would never be"<sup>40</sup> (because the End was near.)

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<sup>38</sup>Dmitrii Stremoukhoff, "Moscow the Third Rome. Sources of the Doctrine," in *The Structure of Russian History. Interpretative Essays*, ed. Michael Cherniavsky, (New York, 1970), p. 112.

<sup>39</sup>See Serge A Zenkovsky, *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles and Tales*, edited and translated by Serge A. Zenkovsky, (New York, 1974), p. 323. The citation from Daniel is as follows: "And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints most high, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him."

<sup>40</sup>Cited in Zenkovsky, *Medieval Russia's Epics*, p. 323.

Moscow was the "Third Rome."<sup>41</sup>

It was therefore believed that Russia was predestined to be the final kingdom on earth and would remain so until the Final Judgement. Moreover, Russians came to regard themselves as the chosen people and their country as the sole exponent of the true Christianity, which, to them, meant Orthodoxy.<sup>42</sup> As Stephen Baehr points out, for Russians, "Russia's emergence as the country most favoured by God --- the seat of the religious empire --- was seen as the ultimate end (in both senses of the word) of history."<sup>43</sup> This messianic belief in Russia's and Moscow's predestined greatness, which formed the basis for the "Moscow Third Rome" theory, shaped Russian religious thought for several subsequent centuries.

In the middle of the sixteenth century, with the

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<sup>41</sup>Philotheus' notion embodied the theory of "*translatio imperii*," "the idea that in any period one nation would be the dominant cultural and political force in world civilization, and that that force would move from one state to another with the passage of time." See Stephen L. Baehr, "From History to National Myth: *Translatio imperii* in Eighteenth-Century Russia," *The Russian Review* Vol. 37, No. 1 (1978), 1 - 13; cf. Stremoukhoff, "Moscow the Third Rome. Sources of the Doctrine," pp. 108 - 25.

<sup>42</sup>Berdiaev, *Russkaia ideia*, pp. 11 - 12.

<sup>43</sup>Baehr, "From History to National Myth," p. 10. As I will show, Gogol echoes such sentiments throughout his writings.

coronation of Ivan IV as "basileus",<sup>44</sup> (both a spiritual and secular emperor), the notion of Holy Russia was consolidated. Ivan's status could not be raised to a higher level. He was the pious tsar, God's vice-regent on earth. He was to care for the state and for the salvation of souls.<sup>45</sup> However, certain changes in this notion were to enter into the Russian consciousness within a century. The changes were brought about by another significant episode pertaining to Russian eschatological thought, the Great Schism of the seventeenth century.<sup>46</sup>

The question that lay at the roots of the Schism was whether Russia was truly the Orthodox Kingdom. Because of changes in various church practices initiated by Patriarch Nikon, the Schismatics, led among others by the Archpriest Avvakum, believed that God had forsaken Russia and that evil was to reign. As Berdiaev puts it: *Раскол внушал русскому народу ожидание антихриста*<sup>47</sup> (The Schism instilled the Russian people with an expectation of the Antichrist.) The future was thus viewed in an apocalyptic light. Indeed,

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<sup>44</sup>On the spiritual and political implications of this term, see Michael Cherniavsky, "Khan or Basileus: An Aspect of Russian Medieval Political Theory," in *The Structure of Russian History. Interpretative Essays*, ed. Michael Cherniavsky, (New York, 1970), pp. 65 - 66.

<sup>45</sup>Berdiaev, *Russkaia ideia*, p. 16; Bethea, *The Shape of Apocalypse*, p. 16.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Berdiaev, *Russkaia ideia*, p. 15.

with Peter the Great's ascent to power, this belief became firmly entrenched in the minds of many Russians, especially the Old Believers.

Thus, the eschatological preoccupation stretches over several centuries --- from the early writings of Abraham of Smolensk to the Petrine era (and even up to today.) Furthermore, as evidenced by the "Moscow Third Rome" theory and the notion of "Holy Russia," there was also a prevailing messianic spirit in the pre-Petrine period. Various aspects of this tradition, as we shall see, are strongly reflected in the writings of Nikolai Gogol.

#### **2.4. Aesthetic Values**

The appreciation of beauty, especially in the aesthetic side of worship, has always been a constant feature of Russian Orthodoxy and has thus had an influence on the Russian religious mind and on Russian literature throughout time. The appreciation of beauty can be seen as early as the legendary account of Rus''s conversion to Christianity as described in *The Primary Chronicle (Povest' vremennykh let)*.<sup>48</sup> According to the legend, Saint Vladimir sent emissaries to various confessional centres in the hope of

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<sup>48</sup>A. P. Vlasto, *The Entry of the Slavs into Christendom. An Introduction to the Medieval History of the Slavs* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 256.

determining which faith was the best. The envoys were most impressed with the Greek service held in Constantinople. Although they found the service difficult to understand, they were overwhelmed by its beauty as they had never witnessed such magnificence. Under 6495 (987) the report runs as follows:

The Greeks led us to the edifices where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendour or beauty, and we were at a loss how to describe it. We only know that God dwells there among men, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations. For we cannot forget that beauty. Every man, after tasting something sweet, is afterward unwilling to accept that which is bitter, and therefore we cannot dwell longer here.<sup>49</sup>

The beauty the envoys had witnessed was both an earthly beauty as well as a heavenly beauty. But it was the heavenly beauty, (i.e., being in the presence of God), that they felt they could not continue to live without. Subsequently, Vladimir accepted the Christian faith (though not based solely on the envoys' testimonies.)<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Cited in *The Russian Primary Chronicle. Laurentian Text*, translated and edited by Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 111.

<sup>50</sup>One must bear in mind that the legend was inserted in *The Primary Chronicle* after the Greek party gained power in the Kievan Church. On the controversy surrounding the date and reasons for Vladimir's baptism and Rus''s conversion, see Vlasto, *The Entry of the Slavs*, pp. 256 - 60; Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, pp. 193 - 94.

Although Vladimir almost certainly embraced the Greek form of Christianity for reasons other than its aesthetic values, the legend in *The Primary Chronicle* is indicative of the belief that aesthetic values were closely connected to religious values in Kievan Rus'. Even after this time, non-Christians were inclined to convert to the Orthodox faith because of its liturgical beauty.<sup>51</sup>

Apart from the aesthetic beauty of worship, physical beauty, especially with regard to architecture, icons and sculpture was also important in medieval Orthodox Slavdom. In the Kievan period, churches in the style of Byzantine cathedrals were erected throughout the Russian lands. These churches both "conveyed the essence of the Christian message to Russians [...] and embellished the inherited forms of praise and worship."<sup>52</sup> Written accounts of the beauty of churches and their icons were abundant. For example, in some of the stories of the *Patericon of the Kievan Caves Monastery* (*Kievo-pecherskii paterik*) on icon painting, the true beauty and power of art is shown to be even greater

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<sup>51</sup>See Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, p. 194, who refers to the liturgical beauty as "Russia's most vital and lasting inheritance from Byzantium." Nevertheless, whether the centrality of aesthetics was always part of the Russian personality, or only became so as the Byzantine outlook established itself over the centuries, is a hard question to resolve.

<sup>52</sup>Billington, *The Icon and the Axe*, p. 7.



when inspired by God.<sup>53</sup> In the Muscovite period, the architecture of churches still stressed physical beauty. Many of these churches were designed to "detach the individual from a natural level and compel him to feel the unreality of reality."<sup>54</sup>

Emphasis on aesthetics can also be seen in literature. The Slavic letters were considered by the early Orthodox Slavs as "the bountiful manifestation of the Divine Word."<sup>55</sup> Hence, any writer using these letters had to ensure that he provided perfect images of Truth and beauty in order to avoid heresy. While writers aimed for literary perfection, manuscripts were meticulously ornamented for visual effects. Stylistic ornamentation and embellishments of all sorts,

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<sup>53</sup>See George P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind (I). Kievan Christianity. The 10<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Belmont, Mass., 1975), p. 373, [hereafter, Fedotov, I] who refers to the work of the icon painter Alipius. See Discourse 34 in *The Paterik of the Kievan Caves. Harvard Library of Early Ukrainian Literature. Volume I*, translated by Muriel Heppell, (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 190 - 99.

<sup>54</sup>D. S. Likhachev, "O sadakh. Sad i kul'tura Evropy. Sad i kul'tura Rossii," in his *Izbrannye raboty v trekh tomakh, III* (Leningrad, 1987), p. 504; cited in Maguire, *Exploring Gogol*, p. 105, who points out that Likhachev's observation would "fit unobtrusively into any work by Gogol." Indeed, the aim to make one feel the unreality of reality is a central feature of Gogol's writing. His neo-Platonic outlook stressed that apparent reality was of little significance, and that true reality was being ignored or overlooked by most Russians. As mentioned, Gogol used many of his literary devices in an attempt to "wake people up" to the difference between the illusory world most see as real and the real world which most ignore or deny.

<sup>55</sup>Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, p. 334.

plus the use of symbolism, played a significant role in the literature especially of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, even at the expense of thematic unity.<sup>56</sup> The writer used a complex of tropes and devices to give other, often higher, meanings to objects in the real world. His aim was to suggest meaning rather than state it. (In a sense, therefore, the medieval writer was an expert in semiotics.) The symbolism used by the medieval writer was especially significant in that it showed that the world view of the medieval man was directed toward a "deeper more real reality" rather than toward the "concretely perceptible."<sup>57</sup> By using symbolic and ornamental language, the medieval writer was trying to get closer to the Lord. Clearly, for

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<sup>56</sup>Dmitrii Chyzhevskii is justified in referring to this period as the "period of ornamental style" in his *History of Ukrainian Literature* (pp. 136 - 226) as well as in his *History of Russian Literature* (pp. 82 - 142). The earlier period, which Chyzhevskii refers to as "the period of monumental style" is also not without stylistic embellishments, however. (In his *History of Russian Literature* Chyzhevskii refers to this period as one of "stylistic simplicity" but nevertheless sees it characterized by "a certain *sui generis* monumentality" (p. 32).) In fact, both styles coexisted throughout the Kievan period. One example, Hilarion's *Sermon on Law and Grace* (*Slovo o zakone i blagodati*) is surely early and undeniably ornamental.

<sup>57</sup>Chyzhevskii, *History of Ukrainian Literature*, p. 137. Cf. his *History of Russian Literature*, p. 83, in which he says that during this period "symbolism now acquires exceptional importance, for the man of the Middle Ages seeks behind or "under" every being precisely the more essential, the deeper, the more stable and "true" existence." It is worth noting that Chyzhevskii says much of the same in his two *Histories*, especially with regard to the styles, works and writers he discusses up to the end of the thirteenth century.

the writer and for his intended audience, the beauty associated with a literary work was connected to religious values.

This tradition continued in the Muscovite period. Under the influence of the so-called Second South Slavic Influence and the Hesychast movement there was a penchant for the elaborate writing style referred to as "word weaving" (*pletenie sloves*), which also combined words and sounds to suggest rather than indicate meaning. The principal aim of this writing technique was to achieve direct links with God.<sup>58</sup> It was believed that a combination of word weaving and a highly emotional and ornate style could result in the "lifting up" of the subject matter of the work to a higher spiritual level. Hence, there was a similar tradition in both the early and late medieval periods of using ornamental language to suggest a higher spiritual meaning for concrete and factual material. Aesthetics on both an abstract and a concrete level were therefore an important feature of pre-Petrine literature and culture and no doubt played a role in shaping the world-view of the medieval East Slav.

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<sup>58</sup>The interaction of the South Slavic and the Byzantino-Slavic cultures played a role in the development of the style. For an elaboration on this style and its best-known writer, see Faith Kitch, *The Literary Style of Epifanij Premudryj. Pletenie sloves* (Munich, 1976), pp. 38 - 39.

## 2.5 The Fascination with the Demonic

The belief in the devil and/or in demons or evil spirits was an integral part of both the East Slavic written and oral traditions. Although the devil's image prior to the seventeenth century was not as clearly defined, after the seventeenth century, partly influenced by Western demonology, the devil took on more detailed forms and appearances.<sup>59</sup>

There were three primary sources on which the demonic in East Slavic literature was based. The first source stemmed from Rus''s pre-Christian experience. Animism and the belief in pagan gods were the dominant religions for the East Slavs prior to Christianization. Before Vladimir was baptized, he had even set up a pantheon of pagan idols on the hills of Kiev. It was only after his acceptance of Christianity that he had the idols thrown into the Dniepr. However, the belief in some of these former gods of Slavic paganism did not completely --- or immediately --- disappear with Christianization. Rather, they came to be viewed in some measure as "new devils" under Christianity.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Alexander N. Konrad, *Old Russia and Byzantium. The Byzantine and Oriental Origins of Russian Culture* (Vienna, 1972), p. 201 - 02.

<sup>60</sup>Cf. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, pp. 190 - 99. Professor Marshall has pointed out to me that it was mainly the Nordic-derived nobility who believed in the anthropomorphic pantheon of gods. The vast majority of the

Furthermore, many of the spirits in the pre-Christian era retained their place among the masses and continued to be part of medieval man's attitude toward nature and life in general. Eventually, however, all the mythological gods and demons were replaced by the Christian God and by Christian notions of the demonic. This was not the case until at least the fifteenth century, however. Up to that point Christianity remained predominantly a religion of the upper classes and pagan beliefs continued until the seventeenth century<sup>61</sup> (and to some extent well past that time.)

The second main source of the demonic in Old Rus' were the apocrypha, saint's *Lives* and *patericon* tales from Byzantium. Byzantine apocrypha which entered Rus' by way of the South Slavic lands were popular in medieval Rus' mainly because of their portrayal of biblical figures, in spite of the fact that this literature was considered heretical by the Church. Byzantine saint's *Lives* and tales from the fourth century onwards frequently describe monks battling or doing battle with the devil and his agents.<sup>62</sup> Many of these works were translated from Greek into Old Church Slavonic in the late-ninth and early-tenth centuries and some may have

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people were animists.

<sup>61</sup>See Dimitri Obolensky, "Popular Religion in Medieval Russia," in his *The Byzantine Inheritance*, Chapter VII, p. 51.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 201 - 03.

had an influence on later East Slavic saint's *Lives* or *patericon* stories. In the eastern *patericons*, the demons or evil spirits often took on human or beast-like shapes. It was believed from early Christian times that these spirits caused diseases in people. The illnesses could range from a simple toothache to insanity. In order to cure the afflicted individual, and hence, to exorcise the devil, magical charms were used (following pagan beliefs),<sup>63</sup> and/or the sign of the cross was made (following the Christian tradition.)<sup>64</sup> Many of these aspects of the demonic also entered Rus' and can be seen in the *Patericon of the Kievan Caves Monastery*, among other Slavic medieval works.

The third source of the demonic in Old Rus' consisted of the Old and New Testaments, which themselves were based on the talmudic belief that God's angels intermingled with earthly creatures. This belief also entered Rus' with Christianization.<sup>65</sup> For example, in medieval works dealing with the ethical standards of pre-Petrine Russia, such as the *Collection of 1076 (Izbornik Sviatoslava 1076g.)*, the *Emerald (Izmaragd)*, and, later, *The Household Management (Domostroi)*<sup>66</sup>, the admonitions to guard oneself against the

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<sup>63</sup>See Nikolay Andreyev, "Pagan and Christian Elements in Old Russia," *Slavic Review* Vol. 22 (1962), 17.

<sup>64</sup>Konrad, *Old Russia and Byzantium*, p. 203.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid, pp. 202 - 03.

<sup>66</sup>Hereafter, I shall refer to the *Collection of*

devil or his agents often cite biblical texts.

Regardless of the human or supernatural attributes possessed by the evil spirits in early East Slavic literature, the devil and his agents' main goal was to prevent man from achieving his salvation. The temptation to veer from the path of righteous was manifest in many ways. In the *Patericon of the Kievan Caves Monastery*, for example, the devil frequently took on the guise of beautiful angels or of a seductive and diabolical woman (the *zlaia zhenia*.) Centuries later, in the sixteenth-century quasi-hagiographic *Tale of Peter and Fevronia* (*Povest' o Petre i Fevronii*), he still appeared in disguise. In this work he first appears as a dragon and later in the guise of a prince. In the seventeenth-century *Tale of Savva Grudtsyn* (*Povest' o Savve Grudtsyne*), a seductive temptress, Bazhen Vtory's wife, was in the devil's service and the sworn "brother," the devil's agent. Suffice it to say, in all cases the temptation was craftily adapted to the weaknesses of the individual targeted. A struggle always took place and Good only defeated Evil through strict prayer and staunch devotion to God.

The devil was also an integral part of Russian eschatological thought. His primary aim was to hinder man's

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1076 and *The Household Management* by their well-known Russian titles.

ascent to Heaven. Moreover, before the Second Coming of Christ, it was believed that with the help of the Antichrist devils would rule the earth with pride and force.<sup>67</sup> The evil associated with the vice of pride most likely stemmed from the Old Testament.

Not until the seventeenth century was there any significant further evolution in the demonic in medieval Russian culture. At that time the influence of Western demonology made itself felt. Translations of such western works as *The Great Mirror* (*Speculum Magnum* or *Velikoe Zerkalo*) and *The Deeds of the Romans* (*Gesta Romanorum* or *Rimskie deianiia*) were particularly influential.<sup>68</sup> The Scriptures and the demonic in early Christian and Byzantine literature were the main sources of the East Slavic belief in the devil up to that point.

In the nineteenth century, the romantics' fascination with the demonic was no doubt based in part on pre-romantic beliefs. Similarly, as we shall see, to a certain extent Gogol's abiding preoccupation with the demonic stemmed from the earlier tradition.

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<sup>67</sup>Konrad, *Old Russia and Byzantium*, p. 227.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid, pp. 201 and 228. Dmitrii Chyzhevskii has suggested that Gogol modelled his story *Vii* on a story from *The Great Mirror* in which an enchantress was taken to hell by the devil. See his *History of Ukrainian Literature*, p. 315.



## 2.6 The Ethical Matrix of the Culture

For all medieval literatures, there is some form of "intermediary" literature which acts as a transition from one period and literature to the next.<sup>69</sup> As mentioned, for the East Slavs, the intermediary literature or matrix was predominantly Old Bulgarian literature which included works of early Christian (translated Greek) literature. The writings of the Church Fathers, or the patristic works, were very important to Old Russia as they "expounded principles of Christian morality or rules of monastic [and lay] life in the form of instructions and exhortations."<sup>70</sup> Apart from having an influence on later Russian oratorical and homiletic writers, patristic literature was instrumental in shaping the ethical development of newly converted Rus'.<sup>71</sup>

The main sources at our disposal for an understanding of ethics in the pre-Petrine period are admonitions, writings in the various *izborniki* or miscellanies, and the

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<sup>69</sup>cf. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, p. 322; also, Oleg Tvorogov, "The Literature of Kievan Russia (Eleventh to Early Thirteenth Centuries)" in *A History of Russian Literature 11th - 17th Centuries*, translated by K. M. Cook-Horujy, ed. Dmitrii Likhachev, (Moscow, 1989), p. 47.

<sup>70</sup>Tvorogov, "The Literature of Kievan Russia," p. 48.

<sup>71</sup>See also *ibid*, p. 51.

Chronicles, all of which, to varying degrees, came under the influence of the patristic texts.<sup>72</sup>

The literature of admonition was very popular in the East Slavic lands during the pre-Mongol period. One of the most famous and influential monuments of admonitory literature was the *Instruction of Vladimir Monomakh* (*Pouchenie Vladimira Monomakha*) which has come down to us in only one manuscript in *The Tale of Bygone Years* in the *Laurentian Codex* of 1377.<sup>73</sup> The *Instruction* served as a model for later didactic literature (as well as for autobiographical writings.) It is believed to have been written circa 1117 by Vladimir, a prince and a layman, for his sons. Vladimir instructs them to be meek, to obey their superiors as well as to befriend their equals and inferiors

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<sup>72</sup>See V. P. Adrianova-Peretts, "Chelovek v uchitel'noi literature drevnei Rusi," *Trudy otdela drevnerusskoi literatury* Vol. 22 (Leningrad, 1972), 4 - 6; Fedotov, I, p. 203. Although Fedotov's study tends to be Russo-centric, it is nevertheless valuable for its contribution to the study of the ethical matrix of pre-Petrine Russia. The works discussed in this section provide a basic overview of some of the principal ethical standards of pre-Petrine culture. It is beyond the scope of this study to expound on the differences between the ethics of the clergy and the ethics of the laity. Oftentimes there is little distinction between the two types in theory. Also, as Alexander Schmemmann points out, "in Orthodoxy there is no opposition between the two [groups]. They can function only in complete obedience to God. It is the same obedience that establishes the harmony between them, making them one body, growing into the fullness of Christ." See his *Orthodoxy: Clergy and Laity in the Orthodox Church* (New York, 1955), p. 15.

<sup>73</sup>For the text of the *Instruction*, see *PLDR*, I, pp. 392 - 413.

alike. Although the *Instruction* was intended to help Vladimir's sons perform their duties as princes and as Christians, it had a wider application for the other social classes as well. In order to be saved, Vladimir believed foremost in repentance and charity. Specifically, repentance was the way to salvation, but this would be rendered impossible through pride. Charity for Vladimir meant the conscientious performance of good deeds. He urged all to feed and honour their guests as well as to help the less fortunate, particularly women and orphans.<sup>74</sup>

While the *Instruction* did contain a political message (requesting that princes live in peace and submit to their superiors), it is evident that Vladimir's work was mainly intended to convey a moral message. His emphasis on prayer in the context of an active life remained an important part of the medieval East Slavic world-view. Moreover, his views on repentance and charity as the touchstone of Christian piety and ethics became an integral part of medieval East Slavic ethics.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup>cf. Dmitrii Chyzhevskii, *Comparative History of Slavic Literature*, translated by Richard Noel Porter and Martin P. Rice, (Baltimore, 1971), p. 40.

<sup>75</sup>Cf. Chyzhevskii, *History of Ukrainian Literature*, p. 109. It is evident from Gogol's history notes that he held Monomakh's *Instruction* in high esteem. Gogol wrote the following about the *Instruction*:

[...]один из лучших памятников словесности, исполнено простоты и

Another important source for the study of ethics in the medieval period is the miscellanies. Miscellanies were the most widely read type of manuscript in pre-Petrine Russia. They consisted of a collection of fragments of diverse content, quite often arising from the writings of the early Fathers of Christianity. St. John Chrysostom and Ephrem the Syrian were particularly esteemed. Their ideas were frequently echoed in original Russian writings.<sup>76</sup>

In many cases, even when articles in the miscellanies were not written by such men as St. John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, or St. Gregory Nazianzus, they were quite often attributed to these saints by Slavic or Russian compilers or editors. However, because a lot of the literature in the miscellanies either consisted of restatements of the writings of the Church Fathers or were merely inspired by their writings, it has often been difficult to distinguish Greek translations from original Russian or even Old Bulgarian originals. But over the course of centuries, regardless of the origins of these writings, most of the

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ИСТИНЫ И НАСТАВЛЕНИЙ ОПЫТНОСТИ В ДЕЛАХ  
РАЗНЫХ, В ЖИЗНИ ДОМАШНЕЙ. (IX, 58)

[...it is] one of the best literary  
monuments, filled with simplicity and  
truth and instructions on various  
business matters and on domestic life.

<sup>76</sup>Tvorogov, "The Literature of Kievan Russia," p.  
48.

material in the miscellanies became "Russified."<sup>77</sup> In other words, as George Fedotov points out, "It [the material] went into the blood of the Russian people. By the Muscovite period it had shaped their moral and religious life."<sup>78</sup>

One of the earliest miscellanies of Old East Slavic literature concerned with ethics is the *Izbornik of 1076*. As its title indicates, it is a compilation or miscellany. It contains invaluable information on the history, theology and morals of Old Rus'. The *Izbornik's* primary purpose was that of edification.<sup>79</sup>

The main themes in the *Izbornik* include charity, love of God and of one's fellow man, obedience, humility, repentance and the fear of God. It is saturated with biblical quotations and interspersed with the writings of the Church Fathers, most notably those of St. John Chrysostom. A lengthy chapter containing "advice for salvation" focuses in part on charity, especially directed towards the poor. The authors/compilers of the *Izbornik*

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid, pp. 48 - 51; Fedotov, I, p. 203.

<sup>78</sup>Fedotov, I, p. 203.

<sup>79</sup>See William R. Veder, "Introduction" in *The Edificatory Prose of Kievan Rus'*. *Harvard Library of Early Ukrainian Literature*. Volume VI, translated by William R. Veder, (Boston, 1994), esp. pp. xvii - xxi. In 1791, the *Izbornik* was made available for research. Parts of the manuscript were published by K. F. Kalaidovich in 1824 and parts by A. Kh. Vostokov in 1828.

insist that the less fortunate be helped from the heart:

Extend your hands to the wanderer in the streets; take such a person into your dwelling; share your bread and water that the Lord has given you with him.<sup>80</sup>

The need to give charity runs throughout the *Izbornik*.

The virtue of obedience is also central to the miscellany. It is stressed that one must "bow one's head" to those senior in age and wisdom. Friends are to be treated as equals and minors must be shown love and charity. Above all else, however, leaders are to be obeyed and served:

Fear the prince with all your might: to fear him is not to bring ruin to your soul; it will rather teach you to fear God as well, for disregard of the authorities is disregard of God Himself.<sup>81</sup>

It is clear that the authors believed that a prince served as God's agent on earth. It was the prince's duty, as God's servant before men, to admonish, punish, instruct and forgive his subjects.

Excerpts from and adaptations and paraphrases of the deuterocanonical *Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach* (*Ecclesiasticus*) occupy a significant part of the *Izbornik*

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<sup>80</sup>All citations are based on Veder's translation; here, p.18.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid, p. 20.

of 1076. Here we read, among other things, how a master is to treat his servants. Servants are not to be abused for any reason, and, if they are clever, they are to be granted their freedom. It is the master's responsibility to instruct them properly. Furthermore, the vice of idleness is to be guarded against:

Instruct your servant, and you will find rest; if you leave his hands idle, he will seek liberty. Put him to work, that he may not be idle, for idleness teaches much evil.<sup>82</sup>

At least two sections of the *Izbornik of 1076* are devoted to women/wives. Based on the *Book of Sirach* we are told that no wickedness is as great as the wickedness of a woman: "From woman is the beginning of sin, and because of her we all die."<sup>83</sup> Ironically, such invective is countered by the praise of virtuous women: "Blessed is the husband of a good wife, and the number of his days will double."<sup>84</sup>

Some scholars have suggested that the *Izbornik of 1076* had some influence on later Russian writers.<sup>85</sup> Clearly, later works of medieval Russian literature concerned with

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid, p. 52.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>For an elaboration, see Veder, p. xxvi. Because of the *Izbornik's* popularity, individual works were copied from it right up to the nineteenth century. See Dmitrii Chyzhevskii, *History of Russian Literature From the Eleventh Century to the End of the Baroque* (The Hague, 1960), p. 70.

ethics contain and expound on similar themes found in the *Izbornik of 1076*. One such work, another miscellany, which may serve as a guide to the ethical matrix of pre-Petrine culture is the *Emerald*.<sup>86</sup> According to George Fedotov, the *Emerald* was the favorite book for devotional reading with the Russian laity for approximately four centuries. Not just a collection of medieval commonplaces, it was designed to be a moral guide, a way to salvation.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>The *Emerald* has survived in two main versions. One version dating from the fourteenth century is extant in only three manuscripts. The second version dating from the late-fourteenth - early-fifteenth centuries is twice as long as the first and is extant in approximately two hundred manuscripts. Unfortunately, the *Emerald* has received relatively little scholarly attention. Various excerpts from the miscellany have been published, but as far as I am aware, a complete edition of the *Emerald* remains unpublished. I have therefore relied on the study by Professor Fedotov in his *The Russian Religious Mind (II). The Middle Ages. The 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Belmont, Mass., 1975), pp. 36 - 112; [hereafter, Fedotov, II].

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid*, p. 40. Although there is no direct evidence in Gogol's correspondence that he knew of the *Emerald* (or of the *Izbornik of 1076*), it is unlikely that he would not have had some knowledge of these miscellanies. Many of Gogol's contemporaries --- the Slavophiles, the historians, N. M. Karamzin, M. P. Pogodin, and the folklorist M. A. Maksimovich --- must have had access to these miscellanies and discussed them with Gogol. They would definitely have been of interest to historians and ethnographers. Gogol does, however, frequently refer to the writings of the Church Fathers, especially those of St. John Chrysostom's, in his creative work and correspondence alike. More than likely, Gogol became acquainted with Chrysostom's writings from *izborniki* devoted solely to Chrysostom such as the *Golden Stream* (*Zlatostrui*) and the *Pearl* (*Margarit*) and/or from the *Izbornik of 1076* and the *Emerald*. For Gogol's discussions on Chrysostom, see *Pss VIII*, 326 - 27; *XII*, 279, as well as Gogol's *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy*. Gogol praises Ephrem the Syrian to A. P. Tolstoy and to his sister in *Pss VIII*, 184 and 367. In Gogol's *Notebook for 1846* (esp. *Pss IX*, 563), he wrote of Gregory Nazianzus, Ambrose, Augustine and John of Damascus, among



The idea of love, especially the social aspect of love, runs throughout the *Emerald*. It is stated time and again in the miscellany that a layman can only be saved by love. But the love he must have and give is to be both "an activity of the soul" and "an action of the hands."<sup>88</sup> In other words, charitable actions must accompany moral perfection. Alms-giving was the centre-point of this charity. It had to be more than the mere distribution of wealth or the giving of occasional help:

What is the use if a poor man comes to you, and you sometimes give him a crust of a loaf, not condescending to share with him your last repast? And if you give only once in a while, and insult him more often, then your alms are not perfect.<sup>89</sup>

The *Emerald* also provides advice to masters on how to treat and instruct servants:

[...] if you do not teach through fear and kindness, you will be responsible for them [servants] before God [...] If they go to steal and rob, you will answer before God for their blood. Order your servant to work so that you may repose. If the slave is slack in work,

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other Church Fathers. See also the study by Hildegund Schreier, *Gogol's Religioses Weltbild und sein Literarisches Werk. Zur Antagonie zwischen Kunst und Tendenz* (Munich, 1977), esp. pp. 87 - 91 for an extensive list of the Church Fathers and saints mentioned by Gogol in his correspondence. Again, Gogol likely read the works of these writers in the old Slavic miscellanies.

<sup>88</sup>Fedotov, II, p. 60.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid, p. 61.

he begins to seek freedom; for, idleness teaches many evils.<sup>90</sup>

These instructions have parallels with the instructions given on servants in the *Izbornik of 1076* as well as what is found in the *Book of Sirach*.<sup>91</sup> One or both of these works may very well have been one of the sources of the *Emerald*. Other moral and ethical issues are also touched upon in one or both versions of the *Emerald*. Chapters are devoted *inter alia* to the role of women, to education, to judging others and to death.

Many of these subjects were also to be found in another highly influential work dealing with moral issues, the sixteenth-century *Domostroi*.<sup>92</sup> The *Domostroi* clearly depended on the *Emerald*.<sup>93</sup> Being a work of the sixteenth century, it may serve as a guide to the study of ethics of

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid, p. 72.

<sup>91</sup>As we shall see, Gogol's instructions on how to treat servants (in *Selected Passages*) are similar to this.

<sup>92</sup>For the text of the *Domostroi*, see *PLDR VII*, pp. 70 - 173. For an English translation of the work, see Carolyn Johnston Pouncy, *Rules for Russian Households in the Time Of Ivan the Terrible*, edited and translated by Carolyn Johnston Pouncy, (Ithaca, 1994), pp. 57 - 200. I have altered Pouncy's translation where I felt necessary.

<sup>93</sup>Apart from the *Emerald*, other works served as models for the *Domostroi*. Among these are the *Instruction of Vladimir Monomakh*, early Greek writings as well as Western humanistic works of didactic literature. See Harvey Goldblatt, "Domostroi," in *Handbook of Russian Literature*, ed. Victor Terras, (New Haven, 1985), p. 102.

the Muscovite period.<sup>94</sup> The overall aim of the *Domostroi* was to establish new rules for social behaviour in line with the official ideology under Ivan IV. Its political, religious and ethical principles (guided largely by the rules of monastic communities) were associated with the theory of "Moscow the Third Rome."<sup>95</sup> It was designed to ritualize all aspects of daily life and undertook to regulate or set norms for all the relations of a Muscovite man --- to family, neighbours, Tsar and God. Thus, its author called for moral behaviour in family life, diligence at work, and extreme economizing, frequent church attendance, confession, obedience to superiors (especially to the Tsar), as well as respect for subordinates, among other things. In order to be a good Christian, one was also required to care for the poor and the clergy. Instructions were given to the head of the household as well as to women, children, and servants. In order to lead a pure and moral life (so as to be saved), one had to heed the author's words.

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<sup>94</sup>The *Domostroi* was first published in 1849 in the *Vremennik obshchestvennoi istorii i drevnostei*. Gogol, among other nineteenth-century Russian writers, quite likely had access to the work before this date, however. In a letter to A. M. Vielgorskaia, dated March 30, 1849, he praises the work and provides a detailed description of its contents. See *Pss XIV*, 108 - 112.

<sup>95</sup>Nikolai Gudzi, *History of Early Russian Literature*, translated by Susan Wilbur Jones, (New York, 1949), p. 347.

Fear of God was central to the *Domostroi*. In the first chapter, the author opens with the admonition to fear God. He continues the message in the third and fourth chapters in which he entreats all to prepare for Judgment Day:

Тайнамъ божиимъ вѣруй, тѣлу его, крови  
вѣруй причащатися и со страхомъ [...]   
страхъ божий всегда имѣй въ сердцѣ  
своемъ и память смертную всегда волю  
божию творити [...] Рече господь: В  
чемъ ты застану, в томъ и сужу --- ино  
достоитъ всякому христіянину готову  
быти в добрыхъ дѣлахъ, в чистотѣ и в  
покаянии, и во всякомъ исповѣданіи,  
всегда чающе часа смертнаго.<sup>96</sup>

Believe in the divine mysteries; believe  
in His body and blood, partaking in  
communion with fear [...] Always fear  
God in your heart, remember death and do  
the will of God [...] The Lord said: "I  
judge as I am forced to" --- therefore,  
every Christian must always be prepared  
through good deeds, purity and  
repentance, and in every confession  
awaiting the hour of death.

The message to fear God and to teach one's servants, children and wife to fear God is repeated almost verbatim in chapters 16, 17, 21, 22, 29 and again in the closing epistle. The author of the *Domostroi* also insists that one must fear one's superiors in general.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, he warns his readers that if a master does not provide moral guidance to his servants, the master must answer to God on Judgment Day (chapters 19 and 20.)

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<sup>96</sup>PLDR VII, pp. 72 - 74.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid, pp. 75 - 76. (Gogol gives a similar message to his readers in *Selected Passages X*, "On the Lyricism of Our Poets.")

As in the *Emerald* and the *Izbornik* of 1076, alms-giving is the focal point of charity in the *Domostroi*. The author encourages his readers to visit and help the less fortunate in monasteries, hospitals and prisons:

[...] и милостыню по силъ всяких потребных подавай, елико требуютъ, и види буду их и скорбь, и всяку нужу, елико возможно, помогай имъ, и всякаго скорбна и бѣдна, и нужна, и нища не презри, введи и домъ свой, напои, накорми, согрѣй, одежи всею любовию и чистою совѣстью: тѣми милостию Бога сотвориши и свободу получиши.<sup>98</sup>

[...] give alms according to your means to the needy, as much as they require. Help them in their poverty and sorrow as much as possible. Do not despise any unfortunate, troubled, poor or needy person. Bring the poor into your home. With love and pure conscience, give them food and drink. Offer them warmth and clothe them. By these things you do the work of the merciful God and will receive freedom.

It is important to note that the author specifically cautions that alms acquired through injustice are unacceptable (chapter 9.) As in the *Emerald* and the *Izbornik* of 1076, alms-giving was to be an "activity of the soul" as well as an "action of the hands." Thus, the treatment of these fundamental themes in the *Domostroi* has parallels with the treatment of similar themes found in earlier works of East Slavic literature primarily concerned

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid, p. 74. (The need for alms-giving was also a prime concern of Gogol's as he proved in an essay included in *Selected Passages*, "On Helping the Poor.")

with ethics.

One other important source for the study of pre-Petrine ethics is the chronicles. One recurring theme in the chronicles which characterizes the ethical values of the medieval period is the principle of "brotherly love." This notion implied obedience to elders and harmony amongst men on both a political and a moral level. It called for unity and an end to conflict and the establishment of good social order. It also implied that all moral relationships were raised to the level of blood kinship. In the chronicles, it extended to all princes of the same generation. In other words, it expressed peaceful relations between princes.<sup>99</sup> As George Fedotov points out, the chronicle account of Iaroslav's death in 1054 provides an apt description of this concept:

My sons: have love between you, because you are brothers of the same father and mother; if you have love between yourselves, God will be in you and subject your enemies to you and you will live in peace; and if you live in hatred, in quarrels and altercations, you yourselves will perish and ruin the land of your fathers and grandfathers which they had acquired with great labours; dwell then in peace, obedient one brother to another.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>For an elaboration on these points, see Fedotov, I, pp. 281 - 83.

<sup>100</sup>Cited in Fedotov, I, p. 282.

The principle of "brotherly love" occurred in other works of medieval East Slavic literature. It was implied by Vladimir Monomakh to his sons and was an important theme in the celebrated *The Igor Tale*.<sup>101</sup> The defeat of the Rus'ians (led by Prince Igor Sviatoslavich) by the Polovtsian troops was attributed to the lack of unity amongst the Rus'ians. (Igor and three of his relatives set out to do battle without the consent and knowledge of Grand Prince Sviatoslav.) But the work ends on an optimistic note implying that it is through unity that the battle against the pagans can be won. Even in the Muscovite "ethical guide," the *Domostroi*, the need to love one's brothers is both implicit and explicit. This notion was also to serve as a theme in the works of writers in the post-medieval period.<sup>102</sup>

In summary, it is evident that a concern for ethical standards pervades several of the most significant works of

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<sup>101</sup>Tvorogov, "The Literature of Kievan Russia," p. 117 and pp. 140 - 42.

<sup>102</sup>As I will show, Gogol also endorsed this principle in his writings, which he may have gleaned from the chronicles. To be sure, Gogol read through a number of the old monuments. He turned to the chronicles when he was researching his history of the Ukraine and for his St. Petersburg history lectures. He claimed to have read Byzantine chronicles and the *Nestor Chronicle* (*The Primary Chronicle*), and requested from friends a copy of the *Kiev Chronicles*. (XI, 116) In his history notes he wrote about such figures as Iziaslav, Sviatopolk, Iaropolk and Mstislav. (IX, 37 - 73) (Gogol's view of the chronicles were both positive [see VIII, 279] and negative [see X, 284].)

early East Slavic literature. The writer's aim was to instruct people on what to do in order to be saved. Therefore, specific fundamental virtues and rules were incorporated time and again into the literary monuments of the Kievan and Muscovite periods. Of prime importance were the virtues of charity, repentance and humility. Fear of God and love for one's fellow man were also important requisites for achieving one's salvation.

The aspects of the pre-Petrine literary and cultural tradition discussed in this chapter were instrumental in shaping the pre-Petrine man's outlook. The medieval writer's vocation was deemed to be divinely inspired. His task was to guide people to the Right Path, to salvation. For the medieval Orthodox Slav, salvation meant the Kingdom of God, which, in turn, meant the Kingdom of Beauty. The concern for salvation also manifested itself in a preoccupation with "the last things." While the true Christian life could best be attained through monasticism, a system of ethics was to be followed by all. For a newly Christianized nation, the concern for the End was always accompanied by an abiding concern for the presence of the demonic in the world.

Nikolai Gogol shared these concerns of the medieval man. Also, as was the case with the medieval man, religion



played a significant role in Gogol's life. Gogol's religiosity has been the focus of a great deal of scholarly attention mainly because of his supposed religious crisis and conversion. Therefore, before examining the nature and extent to which these aspects of the pre-Petrine tradition are reflected in Gogol's thought and writings, first, it is worthwhile exploring the question of a decisive religious crisis in Gogol.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE QUESTION OF A DECISIVE RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN GOGOL

Gogol's friends and contemporaries always knew that Gogol was a religious man. Much of his correspondence reveals a religious and moral bent. However, it was the publication of *Selected Passages* that prompted many to question Gogol's religious views. It is an understatement to say that the book was poorly received when it first appeared in Russia. Few believed Gogol's claim that he had always wanted to help people and to do good. Rather, the book was seen as a disgrace and Gogol as "a traitor to the cause of humanity."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it was concluded that Gogol had either gone mad or had undergone some sort of religious crisis or spiritual transformation, and that *Selected Passages* was the result of his new religious fanaticism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Jesse Zeldin's "Introduction" in Nikolai Gogol, *Selected Passages From Correspondence With Friends*, translated by Jesse Zeldin (Nashville, 1969), p. xi. (Zeldin does not say who specifically referred to Gogol in this way.)

<sup>2</sup>On the reactions to *Selected Passages* at the time of its publication, see Paul Debreczeny, "Nikolay Gogol and His Contemporary Critics," in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society. New Series* Vol. 56 (1966), pp. 50 -

While today most scholars are somewhat more hesitant to refer to such a crisis, their reasons for this are as yet not well elaborated. Accordingly, I will present a representative selection of some of the most common views on this matter and then my own position. My aim is to show that Gogol did not change his views over the course of his life.<sup>3</sup>

Gogol's first biographer, P. A. Kulish, cited 1836 - 37 as a significant period in Gogol's religious "transformation." Kulish suggested that it was the news of Pushkin's death in 1837 that saw the beginning of a change in Gogol:

При жизни Пушкина Гоголь был одним человеком, после его смерти сделался другим.<sup>4</sup>

During Pushkin's lifetime, Gogol was one person; after his death he became another.

Kulish based his statement on a letter Gogol wrote to P. A. Pletnev from Rome, March 28, 1837. In the letter,

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61. One of the most outspoken opponents of the book was Vissarion Belinsky. His view that *Selected Passages* was a literary disgrace prevailed. In his famous Salzbrunn letter to Gogol, in short, Belinsky contended that many of Gogol's ideas were rubbish.

<sup>3</sup>I consider Gogol's religious and ethical views to be closely connected in that his morals or ethics were dictated by his faith.

<sup>4</sup>P. A. Kulish, *Opyt N. V. Gogolia, so vklucheniem do soroka ego pisem* (St. Petersburg, 1854), p. 48.

Gogol complains about his complete apathy for life because of the loss of Pushkin:

Все наслаждение моей жизни, все мое высшее наслаждение исчезло вместе с ним. Ничего не предпринимал я без его совета. Ни одна строка не писалась без того, чтобы я не воображал его пред собою [...] Несколько раз принимался я за перо --- и перо падало из рук моих.<sup>5</sup>

All the enjoyment of my life, my greatest pleasures have disappeared with his death. Nothing did I undertake without his advice. Not a single line was written without my imagining him before me [...] Several times I have tried to write, but the pen just fell from my hands.

The letter continues in the same vein. Kulish's opinion was widely accepted in nineteenth-century Gogolian scholarship, and, though to a lesser degree, has been endorsed in the twentieth century as well.<sup>6</sup>

Other critics have also seen 1836 - 37 as the period when Gogol "became more religious" and cite his reaction to the reception of his play *The Inspector General* as the crucial factor. For some this marked the beginning of

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<sup>5</sup>Cited in Kulish, *Opyt Gogolia*, p. 48. See also *Pss XI*, 88 - 89.

<sup>6</sup>Some doubt has been cast on the degree of intimacy and influence of Pushkin on Gogol. See, for example, V. V. Gippius, *Gogol*, (Leningrad, 1924; Reprint: Providence, 1971), p. 40. (Many people also feel that the death of Gogol's close friend, Iosif Vielgorsky, was also a trigger for deeper spiritual reflection. On this point, cf. also Ruth Sobel, *Gogol's Forgotten Book. Selected Passages and Its Contemporary Readers* (Washington, 1981), p. 61.)

Gogol's "religious tendency"<sup>7</sup> or of the "slow evolution" in his views.<sup>8</sup> When the play was first staged in 1836, although many praised it as an artistic *tour de force*, there were nevertheless some outcries from those who felt themselves indicted by its subject matter. For them, it hit too close to home. In a number of letters dated between April and May 1836, Gogol complained of the supposed abuse he received because of *The Inspector General*. Ironically, at the same time he was refusing to acknowledge any accolades of the play. Gogol felt that his play was not understood. It was largely seen by the public as a comedy rather than as a revolution in morality. Nevertheless, the reactions to the play, both positive and negative, convinced Gogol that his words were listened to, that their effect meant that he could influence, guide and teach people.<sup>9</sup> As Gogol said in a letter to his historian friend, M. P. Pogodin, the insults he had received were sent to him from Divine Providence as part of his education. He was going abroad because a heavenly will was guiding him. (XI, 45 - 46) One month after writing the letter to Pogodin, Gogol

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<sup>7</sup>This is the term used by Vsevolod Setchkarev in his *Gogol*, p. 48. Setchkarev nonetheless still sees a "crisis" as taking place, though later. See below.

<sup>8</sup>See Sobel, *Gogol's Forgotten Book*, p. 63, who argues that "the profound disappointment of what Gogol regarded as the fiasco of *The Government Inspector* [*The Inspector General*] brought about the slow evolution in Gogol's views."

<sup>9</sup>For an elaboration, see Setchkarev, *Gogol*, pp. 45 - 49.

left Russia for three years. Critics argue that Gogol entered a new phase at this time, one in which religion was to play the key role in his life and writings. As I shall show, however, this should not be viewed as a significant religious turning point in Gogol's life. Gogol's high expectations from the play and his subsequent despair that they were not met only prove that he was moralistic and didactic all along. Moreover, it is unlikely that at this time Gogol came to believe that he could guide people. In fact, he felt that he had failed and that his fellow countrymen had let him down.

Late-1840 - early-1841 is the other commonly cited date of Gogol's supposed religious crisis.<sup>10</sup> Sergei Aksakov suggested this period in his memoirs on Gogol. According to Aksakov, from 1841 there was a constant striving in Gogol to improve his spiritual self and to attain some religious direction. Aksakov based his conclusions on a letter he received from Gogol from Rome, dated December 28, 1840. In it Gogol wrote of his near-death illness and astonishing recovery, which he credited to God's miraculous powers. In particular, Aksakov focuses on the following words, which were puzzling to him, yet indicative of some change in Gogol:

[...] я рад всему, всему, что ни  
случается со мною в жизни, и как

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<sup>10</sup>cf. Sobel, *Gogol's Forgotten Book*, p. 57.

погляжу я только, к каким чудным  
пользам и благу вело меня то, что  
называют в свете неудачами, то  
растроганная душа моя не находит слов  
благодарить невидимую руку, ведущую  
меня.<sup>11</sup>

[...] I am glad for whatever happens to  
me in my life. And when I think of all  
the things in the world that people call  
unfortunate, and that these things have  
led to magnificent achievements and  
goodness for me, then my touched soul  
cannot find the words to thank the  
unseen hand leading me.

1840 - 41 was also the period considered by Vsevolod Setchkarev as a watershed for Gogol's transformation. His reasoning is as follows. In 1840 Gogol arrived in Vienna (en route to Rome) where he decided to take the waters at Marienbad as they were considered beneficial for certain ailments. In particular, he was suffering from extreme nervous anxiety accompanied by shortness of breath, insomnia, intestinal disorders and complete apathy. Gogol was convinced he was going to die up to the moment that he apparently had a supernatural experience. (Little is known of this visionary experience although Setchkarev contends that there are intimations of it in Gogol's correspondence.) After this supposed vision, Gogol is said to have made his decisive turn to religion. From this point on he felt that he was "one chosen, on whom a grace was bestowed".<sup>12</sup> He

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<sup>11</sup>Cited in Aksakov, *Istoriia moego znakovstva*, p. 46. See also Pss XI, 322.

<sup>12</sup>See Setchkarev, *Gogol*, pp. 62 - 63.

allegedly became convinced of his calling as a teacher and prophet.

Thus, despite slightly different views, two main periods have been proposed for the time of Gogol's religious "crisis" or transformation: 1836-37 and 1840-41.

Gogol departed for Europe in 1836 and remained abroad for much of the following decade. During this period his correspondence reveals a definite interest in religion and a concern for spirituality. (Though this was not new, in the eyes of some, these concerns constituted a new interest in religion.) In several of these letters, he speaks of the inspiration he had received from God or of the guidance he had gotten from Divine Providence. For example, in a letter to Pogodin, December 28, 1840, Gogol wrote that he planned to print the first volume of the continuation of *Dead Souls*, but only if it pleased the wonderful power of God who had resurrected him (XI, 325). Again referring to *Dead Souls*, three months later he wrote to Sergei Aksakov saying that he had received God's help, since: подобное внушение не происходит от человека (XI, 330) (such an inspiration does not just spring from a person.)

In August of the same year Gogol again assumes a prophet-like role in a letter to his childhood friend, A. S. Danilevsky:



Но слушай, теперь ты должен слушать  
моего слова, ибо вдвойне властно над  
тобою мое слово, и горе кому бы то ни  
было не слушающему моего слова [...]  
О, верь словам моим. Властью высшего  
облечено отныне мое слово. (XI, 342 -  
43)

Hear this: now you must listen to my  
word, for my word has a great power over  
you, and woe unto him, whomsoever he may  
be, who does not listen to my word [...]  
Oh, believe my words. Henceforth, my  
words shall be vested with the highest  
power.

(Gogol's tone in this passage is certainly reminiscent of  
the tone of admonition literature of the medieval period.)

More than two years later, his letters are still  
saturated with a similar religiously didactic tone. From  
Dusseldorf in 1843, Gogol wrote to N. M. Iazykov on the  
benefits of prayer. He insisted that prayer had to come  
from the soul. Only through prayer could one conquer the  
devil. (XII, 233 - 36) And in 1847, Gogol wrote to S. P.  
Shevyrev, explaining to him how he came to meet Christ:

Анализ над душой человека таким  
образом, каким его не производят  
другие люди, был причиной того, что я  
встретился с Христом, изумясь в нем  
прежде мудрости человеческой и  
неслыханному дотоле знанию души, а  
потом уже поклонясь божеству его.  
(XIII, 214)

Analyzing man's soul in a way others do  
not, I came to meet Christ. First, I  
was amazed at the human wisdom in Christ  
and the knowledge of the soul in Him,  
hitherto unknown. And then I worshipped  
His divinity.

The following year, in January of 1848, Gogol left on a  
pilgrimage to the Holy Land which he claimed he had to do

before his death.

These excerpts provide clear evidence of Gogol's firm religious convictions after 1837. Moreover, his messianic attitude illustrates his vision of himself as teacher and prophet. Similar to the ancient biblical prophets or the medieval writer, Gogol saw himself as one chosen to spread the Word, to instruct his fellow man. Scores of his letters until his death are written in a similar vein. He frequently mentioned God's will and intervention. He often prayed to God in his letters and asked others to do the same. However, in spite of the tone of the letters, one should be cautious in classifying Gogol's spirituality or his attitude towards religion at this time as the result of a religious crisis. And although it is quite possible that Gogol was deeply affected by the death of Pushkin or even by the public reaction to *The Inspector General*, to say that these incidents caused him to turn to religion or to undergo a religious crisis is an overstatement.

The truth of the matter is that religion was always an important part of Gogol's life. Although both dates suggested for a crisis were important times in Gogol's life, the religious views seen later in his life had always been a part of his basic outlook and were not brought about as the

result of some sort of religious crisis.<sup>13</sup>

Kulish's hypothesis that Gogol's crisis was brought on by Pushkin's death can be dispelled with a close examination of Gogol's correspondence in 1837. While Gogol's letter to Pletnev (cited by Kulish) is clearly indicative of Gogol's grief over Pushkin's death, there is nothing in the letter to indicate that a crisis or transformation was beginning to take place in Gogol. Indeed, on the same day Gogol wrote another letter, one to his mother, in which he described at length the beauty of Rome, Genoa and Florence, the climate, the architecture, and even the stars in the sky. He ends the letter by saying he must hurry to catch some sun. (XI, 89 - 90) Again, there is no sign of a transformation.

Two days later, March 30, 1837, Gogol wrote a letter to N. Ia. Prokopovich. In only one line of the letter does he refer to the loss he has suffered from Pushkin's death. (XI, 91) Most of the remainder of the letter is again devoted to

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<sup>13</sup>Vasilii Gippius also disputed the crisis theory. However, he felt that it was possible to speak of a "religious period" in Gogol's life beginning in the early 1840s. Gippius contends that severe melancholy was the catalyst for Gogol's religious period. See his *Gogol*, p. 169. Similarly, Konstantin Mochulskii saw a change (not a crisis, *per se*) in Gogol which he boiled down to Gogol's more earnest efforts to commune with the Lord later in his life. In spite of the change, Mochulskii did feel that Gogol was fairly consistent in his religious outlook throughout his life. See his *Dukhovnyi put' Gogolia* (Paris, 1934), esp. pp. 45 - 55. I most closely agree with Mochulskii and see a gradual "strengthening" in Gogol's religious outlook.

the splendours of Italy. And, again, there is no hint of even an incipient spiritual transformation.

In none of Gogol's letters written between March 30, 1837 and his last extant letter for that year, December 22, 1837, is there any indication of a transformation in his religious world-view taking place. Gogol does on occasion mention his grief for Pushkin. For example, to Prokopovich in September he writes that half of what amused him has now gone with the death of Pushkin. (XI, 110) And at the end of October, to Zhukovsky he writes that he was lucky to have had such a beautiful dream as Pushkin. (XI, 112) However, these pronouncements are nothing more than a man mourning the loss of a friend.<sup>14</sup> Pushkin's death does not appear to have been a catalyst for a significant spiritual transformation or crisis in Gogol, as has been suggested.

The other theory that the aftermath of the staging of *The Inspector General* precipitated Gogol's religious tendency is also not sound. As mentioned, Setchkarev suggests that the reactions to the play made Gogol feel that his words were sincerely listened to and that he would have to become more conscious of what he was to say and how he would say it. According to Setchkarev, Gogol apparently

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<sup>14</sup>Then again, as Professor Danilo Struk has rightly suggested to me, Gogol could have been posturing for effect as he so often did.

believed that the best way of collecting his thoughts would be from abroad: "He [Gogol] wanted to look at Russia from a distance, a distance that would clarify his thoughts about his new vocation."<sup>15</sup>

It could not simply have been the aftermath of *The Inspector General* that brought on Gogol's so-called religious period which coincided with his trip abroad. Although the reactions to the play likely affected Gogol negatively, months before the staging of the play, Gogol had decided he was going to leave Russia. He mentioned this to his mother in a letter on November 10, 1835. (X, 376) And even after the play had been staged, after the public's misapprehension of his play and the indignation of some critics, he wrote his mother saying that he was not sure when he would go abroad:

Насчет поездки моей за границу я еще не решил, но думаю, что это исполнится в этом году. (XI, 42)

Regarding my trip abroad, I still haven't made any decisions, but I think it will take place this year.

The letter was dated May 12, 1836. Gogol had not yet fled Russia to "rethink" his vocation.

Even after this date, there is little indication of a crisis. What we do see in many letters is a man with firm

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<sup>15</sup>Setchkarev, *Gogol*, p. 49.

intent to do good for society. In 1844, Gogol wrote the following lines to Danilevsky:

Я люблю добро, я ищу его и сгораю им  
но не люблю моих мерзостей и не держу  
их, как мои герои. Я воюю с ними и  
буду воевать и изгоню их, и мне в этом  
поможет Бог.<sup>16</sup>

I love the Good. I search for it and  
burn for it. But I do not love the  
loathesome aspects of myself and do not  
hold on to them as my heroes. I am at  
war with them, and will be at war with  
them and will drive them out. And God  
will help me with this.

Such an idealistic view was also expressed to Shevyrev in 1847. Gogol claimed that he loved the Good more than he loved himself: любовь к добру все таки у меня сильнее чем любовь к собственной личности моей. (XIII, 315) Such testimonials have been used to support the notion of a crisis taking place in the 1840s.

Gogol's commitment to do good is also central to *Selected Passages*, which he started in 1845. His philanthropic aspirations expressed in his book (and his correspondence) should be seen as Gogol's expression of how he came to view art, rather than as a crisis. As Victor Terras has rightly pointed out, "Gogol was always seeking to integrate his philosophy of art with his philosophy of life,

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<sup>16</sup>Cited in Marianna Bogoiavlenskaia, *K razvitiu i vospriiatiiu religioznoi mysli Gogolia* (n.p., 1959), p. 20. I have not been able to locate this letter in Gogol's correspondence.

and specifically with his religious ethics."<sup>17</sup> His attempt, therefore, to integrate his philosophies led to a Christian conception of art. He was interested in its moral effects.<sup>18</sup> In other words, Gogol's religious, ethical and aesthetic views were becoming unified. For Gogol, art came to represent the road to Christ.<sup>19</sup> Gogol spells this out in a letter to Zhukovsky, January 10, 1848:

Оно (исскуство) должно быть свято --- оно уже стало *главным* и *первым* в моей жизни, а все прочее *вторым*. (XIV, 34)

The purpose of art should be sacred --- this became what is *first* and *central* in my life. Everything else is *secondary*.

Moreover, Gogol believed that a writer would be punished [if]:

если от сочинений его не распространится какая-нибудь польза душе и не останется от него ничего в поучение людям. (VIII, 221)

if from his writings some benefit for the soul were not spread and if no lessons to people remained.

It is in this regard that Gogol was very much like the medieval man. Like the medieval writer, he, too, wished to be the purveyor of the Truth. He sought personal salvation

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<sup>17</sup>Terras, *Belinskij and Russian Literary Criticism*, p. 27.

<sup>18</sup>As Gippius puts it, Gogol was aspiring to be an "artist-moralist" and not just an "artist and a moralist." See his *Gogol*, p. 35.

<sup>19</sup>Terras, *Belinskij and Russian Literary Criticism*, p. 27.

and also hoped to teach others how to be saved. This became his sole purpose in life. This was his lifelong preoccupation (and not the result of a crisis.) It had always been his mission in life to "spread some benefit for the soul" through his writings. Indeed, Gogol himself claimed that he had not changed. As he wrote to Sergei Aksakov from Naples on January 20, 1847:

Вновь повторяю еще раз, что вы в заблуждении, подозревая во мне какое-то новое направление. От ранней юности моей у меня была одна дорога, по которой иду. (XIII, 186)

Again I repeat to you once more that you are mistaken in suspecting in me any kind of new direction [in my thoughts]. From my early youth I have held to one road, along which I go.

A crisis implies a change or transformation. Therefore, if Gogol had in fact undergone a crisis, there should be little or no indication earlier in his life (pre-1836, the first crisis date) of any firm religious beliefs and moral convictions, such as his overwhelming need to do good for humanity, both as a person and as a writer. It is, therefore, necessary to examine Gogol's early life and work to see whether his views as a young writer were essentially the same as his views as a mature artist. One must look to see if there is continuity, (though in matter of degree), or a radical change.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>For biographical information on Gogol I have relied on a combination of the following works: Aksakov (1960); Erlich (1969); Gippius (1924); Kulish (1854);



By far, the bulk of Gogol's correspondence is to his mother.<sup>21</sup> The early extant letters written from his schooldays in Nezhin are simplistic and infantile. They are filled with platitudes and requests for money and books. The first indication in Gogol's correspondence of any real expression of faith appears when he was sixteen in a letter to his mother about his father's death in 1825. Gogol gives credit to God for saving him from committing suicide over the death of his father. Because of the Almighty, he had found the strength to go on. (X, 53) The letter is slightly melodramatic --- it seems unlikely that Gogol would have killed himself over the death of his father, a man he was never that close to --- but it is indicative of a sixteen-year-old boy with some religious beliefs, if we accept Gogol's claim to finding comfort in his faith in the Almighty.<sup>22</sup>

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Magarshack (1957); Mochulskii (1934); Nabokov (1944); Setchkarev (1965); Shenrok (1892-98); Stilman (1990); and Veresaev (1933). See the bibliography for full citations. Only specific references will be footnoted.

<sup>21</sup>This is especially the case in the early years. Although one must handle these letters with care, many of the thoughts together with the sanctimonious tone and didactic strain of these early letters can also be seen in Gogol's later correspondence.

<sup>22</sup>Although the second half of the letter is frivolous in content, it is not unthinkable for Gogol to have turned to God at time when a family member had died.

A few other letters from the Nezhin period provide evidence of a young man with solid moral convictions. At this time we start to see hints of what we find in later letters, namely, Gogol's desire to do good for his country and for humanity. He felt that getting a job in the Department of Justice would help him to achieve his aims. At eighteen, Gogol expressed this desire to his uncle:

[...] с самых лет почти непонимания, я пламенел неугасимую ревностью сделать жизнь свою нужною для блага государства [...] что здесь только я могу быть благодеянием, здесь только буду истинно полезен для человечества. (X, 111 - 12)

[...] from my very childhood when I could understand almost nothing, I have burned with the inextinguishable zeal to make my life useful for the good of the state [...] that only here can I be of benefit, only here will I be truly useful to humanity.

And again, the following year he wrote to his mother stating what he saw to be his destiny:

[...] верьте только, что всегда чувства благодарные наполняют меня, что никогда не унижался я в душе и что я всю жизнь свою обрек благу [...] я слишком много знаю людей, чтобы быть мечтателем. [...] Вы увидите, что со временем за все их худые дела я буду в состоянии заплатить благодеяниями, потому что зло их мне обратилось в добро. (X, 123)

[...] believe only that grateful feelings always fill me, that I have never debased myself in my soul and that I have directed my whole life towards the Good. [...] I know people too well to be a dreamer [...] You will see that with time I will be able to pay for all their bad deeds with good ones, because in me their evil turned to good.

This is but one example in a series of subsequent letters in which Gogol assumes a somewhat sanctimonious air. The fact that he believed that the evil of others would turn to good in him suggests that he considered himself to be on a higher spiritual plane than the average man.

After Nezhin, Gogol left for St. Petersburg via Vasilevka. The year was 1828. He took with him a work-in-progress, a lengthy romantic poem entitled *Hanz Kiuchelgarten*, which he published under the pseudonym V. Alov.

*Hanz Kiuchelgarten* was considered a complete failure for many reasons: its rhyme is uneven; its plot is shallow and its language is inflated. Despite the bad reviews it received at the time of its publication, the poem has been seen as significant for two reasons. First, many critics have pointed to elements in it that can be seen in the later, more mature Gogol. Second, *Hanz Kiuchelgarten* is seen as being semi-autobiographical and thus provides some insight into Gogol's views on life in the late 1820s.

The work tells of a young man who goes out into the world seeking adventure and escape from his peaceful, but mundane life. After wandering aimlessly, he returns to his village and marries Luisa, the girl of his dreams. Gogol,

like Hanz, also embarked on a voyage to find himself. The first time he did this was after his poem's failure. And although Gogol did return to Russia, he, unlike Hanz, did not do so to settle down. The most striking resemblance between Gogol and his hero can be found in scene 17 of the poem in which Gogol describes Hanz's thoughts. In this scene Hanz reflects on life and mankind:

О чем же думы крепки те?  
 Дивится сам он суете:  
 Как был измучен он судьбою;  
 И зло смеется над собою,  
 Что поверял своей мечтой  
 Свет ненавистный, слабоумной;  
 Что задивился в блеск пустой  
 Своей душою неразумной;  
 Что, не колеблясь, смело он  
 Сим людям кинулся в объятья  
 И, околдован, охмелен,  
 В их злые верил предприятия.

[...] Но мысль, и крепка и бодра,  
 Его одна объемлет, мучит  
 Желаньем блага и добра;  
 Его трудам великим учит.  
 Для них он жизни не щадит. (I, 93 - 95)

What can his deep thoughts be?  
 He himself marvels at the vanity [of  
 life]:  
 How he was tormented by fate.  
 He mercilessly laughs at himself.  
 That in his dreams he trusted  
 A world so hateful and weak-minded,  
 That he was carried away by the false  
 glow [of high society]  
 By his foolish soul.  
 And how, unswerving, boldly he  
 Embraced one kind of world.  
 And, then, spellbound, intoxicated,  
 He shared in their evil dealings.

[...] But one thought, both strong and  
 cheerful  
 Weighs on him:  
 The desire for righteousness and good  
 Inspires him towards achieving great

things,  
For which his life he will not spare.

There is little doubt that Hanz was a spokesman for Gogol's own philosophies. Gogol, too, felt that he could remedy the evil in man, (by paying for people's bad deeds with good ones.) Gogol, too, wished to do good for mankind. As mentioned, he had expressed such aspirations even earlier to his uncle. They were, therefore, a part of his moral and ethical values from his teenage years onwards. However, *Hanz Kiuchelgarten's* failure and Gogol's subsequent burning of the existing copies of the poem, plus the fact that it was written under a pseudonym, likely distracted his critics and contemporaries from noticing this testimony to his unswerving religious and moral outlook.

After the fiasco surrounding *Hanz Kiuchelgarten*, Gogol quickly left Russia. He explained his urgent need to leave the country in a letter to his mother. God was directing his path:

Он (Бог) указал мне путь в землю чуждую, чтобы там воспитал свои страсти в тишине, в уединении, в шуме вечного труда и деятельности, чтобы я сам по скользким ступеням поднялся на высшую, откуда бы был в состоянии рассеивать благо и работать на пользу мира. (X, 146)

He has pointed out to me the road to a foreign land in order for me to train my passions in silence, in seclusion, deeply involved in the sound of eternal work and activity, so that I myself would go up the slippery steps to the highest level, whence I would be in a

position to spread good and to work for the benefit of the world.

Although one may be reluctant to accept Gogol's words to his mother *sensu stricto*, the tone of this letter is again reminiscent of his earlier philanthropic commitment to help mankind. Though humiliated, Gogol was still determined in his beliefs. God was showing him the way.

In the early-1830s, Gogol's religious and ethical views still had not changed. He continued to assume the role of a prophet and teacher as evidenced in the following letter written to his mother in 1833:

Я вижу яснее и лучше многое, нежели другие. [...] У меня болит сердце, когда я вижу, как заблуждаются люди. Толкуют о добродетели, о Боге, и между тем не делают ничего. Хотел бы, кажется, помочь им, но редкие, редкие из них имеют светлый природный ум, чтобы увидеть истину моих слов. (X, 283).

I see many things more clearly and better than others. [...] My heart aches when I see how people go astray. They talk about virtue and God; meanwhile, they do nothing. I think I would like to help them, but very few of them have the bright and innate mind to see the truth of my words.

His desire to help the society he felt had gone astray would burn within him for the next decade and a half until it culminated in the writing of *Selected Passages*.

Although Gogol's creative work of the early- and mid-

thirties does not always reveal an obvious or overt religious or moral bent or preoccupation, (as we shall see), there is no reason to assume from many of his writings that he was not a man with relatively well-defined religious and moral convictions. He was always interested in the search for the Good and Beauty. He exposed what he saw to be the evil in the world, and he encouraged all to live with passion for the Good and not to judge others.

In the 1840s, one witnesses the same religious and moral outlook in Gogol. Based on Gogol's letters, especially with regard to *Dead Souls*, critics believed that he had been "transformed" as he continuously reiterated that he had come to meet Christ. His creative work, such as his second (more "religious") version of *The Portrait*, supported this belief. But these are merely examples of someone who was maturing, and developing his religious and ethical world views --- views that he had always had. They were always evident in Gogol's writings prior to the 1840s. As mentioned, at nineteen, Gogol planned to direct his life to the Good (X, 123); at twenty, God was pointing him the way (X, 146). In the mid-thirties, Divine Providence was educating him (XI, 49) and in the late-thirties, a Heavenly Will was directing his path (XI, 46). Gogol may have had a personal crisis which affected him deeply and even strengthened his religious orientation, but he did not have a religious crisis that propelled him in a wholly new

direction. From his early youth he had travelled the same road, never straying, never doubting his beliefs. The subsequent chapters shall further support this viewpoint and show that much of Gogol's outlook stemmed from the medieval tradition in which he was so steeped.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE PRE-PETRINE TRADITION IN GOGOL'S CREATIVE WRITING

The first half of the 1830s was a highly productive time in Gogol's artistic career. Apart from the chapter and fragments of his historical novel, *The Hetman* (1830 - 32), and two short essays, *Woman* (1831) and *Boris Godunov. A Long Poem by Pushkin* (1831; published in 1881), he produced his celebrated two-volume *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* between 1831 - 32. This was followed simultaneously by his *Mirgorod* cycle and *Arabesques*, both published in 1835. One of Gogol's least known works, *The Carriage*, and one of his best known stories, *The Nose*, then appeared in 1836. This was also the year his famous play *The Inspector General* was published. Six years later he came out with a revised version of *The Portrait*, *The Overcoat*, and his masterpiece, *Dead Souls, Part I*. While there are definite elements of romanticism in these works, many of them also betray Gogol's familiarity with and indebtedness to the medieval tradition. In this chapter I examine Gogol's creative writings before his final book, *Selected Passages*, in the light of the

aspects of the medieval tradition outlined in chapter two.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.1. The Role of the Writer/Artist

As mentioned, the primary goal of the medieval writer was to spread the Truth, and in doing so, he had to adhere to the correct doctrine (*orthodoxy*) and to correct writing (*orthography*). His work was both didactic and moralizing. For the nineteenth-century romantic writers, such as Gogol, creativity was of much greater importance than conformity. Nevertheless, in Gogol's writing there is evidence that he endorsed the philosophy of the medieval writer. While maintaining his creativity, at the same time he strove to be didactic and moralizing. And just as the medieval writer believed in the supremacy and sanctity of the word, so, too, did Gogol. He articulated this view in his major philosophic work, *Selected Passages*, in which he writes,

Обращаться со словом нужно честно. Оно  
есть высший подарок Бога человеку.  
(VIII, 231)

The word must be treated with honesty.  
It is the highest gift of God to man.

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<sup>1</sup>The present chapter does not pretend to exhaustiveness. Rather, I aim to show that in a general way the various aspects of the medieval tradition discussed in chapter two were always a part of Gogol's work and that what he was to write in *Selected Passages* was always a part of his world-view. *Selected Passages* is discussed separately in chapter five.

He also contended that only sacred words could be used for sacred subjects and considered corrupt words to be a heresy. (VIII, 232) But even in his earlier works, these ideas are entrenched. Moreover, like the medieval writer, Gogol also believed in the divine calling of the artist-poet. It was the artist's duty to further the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Gogol's views on the word and the role of the artist are explicitly expressed in *Arabesques* in an article devoted to Pushkin, entitled "A Few Words About Pushkin." He believed that a true poet had to be the "transmitter" of the truth if he were to remain faithful to his calling, and that all poets have a choice: they can make money by speaking passionately about nothing, or they can maintain their integrity and speak the truth. The true poet must not be superficial. He must be able to extract the unusual truth, to remain loyal to the truth. Gogol considered a true poet to be immense in the sense that the poet's vocation was a lofty calling. The poet's words, therefore, were also to be "immense" (neob"iatno). The poet has to be lofty (vysokii) when his theme is lofty, mordant (rezkii), when his theme is mordant. (VIII, 57)

For Gogol, these attributes made Pushkin a great poet. Pushkin spoke from the soul. By writing from the soul, he was able to describe the soul of the nation. Each word

Pushkin wrote was so carefully chosen that it conveyed his exact meaning. The medieval writer also strove to write with precision, to convey the truth. Although Gogol does not say that Pushkin was like the medieval writer, he suggests that the two shared the same attribute --- the integrity to write the truth. For this reason Gogol considered Pushkin to be an exceptional phenomenon and truly Russian. (VIII, 53) Like the other romantic writers, Gogol believed in the primacy of feeling over intellect. Nevertheless, his views on a true poet's place and function in society are similar to the medieval man's notion of the writer's vocation.

In 1842 Gogol published *Dead Souls, Part I*, which he had been working on for seven years. In his *magnum opus* he again stresses the importance of the writer's vocation. The writer is a sage, a seer. A true writer's powers are divine. He is above all others:

[...] счастлив писатель, который не изменял ни разу возвышенного строя своей лиры, не спускался с вершины своей к бедным, ничтожным своим собратям и, не касаясь земли, весь повергался в свои далеко отторгнутые от нее и возвеличенные образы [...] нет равного ему в силе --- он Бог! (VI, 133 - 34)

[...] happy is the writer who has not even once changed the elevated pitch of his lyre, who has never descended from his summit to his poor, insignificant brethren, and who, without touching the earth, has plunged himself completely into his exalted images, far removed from that earth [...] There is nothing

equal in power to him --- he is God!<sup>2</sup>

It is evident from this well-known passage that by the time Gogol wrote his masterpiece, his views on the writer had come to include the writer's religious and universal significance: he was equal to God. While the writer's exalted position as seer or prophet was a belief held by the romantic writers, this divine calling of the writer-poet was also a part of the medieval world-view. The medieval writer was responsible for guiding man to the path of salvation. He strove to inspire and promote the Truth and therefore his job was considered to be loftier than others. The romantics incorporated this idealized vision of the writer into their outlook. However, Gogol went a step further than his medieval counterparts would have dared to go. Though the medieval writer believed that he was inspired by God, he would never have equated himself to God, which, undoubtedly, would have been considered as a heresy.

Gogol's views on the role of the writer are similar to his views on the role of the artist (i.e., painter), which he explores in his short story *The Portrait*. The story was first published in 1835 in *Arabesques* and revised in 1842. Although the first version has received less critical attention than the second, it is important for its insight

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<sup>2</sup>I have referred to the Guernsey translation of *Dead Souls* (see bibliography) and made changes where I felt it was necessary.

into Gogol's pre-1836 views on the interrelation between art and religion, as well as on his views on the artist's vocation. The story is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the power of art over man. The second part explains how the portrait came to be so powerfully seductive and how one could try to break away from its demonic influence.

As in "A Few Words About Pushkin," in *The Portrait* Gogol shows that a true artist must never prostitute his talent for fame and fortune. Chertkov's fate is testimony to this. He is seduced by the hopes of fame and riches, compromises his integrity, falls apart, and eventually dies an evil death. Part of his being seduced is shown through Gogol's frequent use of the word "involuntary" (*nevol'no*) in the story.<sup>3</sup> The narrator tells us that Chertkov was initially repulsed by pretentious art and interested only in art that had a higher level of meaning. Seeing some low grade art in a shop window one day, he was "seized by an *involuntary* state of meditation," (*НЕВОЛЬНО* овладело им размышление) (III, 402) wondering who would buy such works. Looking at the art work, he assumed that "the hands of their creators had been *involuntarily* guided" (*НЕВОЛЬНО*, водило рукою их творцов). (III, 403) The portrait caused "a slight shiver to *involuntarily* run through his body"

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<sup>3</sup>All italics in this paragraph are mine.

(легкая дрожь *НЕВОЛЬНО* пробежала по его телу). (III, 407) And although he told himself not to look at the portrait, "his head turned *involuntarily* towards it" (но голова его *НЕВОЛЬНО* к нему обращалась), but then he "*involuntarily* covered his eyes with his hand" (*НЕВОЛЬНО* закрыл свои глаза рукою.) (III, 408) He had no control over its seductive influence. When Chertkov was painting a young model, "under his brush the face in the portrait seemed *involuntarily* to take on a certain colour" (под кистью его лицо портрета как будто *НЕВОЛЬНО* приобретало тот колорит.) (III, 408) After Chertkov's unscrupulous deeds, he tried to produce a great work similar to the one he had seen, but "his brush *involuntarily* turned to hackneyed forms" (кисть его *НЕВОЛЬНО* обращалась к затверженным формам.) (III, 423) It was too late; he had already sacrificed his integrity.

Gogol's frequent use of *nevol'no* (or its derivative) is not by accident. It is used to emphasize the lack of willpower that Chertkov has when seduced by the power of art recruited in the service of evil. He most frequently and "*involuntarily*" looked at the artwork because of its demonic power. The eyes in the portrait captivated and lured him, implying that as art is seductive, so, too, is the devil who lures people "*involuntarily*." The involuntary fascination with the portrait turned out to be more powerful than art itself. Here Gogol is showing how beauty can be disguised

as evil. If Chertkov had remained true to himself and maintained his integrity as an artist, his fate may have been different. He might have been able to resist the seduction of becoming rich, (i.e., evil) and continued to pursue true art, (i.e., beauty). Not remaining true to his calling led to Chertkov's downfall.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1835 version of the story the narrator's father avoided a fate like Chertkov's by taking monastic vows. Although it is unclear whether he did this in order to maintain his integrity as an artist, in the 1842 version his motives are clearer. He did so to regain his integrity. Initially he was seduced by evil, but, eventually, sought redemption.

The narrator's father's efforts to regain his integrity to a degree corresponds to a commentary written by St. John Chrysostom on the biblical figure Job. Chrysostom's commentary on Job has been succinctly put forth by Rosemarie Jenness.<sup>5</sup> It is worth quoting the following excerpt from

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<sup>4</sup>As we shall see, earlier on in Gogol's writing career, he seemed to have been convinced that in creating and conveying beauty, the divine could touch the hearts of man. Gradually, as he became preoccupied with the demonic, this view changed. He came to believe that evil could be disguised as beauty. This version of *The Portrait* shows that he felt evil was seeking to pervert beauty to its own ends.

<sup>5</sup>Rosemarie K. Jenness, *Gogol's Aesthetics Compared to Major Elements of German Romanticism* (New York, 1995), p. 28. Jenness presents an interesting study comparing



her study:

John (Chrysostom) emphasizes that Job is a man with a beautiful soul, a righteous one amidst corruption. A corrupted life is a life spent in darkness, while a righteous life leads to light and the knowledge of God. Job made progress on the path toward spiritual growth as a result of being stricken with great misfortunes and suffering. At the end of his trial, he not only hears the words of God, but also sees Him with his eyes. Seeing the light, he knows God and resists the sinister attacks of the devil.

Of course, unlike the narrator's father, Job was an innocent victim and his plight was not the result of his own transgressions. Nevertheless, there are definite similarities between Job (based on Chrysostom's commentary) and the narrator's father in Gogol's *The Portrait*. The narrator's father was a remarkable man, humble and saintly. Like Job, he, too, lived amidst corruption. And like Job, the narrator's father also suffered several tragedies. His wife and two children died suddenly. This led him to enter a monastery where he sought out and experienced unfathomable suffering and practiced self-abnegation, as did other saints before him. Although we are not told that the narrator's father had a divine revelation, as did Job, after secluding himself for over a year to paint the birth of Christ, he produced a work so magnificent that it was believed that it could only have been done with the aid of holy and divine

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Chrysostom's commentary on the *Book of Job* to Gogol's *The Inspector General*.

power.

It is possible that Gogol modelled his character on Job, based on Chrysostom's commentary, especially if we consider how much Gogol valued the Church Father's writings. He encouraged everyone to acquaint themselves with Chrysostom's work:

Златоуст [...] старался быть особенно доступным к понятиям человека простого и грубого и говорит таким живым языком о предметах нужных и даже очень высоких. [...] Возьми Златоуста и читай его вместе с твоим священником, и притом с карандашом в руке, чтобы отмечать тут же все такие места. [...] И эти самые места пусть он скажет народу. (VIII, 326 - 27)

He [Chrysostom] tried to be especially accessible to the understanding of the simple everyday man. He speaks in such a vivid language about necessary and even very lofty subjects. [...] Take up Chrysostom and read him with your priest, with a pencil in hand, so as to mark all these passages right away. [...] And let him tell the people these very passages.

In the closing paragraphs of Gogol's story, the narrator talks about the integrity of the artist and the value of a true work of art:

Намек о божественном, небесном рае заключен для человека в искусстве, и потому одному оно уже выше всего. И во сколько раз торжественный покой выше всякого волнения мирского, во столько раз выше всего что ни есть на свете, высокое создание искусства. (III, 135)

A hint to man of God's heavenly paradise is found in art, and it is for this reason that art is higher than all else.

And as many times as a life spent in triumphant peace is higher than a life spent in earthly turmoil, so much is the lofty creation of art higher than anything else on earth.

The narrator is referring to his father (who spent his last days contemplating God) as well as to his father's work. Herein lies the main similarity between the narrator's father and Job: they both had come to know God and were therefore able to resist Satan's subsequent evil powers.

It is clear from the narrator's comments in *The Portrait* that Gogol believed that the artist's role, as the writer's, was of paramount importance. Furthermore, the supreme value Gogol placed on art shows that he believed it to be divinely inspired: true art could contain "a hint of heaven." In this sense Gogol shows a connection to the medieval way of thinking. A true artist worked at furthering the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven by guiding people towards the Truth. Only by coming to know Christ, (as did the narrator's father and Job), could this task be accomplished. Only by maintaining his integrity, could the artist be the purveyor of the Truth.

Gogol shows that there are two "artist-life" patterns at work in *The Portrait*. One is Temptation, Fall and Damnation. This was the path taken by Chertkov. The other is Temptation, Fall, Repentance and Salvation. This pattern was followed by the narrator's father. For Gogol, who

believed that "a life spent in triumphant peace was higher than one spent in earthly turmoil" (cf. III, 135), it is clear which end result he wished for all to choose.

In 1846, six years before his death, Gogol wrote that he believed that one must accept and live according to one's station in life. This, he believed, was preordained by God. Envy of another person's position in life was the source of evil:

Всякому теперь кажется, что он мог бы наделать много добра на месте и в должности другого, и только не может сделать его в своей должности. Это причина всех зол. Нужно подумать теперь о том всем нам, как на своем собственном месте сделать добро. Поверьте, что Бог не даром повелел каждому быть на том месте, на котором он теперь стоит. (VIII, 225)

It seems to everyone now that he could do much good in the place and position of another, and not in his present position. This is the reason for all evils. It is necessary for all of us to think how we can do good in the place we are in now. Believe [me], it is not for nothing that God ordered everyone to be in the place in which he now occupies.

Gogol reiterates this message in his *An Author's Confession* in which he says that even beggars or prisoners who accept their lot have an advantage over those who do not accept their place in life. At least the prisoner and the beggar know what to take from the law of Christ. By serving their place in the earthly state, they would be able to fulfil and

serve the sovereign in the heavenly state.<sup>6</sup> (VIII, 462) One can infer, therefore, that for Gogol, an artist was an artist because this was something preordained by God. He was to fulfil his duty to the best of his ability. It was his "place," so to speak. This is certainly what Gogol believed of himself.

Robert Maguire has convincingly argued that the notion of having one's "place" in life is an integral part of the Neoplatonic tradition within Eastern Orthodoxy.<sup>7</sup> This notion is to be found in the religious tradition of most Eastern spiritual writers and extends back to the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, a sixth-century Greek mystical writer, "who saw the world structured as a divine hierarchy in which God provides what is due to all according to one's needs."<sup>8</sup> Although, as Maguire points out, we do not know whether Pseudo-Dionysius's writings directly influenced Gogol's thought and writings, there are "striking parallels of language and thought" between the two writers which suggest that Gogol's world-view was steeped in medieval Eastern theology.<sup>9</sup> Maguire's theory arguably suggests that Gogol's views on one's place in life stemmed

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<sup>6</sup>cf. Maguire, *Exploring Gogol*, p. 85.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p. 86.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, pp. 85 - 6.

from this earlier tradition. Thus, Gogol not only believed that his profession as a writer was of a high calling, he also believed it was preordained by God.

Two fundamental aspects of the medieval writer's view of his role are apparent in Gogol's creative writings throughout his life: 1) the medieval writer's duty was a lofty calling because he was to serve as the transmitter of the Truth; 2) the writer's place or role in the world was preordained by God, (as were all stations in life.)<sup>10</sup> The first aspect was endorsed by the romantics but did not originate from romanticism. Gogol's insistence on the artist's maintaining his integrity as well as his view of the artist's power and of the power of the word were beliefs rooted in the medieval tradition. The second aspect, also part of medieval Eastern theology, was an integral part of Gogol's world-view, which he likely patterned after the writings of the early Church Fathers. As in the medieval tradition, for Gogol, the writer-poet and artist were fulfilling their roles which were divinely inspired and preordained by God. Thus, Gogol's vision of the writer and his word, while enhanced by the spirit of romanticism, was basically formed by an earlier literary tradition.

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<sup>10</sup>However, the writer's preordained place was of a higher, more vital and important role than most others.

#### 4.2. The Monastic Ideal

The medieval man believed that the surest way to a full Christian life was through monasticism. Gogol held a similar belief. He frequently mentioned his desire to become a monk, stating that there was no higher destiny on earth.<sup>11</sup> Echoing the monastic ideal and its striving for fuller awareness, he called for all to submit and humble themselves before Christ. (VIII, 349 - 50) He also endorsed the monastic ideals of poverty, chastity and obedience, the so-called evangelical counsels. A few years before his death, Gogol completed his *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy* (1845 -47), (published posthumously in 1857.) The work is a description and explanation of the liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox Church based partly on Gogol's study of Orthodox Christianity and its literature. One sees in the work the reassertion of the monastic belief that there was no other path in life except through Christ. Though it is not clear to what extent *Meditations* was original and to what extent it was derivative, Gogol likely wrote the book with the hope that it would serve as a guide to help his fellow countrymen find this path. However, many of his views on Christianity and monasticism, which were rooted in the early Christian

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<sup>11</sup>See, for instance, his letter to N. M. Iazykov, February 10th, 1842 in *Pss XII*, 34 - 35. (As we will see, Gogol reiterates this statement in *Selected Passages*.)

tradition, are also found in some of his creative works before his *Meditations*.

One of Gogol's best-known stories, *The Overcoat*, for example, has been interpreted in the context of early monasticism. As noted, F. C. Driessen was the first to suggest that a legend about Acacius, a sixth-century Orthodox saint, may have actually been the source of Gogol's story. According to the legend, Saint Acacius died with humility after repeated abuse from his evil elder. The elder was haunted by the death and heard Acacius' voice from beyond the grave saying, "I am not dead, for it is impossible for one who is a doer of obedience to die."<sup>12</sup> While my purpose is not to prove or disprove this theory, I shall examine the function of certain religious motifs in Gogol's story in relation to the early Orthodox Slavic monastic tradition and to Gogol's own religious convictions.

Whether or not one endorses the theory that Gogol modelled his hero, Akaky Akakievich,<sup>13</sup> after a saint (or a monk), Akaky's behaviour, particularly his incessant and diligent copying, does remind one of the notion of labour as

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<sup>12</sup>Driessen, *Gogol As A Short-Story Writer*, p. 194.

<sup>13</sup>The well-known resemblance of this name to the Russian word *kaka* (feces) has frequently been pointed out. It is worth noting that the Greek word, *akakos*, meaning "innocence" may also have been Gogol's intention. See Zeldin, *Gogol's Quest*, p. 207.



an *opus dei* and of the staunch prayers of one devoted to God. Because of Akaky's extreme humility and obedience, he is treated with derision by his colleagues. One day he could take no more and asked his co-workers why they insulted him. This affected one young man more than the others:

[...] представлялся ему низенький чиновник с лысинкою на лбу, со своими проникающими словами: - оставьте меня, зачем вы меня обижаете - и в этих проникающих словах звенели другие слова: - я брат твой. - И закрывал себя рукою бедный молодой человек, и много раз содрогался он потом на веку своем, видя, как много в человеке бесчеловечья [...](III, 144)

[...] an image of the humble clerk [Akaky] with a bald patch on his head appeared before him [the young co-worker] with his penetrating words: "Leave me alone! Why do you insult me?" And in these penetrating words, other words rang out: "I am your brother." And the poor young man hid his face in his hands and many times afterwards in his life he shuddered, seeing how much inhumanity there was in man [...]<sup>14</sup>

Akaky could not understand why he was ridiculed for he considered everyone to be his brother. In a monastic community all monks live as brethren. Akaky expected this, but he realized this was not being carried out. Moreover, the young co-worker's reaction shows that he, too, felt that brotherly love was lacking in the world.

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<sup>14</sup>I have referred to the Kent translation of *The Overcoat* (see bibliography) and made changes where I felt necessary. With good reason, Setchkarev refers to this quote as "Gogol's famous humane passage." See his *Gogol*, p. 222.

At age nineteen Gogol wrote to his mother about the bad deeds he saw in man. (X, 123) Years later, in *Selected Passages*, he urged all men to live like brothers in order to rid the world of inhumanity. And in *An Author's Confession*, Gogol's own words over the criticism he had received for *Selected Passages* resemble those of the young clerk. He asked how others could judge him for writing his book when no one is above judgement. Before judging or accusing anyone, he says, we should all ask ourselves if we are not mistaken, for we are also human. (VIII, 466) Thus, the young clerk's reaction to Akaky's statement most likely expressed Gogol's own religious and ethical views that everyone must unite as spiritual brothers and rid the world of its inhumanity.

When Akaky was saving money to pay for his new overcoat, he deprived himself of many basic needs, paralleling a monk's ascetic practices. The deprivations were nothing to him --- he even got used to being hungry --- because the thoughts of his new overcoat came to be a "spiritual nourishment" (*on pitalsia dukhovno*) (III, 154) for him. Like a monk who would meditate in an attempt to commune with the Lord, Akaky meditated on the subject of his overcoat. This made him feel more alive and strong-willed. He also became more absent-minded. He was no longer aware

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of his surroundings when he was meditating.

But here, Akaky's behaviour departs from a monk's. For a monk, spiritual nourishment would come from his belief in God. For Akaky, thoughts of his overcoat were his spiritual nourishment. His meditation and devotion were for something physical. His was not a faith in a higher power. It was a faith in a "higher" thing. When Akaky finally obtained his new coat, his colleagues congratulated him and told him to sprinkle it. The object of his desire was to be "baptized," so to speak, and not Akaky himself. This was the most triumphant day of Akaky's life. His sacrificial acts had paid off.

Once Akaky had obtained his new coat, he began to change. He became pompous and arrogant, proud of his new look in his new coat. He attends a party where he indulges in veal, salads, pastries, pies and champagne --- quite the change from a man who had recently deprived himself of the basics. In a monastic sense, Akaky had fallen from grace. The devil had entered his life in the form of covetousness and pride. Indeed, Akaky had met the devil, represented in Gogol's story by the tailor, Petrovich. It was Petrovich who had prompted and tempted Akaky to purchase a new overcoat. Petrovich is even described by his own wife as "the one-eyed devil" (*odnoglazyi chort.*) (III, 149) Even the description of his feet recalls the biblical description

of the devil's whose "feet were as the feet of a bear" (Rev. 13:2): Petrovich had a disfigured nail as thick and strong as the shell of a tortoise. His paws were tucked under him as he greeted Akaky. The devil had entered Akaky's life.

When Akaky was leaving the party he picked up his coat, which had fallen to the floor, possibly foreshadowing his subsequent fall from grace. On his way home he went in the direction of a "fearful desert" (*strashnaia pustynia*) (III, 161) where a light was gleaming which seemed to be at the end of the world. (This certainly provides an apocalyptic image.) It was here that he was robbed of his coat. In his efforts to get his overcoat back, Akaky has to deal with an "Important Person" (*znachitel'noe litso*.) The Important Person was filled with obstinate pride and treated Akaky with derision. Eventually, Akaky could take no more. Unable to recover his overcoat and belittled when seeking assistance, he lies in bed for days delirious with fever which ultimately quickens his death.

During his delirium Akaky could do nothing but think of his overcoat, the tailor, Petrovich, and the Important Person. Thus, he was completely in the grip of demons right up to his last words. He died muttering gibberish and obscenities. At this time, the Important Person, having heard of Akaky's death, starts to feel pangs of regret for the way he had treated the humble copier. This certainly

corresponds to Driessen's analogy of the elder being haunted by St. Acacius' death for the abuse he had given the humble monk. However, unlike St. Acacius, Akaky cannot be compared to a saintly figure. After his death, he reappears on the earth as a corpse (*mertvets*),<sup>15</sup> who is seen walking the streets of St. Petersburg in search of a stolen overcoat. He had become a part of the living dead, still lusting after the material object of his desire. Akaky's resurrection was not a saintly one.

Akaky had strayed from the monastic ideals he had originally been following and had become seduced by the devil. His only hope was to ask for forgiveness on his deathbed, which he did not. Thus, he was not redeemed and reappeared as a corpse.<sup>16</sup> As a corpse he continued to walk the streets of Petersburg until he got his revenge on the Important Person and took his coat. Akaky's motto had become "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." With the devil at work in Akaky's life, his ties to the monastic

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<sup>15</sup>Leonard J. Kent stresses in his "Introduction" to the English translation of *The Overcoat* that Akaky did not come back simply as a ghost, but as a corpse. Kent views Akaky as an "automaton" without any spiritual values. See his "Introduction" in *The Collected Tales and Plays of Nikolai Gogol*, edited and translated by Leonard J. Kent (New York, 1964), pp. xxxiii - xxxiv.

<sup>16</sup>For a different interpretation, see the unpublished paper by Professor Richard Marshall, "Nikolai Gogol's *Shinel'*; A Monastic Allegory of Salvation." Marshall considers Akaky's reappearance on the earth as "his attempt to redirect sinners to the path of salvation to make up for his own career of sin" (p.14.)

ideals are superficial at best. His humility, obedience and self-abnegation had virtually nothing to do with a spiritual devotion in the Christian sense.

Gogol is showing here that it was Akaky's lust for a material object that led to his downfall. Having rejected his former "monastic" life as a humble copier, Akaky had put his faith in and was devoted to a "false god." Moreover, the fact that Akaky did not repent, but rather, wished for revenge on whomever had stolen his coat shows that he had to suffer eternally. He had rejected his former "monastic" life as a humble copier and strayed from the path leading towards a true Christian life. In *The Overcoat*, Gogol shows that without repentance, eternal torment awaits man. This belief, which stems from early Christianity, was commonly found in the religious literature of pre-Petrine Russia. Thus, although it is possible that Gogol modelled the ritualistic behaviour of his hero after a hagiographic figure and took certain elements from a *Life*, Akaky Akakievich is the antithesis of a saintly figure or monk. He had followed the same pattern in life as had Chertkov. He was tempted, fell, did not repent, and was therefore eternally damned.

Gogol's interest in monastic ideals is also evident in his early Ukrainian collection, namely in *Ivan Fedorovich*

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*Shponka and his Auntie*. The alleged beekeeper-editor of the *Dikanka* cycle, Rudy Panko, prefaces the story by saying that he begged for the tale to be written down. This initial request suggests that the work and the deeds of its hero should be preserved for some reason. This brings to mind a main feature of early hagiography --- the *topos* explaining the necessity of writing the *Life*. Although "Shponka" is not a hagiographic work, parallels can be drawn between Gogol's hero and that of a monk or saint.

The first part of the story is a short biography of Ivan Fedorovich Shponka. We are told that he was different from other children, always neat and punctual. He would sit in class quietly with folded arms while the other boys played pranks, thus shunning childhood games.<sup>17</sup> His good conduct allowed him to be made monitor in charge of the others. He only once fell to temptation and ate a pancake in class, for which he was punished. This incident made him become more serious and withdrawn (his form of self-abnegation.)

Ivan's life did not change in the army. Though the other infantrymen gambled, drank and danced, he remained alone, spending his time doing routine exercises. He either

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<sup>17</sup>Shunning games was typical of young children who devoted themselves to God, and/or who wished to be tonsured (e.g., St. Theodosius.)

polished his buttons, read a fortune telling book (the same passage over and over again), or repeatedly set mousetraps -- all ritualistic activities, though they more closely resemble the activities of a Holy Fool. (In a monastic sense, Ivan lived in a cenobitic community (the army), but chose to lead a semi-eremitic life.) His good conduct again got him a promotion, this time to second lieutenant. Yet again, his behaviour did not change, for, as the narrator says, Ivan Fedorovich knew nothing of pride. Finally, Ivan got his discharge and set off to aid his aunt who claimed she needed help looking after her estate. In fact, she was hoping to marry off her nephew. In this short biography it is evident that Ivan led a righteous life. His behaviour and conduct is suggestive of one following strict ritualistic practices like those of a monk.

Ivan's resistance to marriage has prompted some critics to look into Gogol's sexuality (or latent homosexuality) for a possible interpretation.<sup>18</sup> However, the key to Ivan's behaviour may be found in his attraction to a monastic-like life. Ivan does not dislike women, nor is he repulsed by them. In fact, he finds his female neighbours quite attractive. He is, however, horrified at the idea of getting married. The thought of taking a wife torments him, and not simply the thought of women in general. The

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<sup>18</sup>Simon Karlinsky (*The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol*) suggests Gogol may have had homosexual inclinations.



biographical details of Ivan's life, which to a certain degree correspond to a saint's life, may suggest that the thirty-seven-year-old Ivan, who had lived almost like a monk (practising his own forms of rituals and asceticism), could not bear the thought of breaking his "monastic vows" in order to wed. Sex was an issue for Ivan, (as it was for a monk), and not sexuality.

To Ivan, a wife was seen as diabolical, the *zlaia zhen*a so censured by the monastic orders. In early Slavic hagiography, many monks were tempted by beautiful and seductive women. They were either working as the devil's agent or were the devil himself in disguise. Their purpose was to tempt the monk, lead him away from the righteous life and try to possess his soul. For Ivan, no one woman was acting as the *zlaia zhen*a. Rather, he saw a wife as the demon. A wife would cause him to break his monastic vows, so to speak. He would no longer be able to remain chaste, a fact which horrified him. The thought of taking a wife caused him to have a nightmare in which he even recalled his infantry days (his "monastic" order) and his colonel (the "elder".) Those were happy times which he had spent in solitude. The thought of having a wife would destroy the peace he had attained in the cloistered world he knew best. He dreamt of fleeing (his "flight to the desert") to escape the horror of getting wed. Although the reader does not learn of Ivan's ultimate fate, at the end of the story

Gogol's hero had still managed to maintain the monastic ideal of chastity and rejected what he saw to be evil. The fact that he resisted temptation suggests that there was hope for him, at least in Gogol's eyes. He had not strayed from the Right Path. Thus, although "Shponka" is by no means a typical *Life*, Gogol's attraction to hagiography and monasticism likely had an influence on his story.

There are also certain elements of monasticism in Gogol's macabre tale *Vii*, contained in his "Mirgorod" collection. It is about a young seminarian, Khoma Brut, and his battle against the forces of evil.<sup>19</sup> It is also about Khoma's own personal struggle. He is caught between the life he leads in a seminary, which he believes has been willed by the Lord, and the life on the outside, which he craves. Outside the seminary he enjoys drinking and dancing and he lusts after women --- activities which hardly befit a seminarian. When Khoma and his two friends leave for the holidays, unlike the other seminarians, they stray off the main road. This symbolizes and foreshadows their straying off the Right Path. At the homestead where the old woman/witch puts them up for the night, Khoma is assigned a sheep's pen to sleep in. Before he falls asleep, he kicks at a pig's snout which is poking its way into the pen. This

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<sup>19</sup>As in "Shponka," the old monastic notion of women as evil is also found in *Vii*. In the closing lines of the story, Khoma's friend, the philosopher, suggests that all women are witches, (and hence, evil.) (II, 218)

Gogolian symbol shows that the devil was entering Khoma's life. He is then approached by the witch who takes complete control over his actions. Khoma soon finds himself flying in the sky with the witch on his back. Gogol's vivid description of the night flight suggests that Khoma had succumbed to temptation. Indeed, the entire nocturnal ride is filled with erotic overtones: A voluptuous sensation filled Khoma's heart, while at the same time he felt exhausted with terrible delight. Sweat dripped from him as he flipped himself over onto the witch's back. Though worn out, the two continued the ride. The witch uttered howls that were menacing at first, but which soon became sweeter. Finally, she murmured that she could take no more as she sank exhausted on the ground. Khoma leaves completely confused, unable to understand the new feelings that possessed him after his ride with the witch, who had transformed into a beautiful girl. Thus, having been seduced, Khoma gave into temptation and evidently broke his monastic vow of chastity.

At the end of the story Khoma eventually loses his battle against the forces of evil and his own inner struggle. When Vii appears, he could not restrain himself from looking, despite the inner voice which told him not to look. Once he looked, Vii and an entourage of demonic gnomes pounced on him and his soul immediately flew out of

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his body and he fell to the floor. Again, he had succumbed to temptation. He had completely strayed from the path of salvation. His earthly cares had prevented him from attaining his true Christian destiny.

Khoma's battle against the demonic Vii took place in a church and ended just before a cock had crowed twice. The church setting is significant because it shows that his battle was more than a fight against a monster. It also symbolized his battle between the choice of right (Christianity) and wrong (Temptation), or, Good versus Evil. The biblical symbolism of the cock's crow (e.g., *Mark* 14: 30, 72) shows that Khoma, like Jesus's disciple Peter, had turned from the righteous path. Once more the actions of Gogol's hero are modelled after the three-tiered pattern of Temptation, Fall and Damnation. From a Christian and monastic viewpoint, Khoma had committed a grave transgression. His only hope was to ask for forgiveness, which he did not. His fate was therefore sealed. He was to suffer eternally.

The influence of the Byzantine monastic ideal on the Orthodox Slavs was not slight. Gogol, who explicitly and repeatedly expressed his yearning to become a monk, was closely familiar with these ideals. He was well aware of the rituals and asceticism of monastic orders, and shared the monastic belief that the fullest realization of the true

Christian life could only be attained through monasticism and the monastic ideals of obedience, chastity and poverty. These aspects of monasticism, together with the depiction of the "evil woman" characteristic especially of pre-Petrine hagiography, clearly played a role in shaping the characters and themes in some of Gogol's early creative works.

#### **4.3. Eschatological Concerns**

I have pointed out that an eschatological trend was a salient feature of medieval Orthodox Slavic literature. A messianic spirit also characterized many of the literary works dealing with the End. It was believed that Russia was predestined by God to be the last kingdom before the Final Judgement. Similarly, in Gogol's writings it is evident that he, too, was concerned with thoughts about the end of the world and the ultimate destiny of mankind, i.e. "the last things." At the age of twenty-two he urged his mother to tell his sister, Liza, the same stories she had told him about the bliss that awaits the righteous and the torments that await the sinners of the world. (X, 281) Obviously, Gogol's mother's stories had left an impression on him, for many of his creative writings reveal his interest in eschatology. In the 1835 version of *The Portrait*, for instance, the narrator's father warns his son of the devil's imminence and of the world to come:

[...] скоро приблизится то время, когда искунитель рода человеческого, антихрист, родится в мир. Ужасно будет это время: оно будет перед концом мира. (III, 443)

[...] the time will soon come when the Tempter of the human race, the Antichrist, will come to the earth. Terrible will be that time: it will be before the end of the world.

These words certainly recall Gogol's mother's forebodings.

It is well known that Gogol was fascinated with the demonic. He believed that the devil had already appeared on the earth and he therefore encouraged his countrymen to turn to Christ. However, Gogol's eschatological concerns did not only encompass his views on the demonic, (which shall be dealt with later), but were also focused on his vision of Russia's ultimate destiny, the ultimate fate of mankind, and his own personal preoccupation with the End. In *Selected Passages*, he openly presented his views on the Final Judgement, Russia's ultimate destiny and what he saw to be the road to salvation. He firmly believed that Russia was predestined to be the final kingdom, thereby endorsing the sixteenth-century theory of "Moscow the Third Rome." But Gogol's preoccupation with the fate of Russia and the Russians is also evident in his writings well before he published his final book.

Gogol's interest in eschatological concerns (centered on Russia and the Russians) is to be found, for instance, in

his revised novella *Taras Bulba*, originally published in 1835 and revised in 1842. The later version contains three more chapters and is almost twice as long as the first version. As is well known, a significant difference between the versions is that the 1835 edition is much more Ukraino-centric as opposed to the Russo-centric Orthodoxy expressed in the 1842 version. Loyalty to the Ukrainian Orthodox faith and to the notion of Cossack brotherhood is superceded by a greater Russian spirit.

It has been suggested that Gogol amended the versions of *Taras Bulba* for political and practical reasons. Namely, he wished to appease his benefactors, including Tsar Nicholas I.<sup>20</sup> More likely, Gogol changed his story because of his intensified interests in Russia's universal role and ultimate destiny. He gradually came to believe that Russia had been predestined to be the last kingdom. For example, in the 1842 version, Taras makes the following statement to his brethren on his death pyre:

Постойте же, придет время, будет  
время, узнаете вы, что такое  
православная русская вера! Уже и  
теперь чуют дальшие и близкие народы:  
подымается из русской земли свой царь,  
и не будет в мире силы, которая бы не  
покорилась ему [...]! (II, 172)

Wait a while, the time is coming, there  
will be a time when you will learn what  
the Russian Orthodox faith really is!

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<sup>20</sup>Wasył Sirskyj, "Ideological Overtones in Gogol's *Taras Bulba*," *The Ukrainian Quarterly* Vol. 35 (1979), 283.

Now already nations far and near sense  
 that their king is rising up from  
 Russia, and there will be no power on  
 earth that will not submit to him [...].!

This frequently cited passage is definitely imbued with nationalistic and religious sentiments. In the 1835 edition, Gogol also makes religious and nationalistic statements. They are, however, in defence of Little Russia, not greater Russia. Such beliefs and Taras's pronouncements have connections with the early literary tradition, going back at least as far as the theory of "Moscow the Third Rome" and do not stem from the Russian romantic movement.<sup>21</sup> It is likely that Taras was a spokesman for Gogol's own messianic beliefs. While Gogol believed that the devil was already on the earth, he also believed, as he was to express five years later in *Selected Passages*, that the Saviour would come to Russians first. He was convinced that the resurrection (voskresen'e) of Christ was to be celebrated

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<sup>21</sup>Gogol's indepth study of the chronicles and other historical sources for *Taras Bulba* also had an influence on both versions of the novella. One possible influence could be the Old East Slavic epic, *The Igor Tale*. In both works, the epithets describing the two heroes, Taras and Igor, are striking. Omens precede both battles, and bards and bandura players and lamentful prayers occur in each account. Moreover, the details of the feasts and panoramic descriptions typical of the early "monumental-historic" style in Gogol's story are reminiscent of these details in *The Igor Tale*. On the characteristics of this style, see Dmitrii Likhachev, *Chelovek v literature drevnei Rusi* (Moscow, 1958), pp. 6 - 25. In short, the style gives one the impression that the world is viewed from a higher, more ideal perspective, ignoring the trivial details of life.

Homer's *Iliad* is also deemed to have been influential. See Proffer, "Gogol's *Taras Bulba* and the *Iliad*," 142.



amongst Russians first. Russians would be saved before all other peoples because they were the chosen ones. (VIII, 416 - 18)

Taras committed the gravest of crimes --- the murder of his son. However, he believed that in order to save his people, he had no choice but to eradicate what he saw to be evil. He died for a higher cause. At his death pyre he therefore appears as a martyr and even dies in a messianic way. Indeed, Taras's final words certainly bring to mind the sixteenth-century monk Philotheus' prophetic theory that all Christian realms would unite into one single realm of the sovereign, namely, the Russian realm. Taras did not say that all nations would eventually submit to Russia for she was Holy. However, only Russia was capable of producing such an omnipotent leader. Russia's role in Gogol's eschatological and messianic vision would be reserved for *Dead Souls*. It represents Gogol's views of Russia's future.

Russia's greatness and her ultimate destiny are described in one of Gogol's numerous digressions in *Dead Souls*. Gogol uses a style considered as characteristic of early Russian literary works, "monumental-historicism." When Chichikov and his driver are speeding along the Russian countryside, the description is "from above"<sup>22</sup>:

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<sup>22</sup>Robert Maguire rightly suggests that Gogol's description from a "distanced height" shows that "mere sight

Русь! Русь! [...] вижу тебя, из моего чудного, прекрасного далека тебя вижу. [...] Открыто-пустынно и ровно все в тебе; как точки, как значки, неприметно торчат среди равнин невысокие твои города; ничто не обольстит и не очарует взора. Но какая же непостижимая, тайная сила влечет к тебе? (VI, 220 - 21)

Rus'! Rus'! I see you --- in my alien, beautiful, distant future, I see you. [...] Everything is openly desolate and flat on you; your low-lying towns are imperceptibly scattered like specks and dots over your plains; there is nothing to seduce or enchant the eye. So just what is the incomprehensible, mysterious power that attracts one to you?

The answer is to be found in what the narrator (and Gogol) implies to be Russia's universal significance:

Что пророчит сей необъятный простор? Здесь ли, в тебе ли не родиться беспредельной мысли, когда ты сама без конца? Здесь ли не быть богатырю, когда есть место, где развернуться и пройтись ему? [...] неестественной властью осветились мои очи: У! какая сверкающая, чудная, незнакомая земле даль! Русь! (VI, 221)

What does that boundless space prophesy? Is it not here, within you that there is to be born a boundless idea, when you yourself are without end? Where else if not here is a *bogatyr* to arise, where there is space for him to spread himself and to walk around? [...] through your supernatural power have my eyes come to see the light: Oh! what a glittering, wondrous, unknown land! Rus'!

The incomprehensible pull towards Russia and the birth of a boundless idea and of a *bogatyr* only in Russia suggest that Russia may be the chosen land. Gogol says that

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is powerless to grasp what Russia really is" (*italics, mine*). See his *Exploring Gogol*, p. 243.

Russia's power is mysterious and ineffable, and, yet, it is still capable of attracting people towards it. Everyone will eventually "see the light" and learn of her greatness. The arrival of the *bogatyr*, which may be substituted for Christ, would imply that the Saviour is to come to Russia first. This passage brings to mind Taras Bulba's prophetic words that a King would rise up from Russia. Moreover, the rhetorical question (concerning the *bogatyr*) again alludes to Gogol's messianic vision of Russia. That the Messiah would come to Russia first meant that Russia was to endure as the last kingdom until the Final Judgement. This was predestined by God.

Gogol's eschatological and messianic vision of Russia is also implicit in the famous last paragraph of *Dead Souls*, in which he again makes allusions to Russia's ultimate destiny:

Не так ли и ты, Русь, что бойкая  
необгонимая тройка, несешься? Дымом  
дымится под тобою дорога, гремят  
мосты, все отстает и остается позади  
[...] Что значит это наводящее ужас  
движение? и что за неведомая сила  
заключена в сих неведомых светом  
конях? Эх, кони, кони, что за кони!  
Заслышали с вышины знакомую песню,  
дружно и разом напрягли медные груди  
и, почти не тронув копытами земли,  
превратились в одни вытянутые линии,  
летающие по воздуху, и мчится, вся  
вдохновенная богом!.. Русь, куда ж  
несешься ты, дай ответ? Не дает  
ответа. Чудным звоном заливаются  
колокольчик; гремит и становится  
ветром разорванный в куски воздух;

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летит мимо все, что ни есть на земле,  
и, косясь, постораниваются и дают ей  
дорогу другие народы и государства.  
(VI, 247)

Is it not like that that you, too, Rus',  
are galloping along like a spirited  
troika that cannot be outrun? The road  
smokes under you, bridges thunder,  
everything falls behind and is left  
behind you. [...] What is the meaning  
of this motion which horrifies us? And  
what unknown strength these horses have!  
Such horses are unknown in the world. Oh  
steeds, steeds --- what steeds you are!  
You have caught that familiar song from  
above, and in harmony, and at once, you  
have strained your bronzed chests, and  
barely touching the ground with your  
hooves, you are transformed into  
straight lines, flying through the air.  
And it/Rus'<sup>23</sup> rushes on, all-inspired by  
God!.. Rus', where then are you  
speeding to? Give your answer! But it  
gives no answer. With a wondrous ring  
the bell resounds; the air is torn to  
shreds, thunders and turns to wind;  
everything on earth flies past, and,  
looking at it askance, other nations and  
states stand aside and give it the right  
of way.

The troika racing at break-neck speed along an unknown path  
is definitely symbolic of the search of Russia and Russians  
for something infinite. Indeed, the narrator asks if Rus'  
is like the spirited troika and in fact likens her to a  
troika. The fact that she is inspired by God implies that  
her ultimate destination must be the ultimate Truth.

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<sup>23</sup>As Robert Maguire points out, we do not know what  
Gogol is referring to, the troika or Rus'. Whatever the  
case, the ambiguity allows the troika to be likened to Rus'.  
See his *Exploring Gogol*, p. 251.

The "Moscow the Third Rome" theory and its implied notion of *translatio imperii* are also evident in this final passage. Russian eschatological and messianic thought was shaped by these sixteenth-century theories which implied that only one nation at a time would dominate culturally and politically and that this process was to stop with Russia, and specifically with Moscow, which was to be the last "Rome." The final lines in Gogol's book hint that this time had come: "other peoples and states stand aside and give her the right of way." The apocalyptic ending of *Dead Souls* implies the time had come for the *translatio* process to end. It was to end with Russia.

What Gogol gives in this last paragraph is a messianic view of Russia's fate, an almost arrogant sense of election. The troika scene also brings to mind Nikolai Berdiaev's suggestion that Russians --- Gogol among them --- have always been wanderers in search of God's truth. Hence, at the same time, the apocalyptic ending suggests how Gogol felt about contemporary Russia, and how it, and its people, were wandering in the spiritual wilderness. Were they going to find the Right Path and learn of the Ultimate Truth? The answer to this question may be found in Gogol's hero, Chichikov.

While in *Dead Souls* Gogol focuses particularly on Russia's ultimate fate, he also shows concern for his fellow

man and for man in general. His main character is Chichikov, who is depicted as an ordinary type. He is a bit conniving, but certainly does not epitomize evil. In his desire to make money, however, he had become corrupted. Gogol poses an important question to his readers with reference to his hero: is there not a bit of Chichikov in each one of us?<sup>24</sup>:

Вы посмеетесь даже от души над Чичиковым [...] самодовольная улыбка покажется на лице вашем, и вы прибавите: -- престранные и пресмешные бывают люди в некоторых провинциях, да и подлецы притом немалые! -- А кто из вас, полный христианского смирения, не гласно, а в тишине, один, [...] углубит во внутрь собственной души сей тяжелый запрос: -- А нет ли во мне какой-нибудь части Чичикова? (VI, 245)

You will even laugh from the bottom of your heart at Chichikov [...] and a smug smile will appear on your face, and you'll even add: "in certain provinces there are the strangest and funniest people, and quite considerable scoundrels at that!" But which one of you filled with Christian humility, not aloud, but in silence, alone [...] will let the difficult question intensify in the inner sanctum of your own soul, "is there not even a little bit of Chichikov in me too?"

Hence, Gogol suggests that we should not judge Chichikov too quickly. The question which arises is: is

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<sup>24</sup>Gogol may have had in mind only nineteenth-century Russian society, but his Chichikov is a universal type as Gogol was probably well aware. This type can also be found in earlier Russian literature such as in the seventeenth-century *Tale of Frol Skobeev* (*Povest' o Frole Skobeeve*), (which also has certain similarities to the plot of *Dead Souls*.)

there hope for Chichikov? i.e., is there hope for man? It has often been suggested that Gogol was planning to redeem his character in a Dantesque fashion. In other words, his projected parts two and three of *Dead Souls* were to correspond to Dante Alighieri's *La Divina Commedia* parts two and three, Purgatorio and Paradiso, respectively. In the end, after some sort of "purgative" trial, Chichikov would be transformed and be redeemed. Unfortunately, Gogol's burning of substantial parts of part two and a non-existent part three will never allow such a comparison to be adequately made. There is, however, a hint to the answer of Chichikov's fate. Although he has strayed, he may be able to get back onto the right path to salvation. His ride on the troika in the open wilderness of Russia symbolizes his journey in the spiritual wilderness. He was a wanderer in search of the ultimate destination, the ultimate Truth. In a Dantesque world, he was to pass through purgatory before reaching paradise or salvation. Thus, for Gogol, there was hope for his hero (and for man in general) as well as for his nation.

Gogol wished to let his readers know that the answer was not hard to figure out, that the road to salvation was right in front of them if only they sought it properly. In one of his digressions in *Dead Souls* (when the townspeople are trying to figure out who Chichikov really is), he explains this point:

Много совершилось в мире заблуждений, которых бы, казалось, теперь не сделал и ребенок. Какие искривленные, глухие, узкие непроходимые, заносащие далеко в сторону дороги избирало человечество, стремясь достигнуть вечной истины, тогда как перед ним весь был открыт прямой путь, подобный пути, ведущему к великолепной храмине, назначенной царю в чертоги! Всех других путей шире и роскошнее он, озаренный солнцем и освещенный всю ночь огнями [...] (VI, 210 - 11)

Many errors have taken place in the world which, it seems, even a child now would not make. What winding, remote, narrow, impassable and misleading paths Man has chosen in his striving to attain eternal truth, while right in front of him lay a straight road which is like the path leading (directly) to the splendid temple destined to become the Tsar's palace! The road is broader and more splendid than all others. It is lit up by the sun and illuminated all night by fires [...]

Yet, Man has still managed to stray from the road.<sup>25</sup> Fortunately, however, men continually ask themselves how they may find that path back onto the Right road.

Gogol's Chichikov was one of these men who had taken the wrong road. Although he was not initially striving for that eternal truth, it was Gogol's hope that he would find it. Gogol believed that we all have a bit of Chichikov in us, and, thus, we all stray. But, he also believed that there was still hope for mankind. In particular, he

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<sup>25</sup>No doubt, for this reason, it has been suggested that this passage shows that "error is the driving force in history, as the decisive factor in human life." See Setchkarev, *Gogol*, p. 211.



believed that there was hope for Russians since the Messiah was to come to them first.

Eschatological overtones are also to be found in Gogol's masterplay, *The Inspector General*. A simple anecdote from Pushkin apparently inspired the play although its theme had been used by numerous other writers well before Gogol's time, possibly extending back to the Roman dramatist Plautus.<sup>26</sup> A hapless traveler is mistaken for a government inspector. The small townspeople fawn over the pretender who willingly accepts their attentions. Only when he leaves is the truth revealed. At the end of the play, the stage directions required the actors to remain standing for almost ninety seconds in silence. The silent scene has been interpreted to be symbolic of the End of the world and parallels have been drawn with the concept of the Final Judgement.<sup>27</sup> Dmitrii Chyzhevskii has suggested that Gogol deliberately intended the play, including final scene, to be symbolic and apocalyptic: "the townspeople represented the human soul, the corrupt officials its passions, and the inspector general was death, come to judge."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Gippius, *Gogol*, pp. 95 - 97.

<sup>27</sup>See, for example, Per-Arne Bodin, "The Silent Scene in Nikolaj Gogol's *The Inspector General*," *Scando-Slavica* Vol. 3 (1987), 5 - 16.

<sup>28</sup>Dmitrii Chyzhevskii, "The Unknown Gogol," *Slavonic and East European Review* Vol. 30 (June 1952), 481.

If, in fact, the townspeople did symbolize the human soul, Gogol painted a grim picture of it. The mayor is described as a coarse man, one in whom the transition from fear to joy and from servility to arrogance is rapid. His wife is vain. Osip, Khlestakov's manservant, is a silent rascal while Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky can only eke out their words with emphatic gestures. The judge speaks before he thinks but is entitled to do so because he has read five or six books. The welfare commissioner, Zemlianika, is very obliging, and the postmaster, simpleminded. Finally, Gogol points out that there is no need to describe the other characters as their prototypes are continually before us. Thus, Gogol was certainly not proud of what he saw to be the human soul and its passions. Quite likely he felt that his characters represented "types" that he saw in the world. Indeed, he specifically wanted his characters to act "*comme il faut*" so that, without their trying, they would appear as petty liars and cowards. (XIII, 127 - 28) They had to be natural for they were the everyday natural type found everywhere.

All of the characters in the play feed off of each other and interact to produce the confusion and fear which grows apace in the town because of the presence of the inspector general. Yet, ironically, Gogol's characters don't really seem to know what they fear. Artemii

Filippovich speaks for everyone when he says: Страшно просто. А отчего, а сам не знаешь (IV, 51) (It's simply terrifying. But why, you yourself don't even know.) They did not simply fear the thought of losing their positions or stations in life (by offending the inspector general.) More likely, they feared the inspector general himself and perhaps what he stood for --- their judge. Their time had come. The inspector general's arrival marked their own final judgement. In the small provincial town where immorality was rife, it was Judgement Day. Hence, the characters remain petrified in silence at the end of the play awaiting the End.

Chyzhevskii is right to suggest that it was death, rather than Christ, come to judge. The fate of the townspeople could be nothing other than bleak. They had put their faith in a false prophet, a pretender. In line with Gogol's eschatological and messianic views, salvation was to come to those who sought out and believed in Christ, or to those who asked for forgiveness. At the end of *The Inspector General*, the characters had not yet been redeemed. It is therefore unlikely that their judgement would lead them to salvation.

When *The Inspector General* was first staged in 1836, it produced a considerable uproar from what people saw to be its deeper meaning: it was a microcosm of society at large.

Some saw it to be nineteenth-century Russian society, others a depiction of the whole of mankind. Considering Gogol's preoccupation with the End, it is quite likely that the ending of his play meant to show that the End was imminent. However, Gogol did not believe that one need fear the End. As he expressed in his essay "Bright Resurrection," (*Selected Passages* XXXII), it would be a time to celebrate. God would forgive those who asked for forgiveness. (In this sense, Gogol endorsed the early Christian and eschatological belief that all would receive glory as long as they repented. [cf. Abraham of Smolensk].) There was only need to fear the End if one did not accept Christ. Symbolically and allegorically the characters in Gogol's play feared the End for they had put their faith in a false prophet and in false values. Naturally, they would fear their ultimate judgement.

Gogol's views on his country's fate as well as his fellow man's were the main focus of his eschatological concerns prior to his final book. He had both a messianic vision of Russia as well as an apocalyptic anxiety for his country and for Russians. As he said in *The Portrait*, the time was to come when the Antichrist would be born, (though in reality he believed that the devil was already on the earth.) The End was imminent. Gogol's concern for Russia and for Russians was central to his preoccupation with the End. In *Selected Passages*, as we shall see, he continues to

explore these issues, but also further examines the notion of the Final Judgement.

From the 1835 version of *The Portrait* and *The Inspector General*, one may be inclined to feel that Gogol's vision of the End was negative. His ubiquitous devil, especially in his early stories (see below), as well as the fate of such characters as Khoma Brut in *Vii* and Akaky Akakievich may further support this belief. Yet, one sees a different picture as Gogol matured as a writer. As he shows in *Taras Bulba* (revised version) and *Dead Souls*, and as he was to show later in *Selected Passages*, he had hope for mankind and for his country. This hope was based, in part, on the firm belief that Christ would come to Russians first and on earlier eschatological and messianic theories that Russia was predestined to be the final kingdom before the Final Judgement.

#### **4.4. Aesthetic Values**

Most of the literary criticism devoted to Gogol's aesthetic values discusses the influence of romantic theories on his aesthetics, and, in particular, singles out the influence of German romanticism on his work. The names Wackenroder, Hoffmann, Tieck, Schelling, Novalis and Schlegel appear in almost every study dealing with Gogol in

this area. Gogol's treatment of aesthetics in his essayistic and creative works, which is in many ways similar to that of his European counterparts, tends to support this theory. Yet, like most aspects of Gogol's writings, it is almost impossible to attribute his aesthetics to only one influence. It can be shown that Gogol's aesthetic views were drawn from a variety of sources. Indeed, as Vasilii Gippius has said, "Gogol did not just repeat his predecessors; he also contradicted them as he did himself."<sup>29</sup> Such confusion opens the door for another possible influence on Gogol's aesthetic views, namely, the aesthetics of the pre-Petrine literary tradition. Again, the romantics' affinity for things medieval points in this direction.

In a broad sense, two aesthetic patterns or trends are evident in Gogol's writings. One centers on his belief that religious and aesthetic values are closely connected. The other shows that he believed that beauty could be disguised evil, which led him to question whether true beauty could really be attained. Both trends have their origins in the pre-romantic period.

As mentioned, especially later in his life, Gogol wished to integrate his philosophy of art with his religious

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<sup>29</sup>Gippius, *Gogol*, p. 44

ethics and aspired to be an "artist-moralist."<sup>30</sup> Perhaps as a result of this, he developed what has been referred to as an "aesthetic utopia" --- "a belief that art could evoke a genuine impulse towards the good."<sup>31</sup> In other words, he aimed to connect religious values with aesthetics. He believed that "art was to inspire mankind in the struggle for the kingdom of God,"<sup>32</sup> and, that God inspired the artist. These beliefs are not far removed from medieval notions of beauty. The medieval man believed that the writer-artist was chosen by God who inspired his pen, brush, lyre, etc. Through such inspired beauty God spoke to his creatures.

Even very early in Gogol's writing career he shows that he believed in the correlation between religious and aesthetic values. In 1831 he published his short essay, *Woman*. The aesthetics here center on and illustrate Gogol's knowledge of the Platonic theory of love. The essay is in the form of a dialogue between Plato and his student, Telekles, who claims that women are the devil's creation and accuses the philosopher of not knowing women. Plato explains to Telekles that woman is everything, while man is only her incarnation (*voploshchenie*) in reality. He

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<sup>30</sup>See note 17, Chapter Three of this thesis.

<sup>31</sup>Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, pp. 177.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

contends that beauty is "sanctified and idolized" (*osviativ i obogotvoriv*) in Alkinoi, Telekles' love. (VIII, 147) She represents ultimate beauty. Her beauty is also representative of supreme Good:

[...] как прочитал вечность в божественных чертах Алкиной [...] сколько новых откровений постиг и разгадал ты своею бесконечною душою и во сколько придвинулся ближе к верховному благу! (VIII, 145)

[...] when you read eternity in the divine features of Alkinoi [...] how many new revelations did you perceive and unravel with your eternal soul, and how much closer did you move to supreme Good!

Of course, for Plato, the physical world could never be as perfect as the world of Ideas. It could only imitate it, and, imperfectly at that. But Plato's statement implies that over time man could learn to understand ultimate beauty, and hence, supreme Good, more intimately. It has often been pointed out that *Woman* was based in part on Gogol's understanding of the romantic concept of the Eternal Feminine.<sup>33</sup> However, the notion that supreme Good and Beauty were connected stemmed from ancient times, at least as far back as Plato, and was likely assimilated by Gogol in his essay.

Gogol's Platonic notion of beauty shows that in

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<sup>33</sup>See, for example, Gippius, *Gogol*, p. 42.



creating and conveying beauty, the Divine could touch the hearts of man. However, his aesthetic views would gradually change in his life. With his growing preoccupation with the Satanic, in time he would feel that evil sought to pervert beauty to its own End. Indeed, even in *Woman*, Telekles' contention that women embody evil and are the ultimate source of man's downfall suggests that as early as 1831 Gogol had already started to question the meaning of real beauty. Moreover, the dialogue between the two men represents Gogol's own vacillating views on women in general. Throughout his writings, Gogol shows both a positive and a negative evaluation of women. They could save and protect man or they could be his plague and lead to his ruination.

The idea of evil appearing in the guise of beauty is also to be found in pre-Petrine literature. As noted, it was common for the beautiful, seductive temptress to be acting as one of the devil's agents, the diabolical *zlaia zhena*. Several of Gogol's stories also incorporated this approach. In *A May Night, or The Drowned Maiden*, for example, a legend circulates about an evil stepmother disguised as a beautiful water-nymph. In *Vii*, after the nocturnal ride, the hideous old lady/witch transformed into a beautiful girl, which left Khoma questioning whether the two were the same person. The Polish beauty in *Taras Bulba* was viewed as the epitome of evil by Taras for she lured his

son, Andrii, over to the enemy side. Taras justified his murder of his son partly because of what he saw to be her evil-doings and her evil influence on his son's activities. Thus, from *Woman* in 1831 to *Taras Bulba* in 1842, the two aesthetic trends are evident in Gogol's work.

The publication of *Arabesques* in 1835 shows that Gogol still believed in the correlation between beauty and the Divine. This is the case for his non-fictional essays. The fictional tales, on the other hand, are more indicative of Gogol's notion of beauty being corrupted by evil.

Several of the non-fictional essays in *Arabesques* deal with the religious and aesthetic significance of the arts. In "Sculpture, Painting and Music" Gogol thanks God for sending mankind these arts, for without them, he says, the world would be a desert. He extols the virtues of each of these arts in religious terms. With sculpture, man got a world where religion was based on beauty. Painting makes one feel as if heaven is filling the soul. (VIII, 11) According to Gogol, it holds the mysteries of the Christian world. But he felt music was the supreme gift from the Creator. God sent it to man to turn him to Him. Music was the saviour and protector of nineteenth-century man who was being suffocated by terrible temptations. In "The Last Day of Pompeii," an essay devoted to K. P. Briullov's painting, Gogol contended it was a combination of painting, music and

poetry which were connected to God. Gogol particularly admired Briullov's painting for its depiction of man's physical beauty and his passions.

In "On Present-day Architecture" Gogol praises the Middle Ages for its architecture. In particular, he says that the Gothic style surpasses all styles. With its beauty, it was like Christianity: it reached up to heaven. Gogol condemns uniformity of style as a sin. He contends that architecture should be concerned with the eternal and encourages diverse designs that would soar up to heaven. Such architectural design of churches fits into Gogol's notion of the merging of beauty and religion. Gogol also strove to get closer to the Lord, to reach out to Him, so to speak. It is natural, therefore, that he would particularly admire churches that were pointing upward, "stretching out" to heaven. What Dmitrii Likhachev suggested about the architectural design of the churches in the Muscovite period --- that they "compel one to feel the unreality of reality"<sup>34</sup> --- certainly corresponds to Gogol's views on what architecture should be like.

The arts Gogol discusses in *Arabesques* were also esteemed in medieval Russia. For example, Gogol writes the following about painting:

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<sup>34</sup>See note 55 of chapter two.

она [живопись] похищает явления из  
 другого безграничного мира, для  
 названия которых нет слов. (VIII, 11)

it captures phenomena, which no words  
 can name, from another limitless world.

The high praise he gives to painting is certainly reminiscent of the medieval icon painter's belief in the divine purpose behind his work, which, in essence, was the Incarnation of the Word of God. The importance Gogol places on the interrelationship between religion and the arts is clearly indicative of his attempt to integrate his religious and aesthetic views. Both on an abstract and on a concrete level, he shows that striving for ultimate beauty may lead one closer to the ultimate Truth.

Gogol's fictional tales in *Arabesques* indicate a stage in the evolution of his aesthetics. In these stories, his belief in good being perverted to evil becomes more evident. In *The Portrait*, as we have seen, Chertkov turned his back on the pursuit of pure beauty which ultimately led to his demise. In *Nevsky Prospect*, the plot revolves around a quest for ideal or pure beauty. As in *The Portrait*, two tales make up the story. The first tale involves a young painter, Piskarev, who follows a beautiful woman along the street. To his dismay, he discovers that she is a prostitute. After a failed attempt to save her, he commits suicide. The second tale also concerns the pursuit of a beautiful woman. This time it is a Lieutenant Pirogov who falls for the wife of a German tinsmith whom he manages to

corner and smother with kisses. When the woman's husband finds out, he humiliates Pirogov, who, oddly enough, quickly abandons any plans for revenge.

Gogol evidently shared the romantics' fascination with the world of dreams and the contrast between the real and the unreal. The naive Piskarev frequently confuses his dreams with reality, believing that life itself was a confusing mixture of dream and reality. He concludes that his dreams are more pure and good than reality when the prostitute rejects his attempts to save her from a life of sin. To a certain degree, Piskarev resembles Poprishchin, the hero of *Diary of a Madman*, who also could not distinguish between reality and fantasy. Poprishchin decided that his lot and reality in life were unacceptable. He therefore withdrew into his own fantasy world. But Piskarev goes a step further than Poprishchin and ends his life when he realizes that he cannot distinguish real beauty and beauty in the service of evil. The narrator implies that suicide was Piskarev's choice because he was overcome by remorse which had been touched by debauchery (*razvrat.*) (III, 22) For Piskarev, beauty, which should be good, had become infected with evil.

Unlike Piskarev, Pirogov was not looking for ideal beauty. He merely wished to make another conquest for his own gratification. He lived by his own laws in pursuit of

his own desires. Hence, he remained untouched by moral scruples. Suicide did not cross his mind.

One may wonder whether Gogol felt that real beauty could actually be attained. Neither Piskarev nor Poprishchin was able to attain it. The fact that they were unable to distinguish real beauty and beauty in the service of evil suggests that Gogol had come to believe that evil could pervert beauty and even appear in the guise of beauty. However, the non-fictional pieces in *Arabesques* offer an alternative answer to the question of whether real beauty was attainable in Gogol's eyes. In each of the arts --- music, painting, sculpture, poetry and even architecture --- he believed that beauty could be, and, in fact, had been attained. These arts inspired one with the feeling of heaven. They allowed the individual to feel detached, to feel "the unreality of reality." Moreover, they suggested that beauty and religion were closely connected. This medieval notion was endorsed by the romantics and was clearly a part of Gogol's religious and aesthetic outlook.

Hence, the fact that Gogol's fictional characters do not attain a level of perfection in their "real" lives similar to the one of their dreams does not mean that Gogol felt that true beauty could not be attained in reality. His Platonic notion of beauty, as expressed in *Woman*, shows that he believed that true beauty could lead one closer to the

divine. He felt that everyone had to strive to attain this level of beauty which meant striving to commune with the Lord. Moreover, he believed that man must both act and think in a Christian way in order for this communion to take place, that is, in order to be saved. His characters in *Nevsky Prospect* and *The Portrait* were not "saved" because they did not in reality lead a Christian life. If they had, (as did the narrator's father in *The Portrait*), the beauty they had dreamt of would have become part of their real lives. Thus, Gogol's Platonic notion of beauty, that ultimate beauty represented supreme Good, remained part of his aesthetic world view in later works. (In essence, he proved to be an "artist-moralist.") He was, however, always keenly aware that the powerful forces of evil could transform or contaminate beauty. The notion of evil versus beauty was closely connected with Gogol's fascination with the demonic, to which we shall now turn.

#### **4.5. The Demonic**

While the romantics looked for a reason for their existence in religious belief, especially in the Christian faith, they also studied pre-Christian beliefs and paganism. This led many of them to become fascinated with the demonic, the supernatural, and the notion of other worlds. This fascination with "the world beyond" was also an integral

part of the medieval man's outlook, in general, and of early East Slavic literature, in particular. Given the romantics' interest in things medieval, medieval notions of the demonic likely influenced the romantics and were in turn reinforced by them. Gogol was one writer of the romantic period who was clearly fascinated with the supernatural and the demonic. Indeed, this has led some critics, Dmitrii Merezhkovskii for one, to assert that the devil was "the main idea of all of Gogol's life and work."<sup>35</sup> Moreover, according to Merezhkovskii, the devil in Gogol's religious outlook was both a mystical essence and a real being. As a real being, the devil was both the complete denial (*otritsanie*) of God and the representation of eternal evil.<sup>36</sup> As God is infinite, the devil, being the denial of God, is therefore the denial of the infinite.<sup>37</sup> He is "eternal planarity (*ploskost'*) and eternal banality (*poshlost'*)."<sup>38</sup>

The devil certainly did occupy an important place throughout Gogol's writings, although he may not have been the most central subject of Gogol's art, as Merezhkovskii contends. There are roughly three main stages in the

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<sup>35</sup>Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, *Gogol' i chort. Issledovanie* (Moscow, 1906), p. 1.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.



evolution of the demonic in Gogol's work prior to *Selected Passages*: 1) the diverse, ever-changing devil of his early short stories; 2) the devil of *poshlost'* and *ploskost'* of the mid-1830s; 3) the more open, "human" devil from the mid thirties to the early forties. No doubt, the romantics' abiding fascination with the demonic and the supernatural had an influence on Gogol. However, medieval notions of the demonic, which influenced the romantics, also shaped Gogol's views, though indirectly.

The first stage of the demonic in Gogol's writings is seen in many of his early Ukrainian stories, *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*, in which superstitions, pagan beliefs and legends brought the devil to the fore.<sup>39</sup> The precise source of the demonic in several of these stories is difficult to determine. Indeed, as Vasiliï Gippius has pointed out in his study of the demonic and the farcical in Gogol's writings, it is not always easy to tell what may have come from folk sources and what from literary sources in the stories. The problem is compounded since elements in the oral folk tradition may have derived from earlier literary sources or vice versa.<sup>40</sup> As in all cases of derivation touching upon oral literature and the multi-faceted medieval

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<sup>39</sup>The influence of the Ukrainian puppet theatre (*vertep*) and the nativity play on these stories is also well known.

<sup>40</sup>Gippius, *Gogol*, p. 35.

tradition, perfect identification can be elusive. However, there are enough parallels between Gogol's writings and those of the earlier traditions that suggest that he invoked and even drew upon both in his creative writings.

What one sees in these stories, which is also found in pre-romantic literature dealing with the demonic, is a devil that assumes various shapes. Gogol's devil transforms into a pig (*The Fair at Sorochinsky*), a water-nymph (*A May Night, or the Drowned Maiden*), a witch, a cat, a hound and a ram (*St. John's Eve*), all of which point to his continually changing nature. Moreover, following the early Christian tradition, Gogol's heroes and heroines warded off or exorcised the devil quite often by making the sign of the cross (e.g., *The Fair at Sorochinsky*, *Christmas Eve*, *The Lost Letter*.)

A belief in the supernatural was common in the medieval period. Indeed, in pre-Petrine literature it was customary for many characters to be motivated in their thoughts and actions either by Divine Will or by being in the thrall of the devil.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Gogol's characters in his *Dikanka* cycle are often motivated by their belief in the supernatural. A few examples shall suffice. In *The Fair at Sorochinsky* the story opens by celebrating the magnificence

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<sup>41</sup>See Likhachev, *Chelovek v literature*, p. 7.

of a summer day in Ukraine and the merriment of a country fair. The gay atmosphere is soon interrupted with the tale of the devil who walks the earth searching for strips of his red shirt. The plot vacillates between stories of young love and a heightening fear of the devil. The story about the devil in *The Fair at Sorochinsky* is only a legend, but it nevertheless appears to be real in the minds of Gogol's characters. They are consumed with tension and fear, feel more dead than alive, and remain numb with horror upon hearing the tale of the devil. The ridiculous actions performed by Gogol's cast of characters are the result of their *belief* in the devil. This belief motivates what they do and how they think. Only when they realize their stupidity do they feel compelled to tie up the man who had scared them with the legend. *The Fair at Sorochinsky* ends on a happy note. The young couple is united and all dance wildly to a fiddler's tunes. Supposedly the devil has been vanquished at this point. Yet the luring and hypnotic dance at the end makes the reader feel that the devil is still lurking out there --- something Gogol always felt.

*St. John's Eve* is Gogol's most graphic story depicting the devil's power and wrath. Initially, it resembles a fairy tale: a little hut appears on a hen's legs and a cat instantly transforms into a witch. Then suddenly the plot takes a turn. A much more macabre course of events follows. A child is decapitated and his blood drunk, all for the sake

of some gold. The devil had taken possession of his victim's (Petro's) soul which led him to commit the heinous crime of murdering an innocent child. Although Petro was unaware of what he had done, he had put his faith in the devil and in doing so was under the devil's control.

A *Bewitched Place* also deals with the demonic entering human life. In the opening passage of the story the reader is reminded that the devil is ubiquitous and omniscient: захочет обморочить дьявольская сила, то обморочит (I, 309) (if the devil wants to pull the wool over your eyes, he will.) The story then shifts between the real world and a fantasy world and ends with a similar message: Так вот как морочит нечистая сила человека! (I, 316) (See how the Evil One takes a man in?) A *Bewitched Place* reinforces Gogol's admonition to beware of the power of evil: it lurks out there and can control man's thought and actions. This message runs throughout the *Dikanka* cycle, sometimes in an apparently light-hearted or humorous mode, sometimes in a serious or even chilling or terrifying manner. But in both cases, one gets the message that the references to the devil perform more than a purely literary function for Gogol, that they speak to Gogol's real views of life and reality.

Hence, in the first stage of Gogol's depiction of the demonic, one sees a continually changing devil and one who is often brought about by superstition. There is a certain

eerieness to his appearance and to Gogol's stories, but nothing that can be taken too seriously. Although it is difficult to say with certainty, it is likely that pre-nineteenth-century notions of the demonic in both the written and oral traditions had some influence on Gogol's portrayal of the demonic at this stage.

In Gogol's "Mirgorod" cycle, the second stage of the demonic is evident.<sup>42</sup> Banality (and planarity)<sup>43</sup> reign in *The Story of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich* and in *Old-World Landowners*. The story of the two Ivans centers around an argument essentially over nothing --- a useless gun. This indicates that the petty demon of *poshlost'* is manifestly at work. It is the cause of the deplorable conflict and the subsequent disintegration in friendship between the two men. The attempts to reconcile the two Ivans after several official petitions and

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<sup>42</sup>The metamorphosis of the old lady/witch into a beautiful girl and the hideously deformed monster in *Vii* have closer links to the demonic in the *Dikanka* cycle, as seen, for example, in *St. John's Eve*. The devil in *Taras Bulba* is depicted as evil (e.g., the enemy, the Polish girl.)

<sup>43</sup>Rendered in English, these terms imply complete banality and triteness (*poshlost'*) and flatness (*ploskost'*.) In other words, everything is seen to be suffocated by complete and total boredom, apathy and dullness. The dreariness of life is stifling. A bland state of reality is all that remains. In a discussion with me, Richard Marshall has suggested that *poshlost'* may be seen as "a spiritual dry rot, one in which evil works through the trivia of distracting worldly concerns and gradually the bright promise of a Christian soul is eaten away and a dead soul replaces it, inexorably, gradually, but lethally."

the mayor's intervention do not do much to assuage their mutual disdain. Gogol ends the story with the words: СКУЧНО на этом свете, господа! (II, 276) (It's a dreary world, gentlemen!) And so it is in the town of Mirgorod for his two Ivans.

When the narrator of the story returns to Mirgorod years later he sees that little has changed --- except for the two Ivans who have aged immensely. The case between the men was still ongoing. The narrator met Ivan Nikiforovich in front of a church which was deserted, apparently because people were afraid to go out in the mud. The chapels of the church were gloomy and "tears of rain" (*dozhdlivymi slezami*) were streaming down the windows. (II, 275) Such a vivid description personifies the church suggesting that even this holy place was grieving over the unabated estrangement between the two men.

Gogol was always against man's overwhelming concern for material goods. He encouraged all to share their wealth and give of themselves. For him, the concern for the material over the spiritual would lead to the corruption and erosion of man's soul and obstruct man on his path to salvation. The battle over a useless gun exemplified a battle over something material which took precedence over spiritual concerns. Such concern turns people into non-beings. The

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devil was, therefore, in control of Gogol's Ivans for they were no longer really human in Gogol's eyes.

As was often the case for Gogol, his fictional town quite likely served as a microcosm for what he saw to be Russian society as a whole. Everything was banal. The devil was at work. Not only was he playing a role in Mirgorod and in the lives of the two Ivans, but he was everywhere. Gogol felt that in order to rid the world of its inhumanity, people had to embrace one another as brothers and sisters. He urged everyone to live as neighbours, and not just in the sense of next-door neighbours. If they did not, the consequences would be dire. (VIII, 411 - 16) It was a "dreary world" for Gogol's Ivans for they did not live like neighbours in the Christian sense of the word.

In *Old-World Landowners*, the pettiness associated with *poshlost'* is again evident. The narrator begins with a lengthy commentary in which he admires the delightful simplicity of life found in the villages of Little Russia. Such existence, he says, makes one forget that the passions and prompting of the evil spirit are in the world. The two main characters, Afanasii Ivanovich Tovstogub, and his wife, Pulkheria Ivanovna, lead a serene life. They devote their lives to food and to the preparation of meals. The two get up with the sun and commence to eat small but delectable

snacks and meals almost hourly. They have few worries and never quarrel. Thus, it appears that they are immune from the passions of the Evil One.

However, the attention to detail they pay to the most minute things in their habitual and flat existence shows that evil, in the form of *poshlost'*, is at work. Their love for and devotion to food symbolize their love for material things. They do not even display a genuine love for each other. Their love is based on habit, their feelings for each other, ritualistic. They never address each other familiarly, but always formally and with patronymics. Since they have no children all of their affection is concentrated on each other. Yet, the only warmth the Tovstogubs actually share is from the stove in the room.

Gogol's detailed description of their house reinforces the feeling of banality which has penetrated into their lives. It, too, lacks life. The walls are decorated with a few pictures which resemble spots more than they do scenes. The rest of the decorations consists of bags of vegetable and flower seeds. The only real sound of life in the house comes from the doors which "sing" as they move. Flies cover the windows and when everyone goes to bed they converge on the ceiling like a black cloud. It is as if they are attracted to the dead. Indeed, like the Tovstogubs, even the servants of the house appear to be dead. For the most



part, they spend their time sleeping in the kitchen. Though no one in the house is physically dead, in essence, they are emotionally and spiritually dead. The operation of soul-destroying *poshlost'* has corroded and alienated its victims from higher concerns. In a sense, they are no longer human as they have no concern for higher things.

The narrator digresses from the story to talk about cats. In the nearby forest there are wild cats which have managed to entice the Tovstogub's family cat to join them in the forest. After a three-day absence, Pulkheria Ivanovna's cat reappears hungry for food. She had not missed her owner, however, as she had apparently grown accustomed to the wilds, or, as the narrator says, she had come to realize that poverty with love was better than life in a palace. Thus, even the animals in the story place more value on the important things in life. Unlike its owner, the family cat knows that love and passion are more important than habit. In the wilds she could escape the *poshlost'* that has saturated every corner of the landowners' estate.

When Pulkheria dies, she is --- appropriately --- laid out on a table. Afanasii deteriorates after his wife's death, as did his kitchen and the cooking in the house. He died five years after his wife, once he heard her calling him to join him. The question which the narrator of the story asks himself (and his readers) when he visited

Afanasii Ivanovich five years later is: Что же сильнее над нами: страсть или привычка? (II, 36) (What is stronger in us --- passion or habit?) It is clear that for Gogol it was passion. Although the Tovstogubs have a passion for food, their existence is based on habit and they are shown to be spiritually dead. As in the story of the two Ivans, Gogol's characters in *Old-World Landowners* are only concerned with the material as they have become suffocated by *poshlost'*.

This stage of the demonic in Gogol's work is indicative of his evolving view of the devil's insidious nature and power. The fact that he was less "tangible" did not mean for Gogol that the devil was any less omniscient, omnipotent or ubiquitous. If anything, he had become only more subtle. The idea of *poshlost'* as characteristic of the devil or the demonic does not stem from the medieval tradition. Nevertheless, if one defines *poshlost'* as a "spiritual dry rot," in which a Christian soul is slowly eaten away and replaced by a dead soul,<sup>44</sup> --- a definition which certainly applies to Gogol's characters --- Gogol's views on the demonic at this point in his life were clearly Christian based.

In the third stage of Gogol's portrayal of the demonic prior to his final book, the devil reveals more of his true

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<sup>44</sup>See previous note.

nature. For the most part, he is less disguised and appears more human, though certainly not more humane. He is more manipulative and uses his victims as instruments to carry out his work. From the mid 1830s to the early 1840s Gogol makes the devil's presence be known in *The Inspector General*, *The Carriage*, *The Nose* and in *Dead Souls*.

It has often been suggested that Khlestakov represented the devil in Gogol's master play.<sup>45</sup> He was the great deceiver and charmer. Everyone put his or her faith in him as he seemed trustworthy. However, whether Khlestakov, and Chichikov, for that matter, were intended to represent Gogol's devil is debatable. Though they were both conniving, they were both simply taking advantage of promising situations. They were certainly swindlers, but not the Devil himself, or, the embodiment of universal and eternal evil, as Merezhkovskii contends. Rather, they were tools in the hands of the devil, who used them to seduce, trick and defraud.

When Khlestakov arrives at the inn in the town, he is depicted as a buffoon, interested mainly in filling his stomach. All of his concerns center on his physical needs.

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<sup>45</sup>Cf. Merezhkovskii, *Gogol' i chort*, esp. pp. 7 - 23. Merezhkovskii also views Chichikov in a similar way. He sees them as "two contemporary Russian individuals, two hypostases (ipostasi) of eternal and universal evil, of man's eternal banality" (p. 5.)

He displays a certain pompousness, but he is actually cowardly and humble. He fears that his complaints about the food at the inn will get him in jail. He bows humbly and apologizes to the mayor for not having any money. It is the mayor and the other townspeople who put Khlestakov on a pedestal which leads him to believe he is someone special. They believe Khlestakov simply wants to pretend he is not an inspector general. Initially, Khlestakov is completely oblivious to their thoughts and designs. Only when he starts to see how much respect and attention he is getting does he begin to lie and embellish his stories. In fact, it is not until Act IV of the five-act play that it dawns on Khlestakov that the townspeople take him for someone of importance in the government. He sees how stupid they are and then tries to take full advantage of them. Only at this point does he become a conniving swindler and a liar. Prior to this, he had no preconceived plan to dupe the townspeople. Thus, he should not be viewed as symbolizing the "prototypical Father of the Lie" (*proobrazovanie --- otets lzhi*)<sup>46</sup>. Khlestakov is but a victim, an instrument manipulated by the Father of the Lie.

Merezhkovskii refers to Chichikov as Khlestakov's diametric opposite in that the hero of *Dead Souls* is an activist, a realist, and a conservative, while his

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid, p. 33.

counterpart is a contemplative, an idealist and a liberal.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, he also sees Chichikov as the embodiment of eternal and universal evil. Again, however, like Khlestakov, Chichikov should be classified as no more than a conniving swindler. His action plan is to deceive, but not to take possession of anyone's soul, to lure or ensnare his victims, or to destroy them. He, too, is an instrument of the devil.

In both *The Inspector General* and in *Dead Souls* banality thrives.<sup>48</sup> It is a part of the atmosphere and the environment, which implies that the devil is at work. He is out to unmask the "spiritual dry rot." Neither the townspeople nor the landowners have concern for higher spiritual things. This, in essence, makes them all "dead souls." The main characters, Khlestakov and Chichikov, are only caught up in the slothfulness of life, the *poshlost'* which slowly kills the soul, but they are not the cause of it. They are in the service of the devil, but they are not the devil himself. They themselves simply have deceitful personalities which make them perfect instruments for the devil's manipulation. Their personalities also exemplify a character type to be found in another story of this period on which Gogol had been working, *The Carriage*.

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

The main character in *The Carriage*, Pythagoras Pythagorasovich Chertokutsky certainly shares Khlestakov's and Chichikov's cunning personalities. It is well known that Gogol played with his characters' names to give them symbolic meanings. Critics have rightly pointed out that Chertokutsky's surname literally means "a stumpy-tailed devil." However, Chertokutsky's first name and patronymic are also symbolic. Gogol quite likely named his hero, (or anti-hero), after the Greek philosopher, mathematician and astronomer, Pythagoras. Pythagoras Pythagorasovich certainly did not have the philosopher's intellectual abilities. However, his name may have been based on the beliefs and philosophy of the Greek mathematician's. Pythagoras and his followers, the Pythagoreans, believed, among other things, in "the eternal recurrence of things, and in metempsychosis, the passing of the soul at death into another body, human or animal."<sup>49</sup> Hence, Gogol's character represented something eternally recurring --- as did his father, according to his patronymic. His name plus surname thus was used to symbolize an "eternally recurring stumpy-tailed devil."

Chertokutsky was, indeed, a "devil," a great deceiver. He dressed in such a manner that people might have thought

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<sup>49</sup>*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Markham, 1983), p. 746 and 961.

he had served in the infantry, although he had not. He tried to get people to vote for him by promising them promotions. He had even managed to marry a wealthy girl. His greatest lie was convincing the general that he owned a luxurious carriage, which he did not. Everyone was taken in by Chertokutsky's lie until the end of the story. But this was not difficult, for Gogol's "devil" was operating in surroundings he knew best --- *poshlost'* and *ploskost'*.

The setting of *The Carriage* is the little town of B---. It is the epitome of banality and planarity, the devil's domain. There is never a soul (*dusha*) to be seen in the streets. The atmosphere in the marketplace is sad. A building has been under construction for fifteen years. Fences are painted gray to match the ground. When it rains all the roads turn to mud and then the animals, who are in effect the townspeople, come out. The French in the town are referred to as loud-grunting pigs. The town's workmen walk around with tin mugs attached to their chins as if they are continually feeding from a trough. The use of animal imagery for people strips the inhabitants of B--- of any human qualities. Metempsychosis has set in B--- in that its inhabitants' souls have passed on into animals' bodies.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>The notion of metempsychosis may have something to do with the names of other Gogolian characters. Sobakevich in *Dead Souls* immediately comes to mind.

In such a banal environment, Gogol's devil thrived. Chertokutsky finally gets trapped in his own deception and is revealed for what he is. Yet, he will survive, for he is an eternally recurring devil.

*The Nose* appeared the same year as *The Carriage*. The story is, as Gogol said, about an absurd happening. A nose is cut off of Major Kovaliov's face and is seen walking the streets in uniform. Later, it inexplicably reappears on the major's face. Yet in spite of its obvious absurdity, there is something deeper, more ominous to the story. Gogol's fascination with the demonic at this time in his life manifests itself as a leitmotif in the story. The nose itself is symbolic of the demonic vice of pride.

In the *Dikanka* stories, Gogol used a pig's snout to indicate the presence of the devil. In *The Nose*, the former symbolic snout has transformed into an actual nose assuming human qualities. It walks the streets of St. Petersburg dressed in an overcoat, rides in a carriage and even prays at Kazan Cathedral. It is no longer out and about to frighten people, as did the pig's snout. Rather, it struts around the town in a most arrogant manner. The nose wears a gold-braided uniform, a plumed hat and carries a sword, all of which lead people to believe that he/it was of the rank of a civil councilor. In actual fact, the nose belongs to one of a lower rank, a collegiate assessor. The nose was



very much like its owner, Kovaliov, who, too, wished people to consider him of a higher rank. Both the nose and Kovaliov were, therefore, filled with snobbish pride. Because Gogol's story is so absurd, the nose suddenly reappears on Kovaliov's face just as it so imperceptibly went missing. It does not take long for the humbled major to regain his pride. Kovaliov starts chasing pretty women all over again and buys himself some ribbon and a medal to flash about the town.

Gogol always considered pride to be one of the most serious vices, as he was to express in *Selected Passages*. The nose --- as did Chertokutsky, Khlestakov and Chichikov -- embodied and embraced this vice. Though they were not the devil incarnate, these characters clearly symbolized what Gogol knew was the mark of the devil. Indeed, Lucifer's sin was one of pride. The depiction of this vice in this stage of the demonic in Gogol's creative works would be further explored in *Selected Passages*.

It is arguable that Gogol's devil went from being the open, naive, even comic type, as told by Rudy Panko, to the more conniving, behind-the-scenes type. Indeed, detecting his possible presence in Khlestakov and Chichikov, Chertokutsky and even in the nose is more challenging. He turned out to be a charmer and deceiver in each case. But in a sense, the devil actually began to reveal more of his

true nature in Gogol's later writings. For the most part, he appeared in a more realistic, human form and did not remain part of a legend or superstition caught somewhere between two worlds.

Gogol's fascination with the demonic stemmed from an early age. His religiously fanatic mother told him stories about the Evil One, probably based on her readings and interpretations of biblical stories. Later, this fascination was reinforced in Gogol by the spirit of romanticism. The romantics' interest in the demonic was brought on partly by their interest in things medieval. Therefore, in both periods of Gogol's life, it is likely that early Christian and medieval notions of the demonic played a role in shaping his views. He always believed that the devil was lurking out there. By the time he wrote *Selected Passages*, as we shall see, his devil would appear completely "open," as he said, "without a mask": Дьявол выступил уже без маски в мир. (VIII, 415)

#### **4.6. Ethical Values**

Gogol's correspondence throughout his life attests to his claim to want to do good for mankind and to be useful to humanity. This, he said, was one of the main purposes for writing *Selected Passages*, in which he fully elaborates his

moral values. He called for the rich to help the poor, for brotherly unity and for everyone to forgive his neighbour for his wrong-doings. Prior to his final book, several of Gogol's earlier works also provide evidence of his ethical values, which, to a large extent, were rooted in a much earlier tradition. In these earlier works, much of Gogol's ethical system reveals an emphasis on fraternal charity.

In the *Dikanka* stories, apart from elements of the supernatural, Gogol's ethical views are also apparent in at least one story, one of the most sinister tales of the cycle, *A Terrible Vengeance*. The story is composed of a legend and a tale, (with the legend in a sense resembling the second half of an ancient diptych.) In the legend, sung by an old bandura player, revenge for murder turns out to be more horrific than the murder itself. Ivan, who is killed by one of his Cossack brothers, Petro, is permitted by God to choose his murderer's punishment. He requests that all of Petro's ancestors rise from the grave to inflict eternal torment on Petro. However, because Ivan's revenge is so terrible, he, too, is prohibited from entering heaven and must sit and watch the everlasting torture he has commanded.

Gogol is clearly ~~making~~ making a moral statement here.<sup>51</sup> He shows that vengeance should not be met with vengeance. Ivan

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<sup>51</sup>See Sobel, *Gogol's Forgotten Book*, p. 66.

was not permitted to enter heaven because of the revengeful punishment he had chosen for Petro. Gogol believed that true judgement was to come solely from God and that nothing was higher than Godly justice. (VIII, 341 - 42)

In the actual plot of the story, (i.e., not the legend), Petro's last descendant is an evil wizard who wreaks havoc on everyone, going so far as to seduce his own daughter and to kill a holy hermit. Even the letters of the holy book dripped with blood in the wizard's presence. Yet as the narrator explains, the wizard himself did not know why he was so cruel:

Не мог бы ни один человек в свете рассказать, что было на душе у колдуна; а если бы он заглянул и увидел, что там дейлось, то уже не досыпал бы он ночей и не засмеялся бы ни разу. Нет такого слова на свете, которым бы можно было назвать. Его жгло, пекло, ему хотелось бы весь свет вытоптать конем своим, взять со всем и затопить в Черном море. Но не от злобы хотелось ему это сделать; нет, сам он не знал от чего. (I, 277)

No one in the world could have told what was in the wizard's soul; and had anyone looked in and seen, he would not have slept at night, or never have laughed again. There is no word in the world to say what it was. He was burning and blazing; he felt like trampling the whole world with his horse and to completely drown the world in the Black Sea. But it was not from malice that he wanted to do it; he himself did not know why he wanted to.

But his fate was set. A great horseman arrived after he had killed the holy man, lifted him in the air, and the wizard

died instantly. His fate was like that of his ancestors' in the legend: dead men rose from the grave all around him.

Ruth Sobel has made an interesting conjecture regarding the wizard's deeds and his death. She contends that he sinned because "he was a descendant of another great sinner [...] the moral of Gogol's story being that the sins of the fathers are visited on their sons."<sup>52</sup> Gogol did believe that a father was responsible for his son's wrong-doing. But Sobel's hypothesis can be extended even further. Gogol also believed that a master was responsible for his servant's behaviour as was the Tsar, the anointed of the Lord, answerable for all his subjects. Moreover, everyone was responsible to a certain degree for the actions of others:

Во всех упреках и выговорах [...] не упрекай его одного, но призови его бабу, его семью, собери соседей. Попрекни бабу, зачем не отваживала от зла своего мужа и грозила ему страхом божьим; попрекни соседей, зачем допустили, что их же брат, среди их же, зажил собакой [...] устрой так, чтобы на всех легла ответственность [...] (VIII, 323)

When you reproach and reprimand anyone [...] do not reproach him alone but summon his wife, his family, assemble the neighbours. Reproach the wife because she has not driven her husband away from evil and threatened him with the fear of God; reproach his neighbours because they have allowed their very brother to live like a dog [...] Arrange it so that the responsibility may lie on everyone [...]

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

Thus, Gogol's wizard in *A Terrible Vengeance* was a sinner because he came from a sinner and because all of his ancestors were sinners. This "ancestral tree" concept recalls the principle of "brotherly love" found in such medieval works as Vladimir Monomakh's *Instruction* and *The Igor Tale*, which equated all moral relationships to the level of blood kinship. This implied that anyone living in hatred would cause the ruination of all of their ancestors. Moreover, while it was stressed in medieval literature that the "generation of the upright would be blessed,"<sup>53</sup> it was equally important to remember that "the generation of sinners would be damned." The latter leitmotif was Gogol's message in *A Terrible Vengeance*.

In *Old-World Landowners* a similar warning is given that one pays for one's ancestor's misdeeds.<sup>54</sup> On Pulkheria Ivanovna's deathbed, she demands that her servant make sure that Afanasii Ivanovich continues to eat what he likes. She threatens the servant with the following admonition:

Я сама буду просить Бога, чтобы не давал тебе благополучной кончины. И сама ты будешь несчастна, и дети твои будут несчастны, и весь род ваш не будет иметь ни в чем благословения Божия. (II, 32)

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<sup>53</sup>cf. *The Tale and Passion and Encomium of the Holy Martyrs Boris and Gleb (Skazanie i strast' i pokhvala sviatykh muchenikov Borisa i Gleba)*; cf. *Psalms* 112: 2.

<sup>54</sup>See Peace, *Enigma of Gogol*, p. 37.

I myself will beg God not to give you a peaceful death, and you yourself will be unfortunate, and your children will be unhappy and none of your descendants will have God's blessing in anything.

Pulkheria Ivanovna's curse on her housekeeper is certainly reminiscent of the curse in *A Terrible Vengeance*. In this regard, the concept of "brotherly love" is applicable once again. The housekeeper was morally responsible to care for Afanasii or she and all her ancestors would be held accountable. In the chronicle account of Iaroslav's death, Iaroslav implores his subjects to live in harmony. If they lived in hatred, they would ruin the land of their fathers and forefathers before them. It is quite likely that Gogol was familiar with this account and may have adapted the medieval notion of brotherly love kinship from the chronicles.

Gogol's short essay, "Al-Mamun," in *Arabesques* also contains the ethical message which called for the need for brotherly love and unity.<sup>55</sup> On the surface, the essay appears to be no more than what Gogol subtitled the work: "An Historical Description." He provides a geo-political and historical account of the monarch's rule and his caliphate. However, on another level, Gogol also indicates

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<sup>55</sup>See Zeldin, *Gogol's Quest*, p. 181, who points out that Gogol has invoked "the principle of harmony, unity and wholeness" in the essay.

the need for brotherly unity. Al-Mamun's demise was brought on by his failure to listen to his people. He chose to reform his caliphate, but without heeding the wishes of his once unified subjects. The result: он произвел оппозиционный фанатизм, который растерзал массу (VIII, 81) (he produced the fanaticism of opposition which tore the masses apart.) Brother did not unite with brother and this caused the collapse of his state.

The theme of brotherly unity and its accompanying sense of patriotism contained both a political and an ethical message. As mentioned, it was one of the fundamental themes in *The Igor Tale*, in Vladimir Monomakh's *Instruction* to his sons, and in the *Domostroi*, among other works of the medieval period. The parallels between Gogol's works and medieval works dealing with this theme further suggest that Gogol's ethical world-view was steeped in the medieval tradition.

Gogol's moral values are also contained in his play *The Inspector General*. In his *Leaving the Theatre After the Presentation of a New Comedy*, a play centered on a discussion about *The Inspector General*, the "Author of the Play," (Avtor p'esy), whom we can take for Gogol,<sup>56</sup> says the following about the protagonist of *The Inspector General*:

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<sup>56</sup>This has been pointed out by Setchkarev, among others, in his *Gogol*, p. 181.



Мне жаль, что никто не заметил  
честного лица, бывшего в моей пьесе.  
Да было одно честное, благородное лицо  
--- смех. (V, 169)

I feel sorry that nobody noticed the  
honest character in my play. Yes, there  
was one honest, noble character --- [it  
was] laughter.

And there really aren't any "human" characters in the play. All the townspeople in the small provincial town are amoral at best. They are pathetic in their simplicity. They only wish to ingratiate themselves with the inspector general, and, overall, pursue their own ends. Thus, they offered Khlestakov their beds, money, food, and even a young bride. Though they were giving what they had, it was not genuine charity.

Ten years after *The Inspector General* premiered, Gogol wrote to his close friend, Mme. A. O. Smirnova, explaining to her the need for people to help others, but only if it were done in a Christian way. (VIII, 234 - 36) In other words, he said the mere distribution of wealth meant nothing if it did not come from the heart and soul. This admonition recalls similar ethical messages found in pre-Petrine literature. It was imperative for the act of giving to be both an action of the hands and an activity of the soul. This was integral to the *Emerald*. Similarly, in the *Domostroi* we read that all Christians must be prepared

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through good deeds for the hour of death. The purpose of the servile "good deeds" performed by Gogol's cast of characters in *The Inspector General* was to help themselves better their positions in life, and perhaps, in preparation for the End. Their charity was not from the soul.

Gogol's ethical values were naturally closely connected with his eschatological concerns. One had to lead a moral life in order to be saved at the End. Thus, the ethical standards followed by Gogol's cast of characters dictated their ultimate fate. If one fell to temptation and did not repent or was seduced by the power of beauty, there was little hope. Thus, Andrii Bulba, Khoma Brut, Akaky Akakievich Bashmachkin, Piskarev and Chertkov were beyond redemption. Ivan Nikiforovich, Pirogov, Chertokutsky, Khlestakov and the townspeople were still awaiting their judgement. They, like Gogol's most famous protagonist, Chichikov, had strayed in their morals. Was there hope for them as there might have been for Chichikov? Though they were only fictional characters, for Gogol they served as types or even symbols. They, like man, could be saved in the end, and, at the End, through repentance and by leading a Christian life. For Gogol, salvation meant the Kingdom of God, which, in turn meant the Kingdom of Beauty. He also believed that man had to continually strive to rid the world of evil. These were his messages to his readers throughout his life. It was his job as a writer to guide people

towards achieving salvation. These notions stemmed from the early Christian tradition and were a fundamental part of medieval East Slavic literature. Gogol indirectly adapted and assimilated some of the models and patterns of this tradition in his earlier writings to expound these messages. These messages, presented more overtly, would also be the driving force behind the letters and articles in his final book, *Selected Passages*.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ***SELECTED PASSAGES FROM CORRESPONDENCE WITH FRIENDS AND THE MEDIEVAL TRADITION***

While *Dead Souls* represents the *magnum opus* of Gogol's creative writings, *Selected Passages* occupies the same place in Gogol's philosophical writings. It was published four years prior to his death and is concerned primarily with his religious, ethical and aesthetic views. The book consists of a preface (*predislovie*) and a collection of thirty-two letters and articles written between 1843 and 1846.<sup>1</sup> Although *Selected Passages* differs from much of Gogol's earlier work in style and form, (with the exception of a few publicistic articles and a number of chapters from his miscellaneous collection, *Arabesques*), in content it is not so different. Gogol wrote the book to make more explicit what he had been attempting to say in his creative work. Thus, in many ways *Selected Passages* represents the summation of views that Gogol had always held. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the nature and extent to which

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<sup>1</sup>It is doubtful whether many of the so-called letters were actually addressed to genuine persons. For a detailed discussion on the authenticity of the letters, see Sobel, *Gogol's Forgotten Book*, pp. 160 - 65.

these views are connected to some of the key trends characteristic of the pre-Petrine literary and cultural tradition discussed in chapter two. I also attempt to determine the ultimate source of much of Gogol's religious and ethical world-view.

### 5.1 Gogol's Self-professed Role as a Writer

Gogol begins *Selected Passages* with a preface in which he explains to his readers that, although he was previously spared from death, he was leaving the following passages as a "farewell to his compatriots"<sup>2</sup> since his strength warned him that his life was hanging by a thread. The reason he gives for leaving his fellow countrymen his final book is that he believed it could be useful for society. (XIII, 91 -

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<sup>2</sup>In 1845, the year Gogol wrote the "Testament," he claimed to be leaving his compatriots a work already produced entitled *A Farewell Tale* (*Proshchal'naia povest'*) (entry number four of the "Testament".) But, not only is this work not extant, but also no mention of it is made in the "Preface" to *Selected Passages*, written in June 1846. It therefore seems unlikely that Gogol possessed such a manuscript at the time. In the "Preface" he states that upon his death provisions would be made for his letters to be published. However, Gogol did not die as he thought he would, in fact, he recovered, and undertook the publication of his own "letters." Thus, more than likely *A Farewell Tale* that is mentioned by Gogol in the "Testament," which was to contain his "letters," was renamed *Selected Passages From a Correspondence with Friends*. For further elaboration on this point, see Lina Bernstein, *Elective Affinities: Nikolai Gogol, Fedor Tiutchev, and German Romanticism* (Ph.D. diss., Massachusetts, 1991), esp. pp. 92 - 93.

92) He claimed that he had never felt such a powerful desire to do good for mankind and that he was motivated by what his soul had heard: "the magnificence [of life] beyond the grave" (*zagrobnogo velichiia.*) (VIII, 221) Convinced that he was capable of teaching much to others, he was fulfilling a yearning that he had always had. (VIII, 453) In his earlier works there is also evidence of his desire to teach. What he had attempted to say in *The Inspector General*, for instance, and the frustration of not being understood, ultimately led him to restate his views more overtly. *Selected Passages* was the medium for doing so.

Gogol also claimed that he felt compelled to write about the Russian man after spending so many years studying the laws of human actions, which he had learned after coming to Christ. (VIII, 453 - 54) He was acting in the name of God and in praise of His Holy name. (XIII, 112) Moreover, he felt that his book would prove that he had truly come to know the Russian soul. It was intended to be a "true mirror of man" (*vernym zerkalom cheloveka.*) (VIII, 433), the "outpouring" (*izliian'e*) of both his own soul and his heart (VIII, 437), not based solely on assumptions and conclusions.<sup>3</sup> He wanted to show others how to learn their

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<sup>3</sup>It is not surprising, given this rationale, i.e., one of high-minded service, that he would suffer, as he claimed to have done, as a result of the book's rejection. See his "confession" in *An Author's Confession*, in *Pss VIII*, 437 - 38.

lessons from the Teacher more easily. In a sense, like the medieval writer, Gogol was striving to further the coming of the Kingdom.

In more concrete terms, Gogol wrote *Selected Passages* because he wished to help Russian society, which he felt had gone astray. Assuming the role of a teacher and prophet in a more overt way, he hoped his countrymen would hearken to his words and return to the Church after reading his book. He felt that life had to be shown through the eyes of one who had studied it from a Christian perspective (VIII, 308), and he believed that it was his job to guide his fellow man, to direct him towards the Truth. Gogol had said it was necessary to purify one's soul before attempting to purify others. (VIII, 283) Whether or not he felt he had already purified his own soul, he believed he had to write the book or he would be held accountable if he did not leave behind a worthy lesson for mankind. Thus, like many of the old monuments of pre-Petrine literature, *Selected Passages* is saturated with moralizing and didactic themes.

To a degree, the form of Gogol's book is also similar to the structure of some medieval East Slavic texts. For example, it has much in common with the old miscellany or *izbornik*. Like the miscellanies, *Selected Passages* is composed of excerpts and didactic treatises, with biblical quotes and references to the early Eastern Church Fathers

sprinkled throughout. As in some old Russian miscellanies, there is not always a connection between one excerpt and the next. For example, Gogol follows one chapter entitled "On Helping the Poor" with another entitled "The Odyssey in Zhukovsky's Translation." Similarly, in a miscellany like the *Emerald*, one can find an excerpt on the value of books followed by one expounding the need to give alms. However, like many miscellanies, *Selected Passages*, though superficially discontinuous and varied in theme, has nonetheless a sort of overall general purpose which gives unity to the otherwise disparate parts. It is the complex of Gogol's religious, moral and aesthetic views.

Gogol also mixed several of the genres common to medieval East Slavic literature in his book. Many of the passages clearly belong to the epistolary genre, but there are also "sermons," (VIII, IX, XII), encomiums, (XIII, XXIII), and exhortations (VI, XXI, XXIV, XXVIII, XXX) in the book. The tone and style of these passages are also varied. At times they are solemn and didactic, at times autobiographical. Overall, the tone is clearly admonitory, much like the admonition literature of the medieval period.

Before proceeding with his didactic messages, Gogol gives a lengthy apology for the inadequacy of his work and for his previous wrong-doings. Part of his apology runs as follows:



[...] сколь бы ни была моя книга незначительна и ничтожна, но я позволяю себе издать ее в свет и прошу моих соотечественников прочитать ее несколько раз [...] я прошу прощения во всех личных оскорблениях, которые мне случилось нанести кому-либо, начиная от времен моего детства до настоящей минуты. Прошу также прощения у моих собратьев-литераторов за всякое с моей стороны пренебрежение или неуважение к ним [...] прошу прощения у моих читателей, если и в этой самой книге встретится что-нибудь неприятное и кого-нибудь из них оскорбляющее [...] В заключение прошу всех в России помолиться обо мне [...] (VIII, 216 - 17)

[...] as unimportant and insignificant as my book may be, I still allow myself to have it published and I ask my compatriots to read it through several times [...] I ask forgiveness for any personal insult I have happened to inflict on anyone, from the time of my childhood to the present moment. I also ask pardon of my fellow men of letters for any disdainful or disrespectful way I may have acted towards them [...] I ask pardon of my readers if they come across anything in the present book displeasing and offensive [...] In conclusion, I ask everyone in Russia to pray for me [...]

This "topos of humility" is especially characteristic of medieval Slavic hagiography. In many early Slavic saints' *Lives* from the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries, it was the common practice for the hagiographer to belittle himself and apologize for the inadequacy of his words. Nevertheless, the hagiographer would write the *Life* out of a sense of necessity or compulsion. Often the writer would give thanks to God for helping him in his important task which he would have otherwise been unable to fulfil.

Gogol follows this pattern. He even implies that he has received help in writing his book from Divine Guidance:

От нас уже довольно бывает протянуть руку с тем, чтобы помочь, помогаем же не мы, помогает Бог, ниспосылая силу слову бессильному. (VIII, 216)

Sometimes it is enough for us to extend a hand for help; but it is not we who help, God helps, granting His power to the powerless word.

Gogol also shows that he was keenly aware of the need to write correctly. As he says in the chapter, "On the Meaning of Words:"

Опасно шутить писателю со словом [...] Беда, если о предметах святых и возвышенных станет раздаваться гнилое слово. (VIII, 232)

It is dangerous for a writer to play with words [...] It is bad if a rotten (i.e., corrupt) word begins to be heard on sacred and sublime subjects.

This philosophy was strictly adhered to by early Slavic writers whose words were to report facts in light of the Truth. Indeed, any form of writing that deviated from this norm was considered unacceptable, even a heresy. Gogol believed his book was written "correctly" and in good faith. He called it a miracle and the proof of the mercy of God, and, therefore, asked his publisher to print it in the name of God and for the glorification of His name. (XIII, 112) Clearly, he felt that *Selected Passages* was divinely inspired and although it is not a hagiographic work, its preface arguably owes a debt to this popular genre of

medieval Slavic literature. Thus, Gogol's book and his professed duty as a writer are characteristic of the literature and of the role of the writer in the pre-Petrine tradition.

## 5.2 An Appeal for Monasticism

Gogol was not a hagiographer, yet like the medieval hagiographer, he was steeped in the monastic tradition. And although Gogol was not a monk, he did aspire to be one and felt there was no higher destiny on earth than the calling of the monk. (XII, 34) He reiterates these sentiments in *Selected Passages* in a letter to A. P. Tolstoy in 1845:

Нет выше званья, как монашеское, и да сподобит нас Бог надеть когда-нибудь простую ризу чернеца так желанную душе моей, о которой уже и помышление мне в радость. (VIII, 301)

There is no higher title than that of a monk. And someday, let God honour us to put on the simple chasuble of the monk, which is so desired by my soul that even the thought of it is joy for me.

At times, Gogol also lived like a monk. He went through periods of fasting and practised meditation. He also frequently stressed the need for internal contemplation, saying that through contemplation man could find the key to one's soul. By finding the key to the soul, one finds the laws for everything. He believed that through meditation the soul could ascend to God. (This is certainly

reminiscent of the Hesychasts' beliefs on meditation.) This ascent would mark the triumph of light over darkness, the heavenly victory over the earthly battle. As he said in his "Parting Words," (*Selected Passages* XXX), the true celebration awaited man in heaven. Earth was only a place to do battle. (VIII, 368)

Gogol truly desired to ascend to that higher world. His last words were "quickly a ladder."<sup>4</sup> More than once in his life, he made reference to this ladder. In June, 1842, he wrote to Zhukovsky stating that he believed that the divine power would help him ascend the ladder (*lesnitsa*) which stood before him. (XII, 69) And in *Selected Passages*, he says that if we all had the desire to embrace each other, a ladder may be thrown down to us from heaven. (VIII, 416) For Gogol, a ladder represented the steps he needed to get to the higher world.

Gogol may have learned of monastic practices firsthand from his visits to the Optina Pustyn monastery in Central Russia where he met the elder Makarii Ivanov (1788 - 1861), among other elders.<sup>5</sup> Ivanov was one of the key figures

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<sup>4</sup>Cited in Michael Holquist, "The Burden of Prophecy: Gogol's Conception of Russia," *Review of National Literatures* Vol.1 (Spring, 1972), 40.

<sup>5</sup>On Gogol's relationship with the monks at Optyna Pustyn, see Ivan Shcheglov, *Podvizhnik slova. Novye materialy o N. V. Gogole* (St. Petersburg, 1909), pp. 54 - 66. Based on letters written by Gogol, recovered from the

responsible for the publication of the works of the Byzantine ascetics, Isaac the Syrian and John Climacus (who wrote the *Climax* or *Ladder of Paradise*<sup>6</sup>), as well as the Russian ascetics Nil Sorskii (who practised Hesychasm) and Paisii Velichkovskii. More than likely Gogol had discussions with Ivanov about these writers and their works.

In various chapters of *Selected Passages* Gogol's words resemble those of an ascetic's. For example, in "The Meaning of Sickness," he praises the benefits of suffering. He states that what he now writes has greater meaning because of his own suffering and he argues that wisdom comes from suffering. Looking back on his childhood, he thanks God for inspiring him with a feeling to shun all "excessive effusions" (*neumerennykh izliianii*) as unpleasant. (VIII, 366) The common practice of monks shunning all earthly goods was no doubt known to Gogol. As mentioned, in his creative story *Ivan Fedorovich Shponka and his Auntie*, his protagonist also shunned childhood games and adhered to the ritualistic lifestyle common to monks. While Gogol indirectly endorsed the monastic ideals in his story, in

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library at Optina Pustyn, Shcheglov believes Gogol knew the various elders quite well. Apparently Gogol even spent time at the monastery recovering from an illness, though what and when, Shcheglov does not say.

<sup>6</sup>This work was influential in Byzantine monasticism and became especially important for the Eastern Slavs. Its contents symbolizes the steps to be taken to spiritual perfection. See Linda C Rose, "John Klimakos, St.", *Dictionary of the Middle Ages Volume 7*, (New York, 1986), p.

*Selected Passages* he overtly shows his admiration of --- and even desire for --- the monastic life.

But despite his expressed wish, Gogol did not become a monk. He had a different station in life --- one, he believed, was preordained by God. He became a writer, and being a writer meant that he could use his words to express his concerns and philosophy on life.

### 5.3 A Concern About the End

Nikolai Berdiaev was correct in suggesting that Gogol, like other *stranniki*, expected a final truth to be revealed. Indeed, one of the prime concerns throughout Gogol's life was salvation. In seeking the ultimate Truth, thoughts about the End continuously preoccupied him. In *Taras Bulba*, and *Dead Souls, Part I*, Gogol suggested that a ruler would soon rise up in Russia, signaling the impending End. In *The Inspector General* he alluded to the possible fate that awaits sinners at the End. In his final book Gogol openly presents his views on salvation and the End. He explains what he means by salvation in *Selected Passages XXVI*, "The Fears and Horrors of Russia." He says salvation is not to save our worldly goods, but our souls:

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Служить же теперь должен из нас всяк

не так, как бы служил он в прежней России, но в другом небесном государстве, главой которого уже сам Христос, а потому [...] должны мы выполнить так, как повелел Христос, а не кто другой. (VIII, 344)

Each of us ought to serve not as he would have in the former Russia, but as he would in the heavenly state, the head of which is Christ Himself, and that is why [...] we ought to fulfil [our duties] in the same way as Christ and no other has commanded.

Gogol warns us that if we do not live by the grace of Christ, we will not be able to hide from our fears. He makes an analogy to the darkness that covered Egypt when the Lord wished to punish the Egyptians. (VIII, 345) Macabre forms and menacing scarecrows appeared before them and they were surrounded by darkness. Similarly, in *Selected Passages XII*, "The Christian Goes Forward" Gogol states that we must pray for the Wisdom of God for with His Wisdom begins a celestial life. Without Wisdom, man's last days will end in a darkness like that of the Egyptians.

Thus, he stresses the need to live by the grace of Christ and paints a bleak picture for those who do not. In the Russian Middle Ages, apocalyptic sentiments were rife. For example, in such medieval literary works as the *Izbornik of 1076* and the *Domostroi*, it was emphasized time and again that one must fear the Lord and remember death as it was believed that God's wrath would be manifest before the establishment of the millennial kingdom. In this case,

although Gogol likely modelled his beliefs on the biblical story, his admonition was commonly found in early Christian literature.

In order to live by the grace of Christ and to hope for salvation, Gogol also insisted that it was necessary to think of life after death. A true Christian should constantly think of death, for, according to Gogol, the constant thought of death gave strength for life and helped one refrain from sinning, thus bettering one's chances of a good End. (XIII, 194) Gogol's preoccupation with death likely prompted him to begin his final book with his "Testament." In each of the bequests (with the exception of one) in the "Testament," he focuses on what is to be done at the time of his death. The first bequest concerns his burial. In the second, he asks that a monument not be raised in his name. He then requests that no one weep for him at his death. In the fourth bequest, he leaves to his readers his final work, (*Selected Passages*), because he says it is concerned with them. He then asks that no one praise or censure his works after his death. In the sixth bequest, he asks that his household devote themselves to helping others. Finally, he requests that his portrait not be published when he dies --- unless it will help others to learn of the man who worked in silence and who had not wished for undeserved fame! Thus, Gogol reveals his preoccupation with death in the opening pages of *Selected*



*Passages*. He firmly believed that this constant reflection on death was a prerequisite for salvation.

What is interesting about Gogol's last wishes is that he does not really bequeath anything at all (with the exception of bequest number four.) Each bequest is really little more than a humble request. On the surface at least, it seems that Gogol aimed to strip himself of any glory, to die in extreme humility. (With his "bequests," it appears that he was attempting to "empty himself" in the kenotic fashion of Christ.) His concern for death and salvation is therefore clearly linked with the medieval monastic ethic of poverty and humility. At the same time, however, by modelling his work on the *topos* of humility, Gogol likely felt that his work would appear less offensive to the modern, secular reader. This would relieve him of some of the hubris with which he might be charged.

The positioning of the "Testament" at the beginning of *Selected Passages* has a twofold purpose. First, its focus on death represents one of Gogol's main purposes for writing the book: to remind people to think of death so as to be saved. Second, it is used to frame the whole book. The "Testament's" focus on death is the first chapter. Gogol's belief that the constant thought of death provides strength for life and salvation is also one of the main themes of the last chapter of *Selected Passages*, "Bright Resurrection."

Within this frame, Gogol repeatedly presents his views on salvation, the Final Judgement, and the return of Christ. Indeed, his overall preoccupation with the End serves as one of the leitmotifs in the predominantly didactic letters and articles in his final book.

Gogol's concern about salvation and the End was not egocentric. He also felt a lively concern for his fellow countrymen. Though he felt they had strayed from the path of salvation, he nonetheless cherished the belief that this situation was correctable. This hope was implicit in *Dead Souls*, as witness the planned conversion of Chichikov in subsequent parts of the novel. This same hope is expressed in *Selected Passages*. Gogol believed that Russians could be saved more readily than all others for they were the chosen people and Russia, the chosen land.

For example, in a letter to Count A. P. Tolstoy, *Selected Passages* XIX, "It is Necessary to Love Russia," written in 1844, he tells the count that he can be saved because he is a Russian, for Russians can be saved sooner than all others if they love Russia:

Если только возлюбит русский Россию,  
возлюбит и все, что ни есть в России.  
К этой любви нас ведет теперь сам бог  
[...]. А не полюбивши России, не  
полюбить вам своих братьев, а не  
полюбивши своих братьев, не  
возгореться вам любовью к Богу, а не  
возгоревшись любовью к Богу, не  
спастись вам. (VIII, 300 - 01)

If the Russian loves Russia, he would love everything Russia has. God Himself directs us to this love [...] And not loving Russia, you do not love your brothers; and not loving your brothers, you are not burning with love for God, and not burning with love for God, you will not find salvation.

The message is straightforward: through one's love for Russia comes salvation. Such a statement is not only extremely nationalistic, but it is also reminiscent of the theory of "Moscow the Third Rome" following which Russians came to regard themselves as the chosen people and their country as the sole bearer of true Christianity. Here, Gogol's zealous, staunch nationalism may have had something to do with his attempt at showing himself to be a loyal subject to the tsar. However, the same year Gogol wrote this letter he also wrote to Mme Smirnova saying that he did not know what soul he had, Russian or Ukrainian (*khokhlackaia*), but that he believed that each one complemented the other.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Gogol's nationalism encompassed both Russian and Little Russian sentiments.

Gogol reiterated the need to love Russia in a subsequent letter to Count Tolstoy the following year. He included it as chapter twenty of *Selected Passages*, "It is Necessary to Travel Through Russia." He counsels the count to retreat from the world: he must give away all his

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<sup>7</sup>See Luckyj, *Between Shevchenko and Gogol*, p. 123; cf. the letter to Smirnova in *Pss XII*, 419.

belongings to the poor and then enter a monastery. According to Gogol, the monastery which the count must enter is Russia itself. (VIII, 308) He reminds the count of the monks who fought in the battle of Kulikovo in 1380 against the Tatars and urges him to work within Russia. By traveling through Russia and by doing good throughout the country, the count will be able to save himself. But, for this, Gogol insists, it is necessary to love Russia.

The belief in Russia's greatness and in her unique destiny is again implied in "On the Lyricism of Our Poets." Gogol cites two subjects that help Russian poets to write with the "biblical lyricism" they do. One of them is Russia itself. (The other is love for the Tsar.) He argues that the name "Russia" in itself seizes the poet and allows him to write with majesty. Gogol's reasoning for this is that Russia, more than other countries, feels the hand of God upon it and is more aware of the approach of a new kingdom. Although he does not directly say what this new kingdom is, it is obvious that he believed Russia to be the future Kingdom of the Holy Spirit. He writes that it was the will of Providence that Russia would achieve its perfect form. (VIII, 250 - 51) Thus, Russia was predestined to be the last kingdom before the Final Judgement. Quite likely, sixteenth-century messianic beliefs of Russia's ultimate destiny influenced this aspect of Gogol's thought.

Gogol not only elevates Russia and the Russian people above all others, he also does the same for the Russian church. In a letter to V. A. Zhukovsky, included in *Selected Passages* under the title "Enlightenment," Gogol compares the superiority of the Russian Church and the Russian religion to other churches and religions. The Russian Church, he says, has the helm (*kormilo*) and the rudder (*rul'*) in its hands. It is more powerful than the church of the West. Therefore, Gogol believed that only the Russian Church could fully educate man. Only the Russian Church was capable of enlightening people and letting them know that salvation was within their grasp. In *Dead Souls* Gogol had said that the road to salvation was right in front of man. He just had to get on the right road, which was brightly lit by fires. In "Enlightenment" he makes a similar analogy. Salvation comes from a sparkling treasure which is in front of man, but which man still does not see.

Gogol's pronouncements on the superiority of the Russian Church stem from the Middle Ages when notions of Russian messianism were at their peak. At that time, Russians believed that Russia was the true Orthodox Kingdom, and that Orthodoxy was, *ipso facto*, the true Christianity.

What Gogol writes about the two main preoccupations in his life, salvation and Russia, indicates that his vision of the End was not one of doom and gloom. Gogol had faith in

his fellow countrymen. He believed that Russians could be saved if they truly loved God. Their love for God meant loving their brethren and loving Russia. At the End, Russia was destined to be saved because it was the will of Divine Providence. Like the early eschatological writer, Abraham of Smolensk, Gogol believed that salvation was to come to Russians if they lived by the grace of Christ.

#### **5.4 The Power of Beauty**

Gogol's aesthetic views are also an important part of *Selected Passages*. In his final book, he continues to deal with the power of beauty, a topic which had particularly concerned him in *Arabesques*. In "Woman in the World," an essay directed towards one woman, (but which may well apply to all women), Gogol not only talks of the virtues of being a good wife in contrast to what constitutes a bad wife, but also stresses the fact that beautiful women can offer more than other women. With their presence alone, they can command without words. The convictions of women with intelligence, whom Gogol views as not beautiful, on the other hand, will be spread about in an evil way. (VIII, 227) The correlation between Beauty and Good in this essay suggests that Gogol had not radically changed his aesthetic views since his 1831 story *Woman*. In this dialogue, Gogol had Plato say that woman was everything and that her beauty

could represent supreme Good. Man, on the other hand, was only her incarnation in reality. Similarly, in "Woman in the World" Gogol argues that beautiful women are the driving force behind men. They can redirect men back onto the right path and guard them from moral infection. (VIII, 224)

Gogol's essay "The Historical Painter Ivanov" is devoted to the power of beauty and art. It is about the grandeur of Ivanov's painting, "Christ Appears to the People," which depicts a crowd of people on the banks of the River Jordan.<sup>8</sup> Some of the people look bewildered, some in awe as Christ appears. For Gogol, the beauty of the picture lies in the fact that it shows what Ivanov "*felt*" (*pochuvstvoval*, italics Gogol, VIII, 130). Ivanov spent twenty years working on "Christ Appears to the People." The length of time taken by Ivanov to complete his work was considered by his critics to be due to laziness. Gogol argues that the artist was condemned because the skeptics did not understand that there is a connection between the soul and art.

The parallels between the real painter, Ivanov, and the fictional painter (the narrator's father) in *The Portrait* are evident. Both men completely devoted themselves to their art, insensible to everything else. Both moved to a

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<sup>8</sup>Ivanov produced the work in Rome. It now hangs in the Tretyakovsky Gallery in Moscow.

strange land where they endured poverty and humiliation in order to accomplish their masterpieces. Gogol's message in *The Portrait* that such a great work of art could not have been produced without Divine Guidance also parallels his sentiments on Ivanov:

Пока в самом художнике не произошло истинное обращение ко Христу, не изобразить ему того на полотне. (VIII, 331)

As long as there is no genuine movement towards Christ in the artist himself, he cannot express it on canvas.

Thus, Gogol's views on the interrelation between art and religion had not changed throughout the 1830s and 1840s. A true work of art must be inspired by God. The artist's vocation is a direct summons from God. This was a belief also held by medieval man.

Gogol also deals with the aesthetics of poetry and literature in his final book. He believed that true poetry was something ineffable, yet still capable of moving man's soul. (VIII, 244) As in *Arabesques*, Pushkin receives first place.<sup>9</sup> He had truly divine traits such as are only found in heaven. (VIII, 261) Gogol felt that Russian poets in general were above all other poets because the ultimate source of their lyricism was God. The beauty of Russian

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<sup>9</sup>Gogol most admired Pushkin's "Boris Godunov" and "Poltava" because they were "true responses to the past" (*vernyi otklik minuvshemu.*) See Pss VIII, 383.



poetry for Gogol lay not only in its biblicism and didactic potential, but also in its connections to the past. In "Subjects for the Lyrical Poet of the Present Time" he tells poets that their words would be twice as powerful if they "clothed" (*oblechet'*) them in the past. He recommended they read the chronicles, other medieval manuscripts and the Old Testament. (VIII, 278) With regard to the true beauty of poetry, Gogol's outlook was clearly medieval.

Gogol also felt that it was the poet's duty to share his source and his soul with the public. He therefore called for the public reading of poetry, convinced that this could work miracles. (VIII, 234) The poet as orator, or as "messenger of Truth," is reminiscent of the medieval orators of homilies and sermons. For Gogol, the poet-writer and his word were instrumental tools which could enable man to learn of the ultimate Truth on the road to salvation.

Apart from Pushkin, Gogol also praises Zhukovsky for his translation of *The Odyssey*, which Gogol esteemed more than the original. Gogol contends that for Zhukovsky to have accomplished his monumental task, he had to have become a more profound Christian. Zhukovsky did this so as to show his compatriots the aesthetic profits their souls would gain once they learned to love Homer. Gogol was convinced that, in spite of its polytheism, *The Odyssey* would show Man that the purpose of life on earth was to struggle against

troubles. These troubles could be overcome through prayer to God. The influence that *The Odyssey* had on the individual man was also great. It would help guide young writers and purify the Russian language. It could help in the development of aesthetic sensibilities. It would teach man about the life of the ancient world. Finally, the grandeur of the ancient patriarchal way of life expressed in *The Odyssey* would serve as a guide to the ailing nineteenth-century man. *The Odyssey* would help Russians in particular see the affinity they shared with antiquity. (VIII, 236 - 244)

In a lengthy discourse on Russian poetry, (*Selected Passages XXXI*), Gogol comments on many great Russian poets (Pushkin, Derzhavin, Iazykov, Viazemsky, etc.). He states that the only true education for a poet should be a Christian higher education. With such an education, the poet would be able to awaken Russia and to move the Russian soul. Gogol cautions against studying poets as such, but rather the source of their genius, which is ultimately God. (VIII, 409) Thus, once again, Gogol suggests that the true beauty of poetry can only come from a belief in Christ. The poet must be inspired by God. The result would demonstrate Russian poetry's national originality. (VIII, 409) Gogol's demand for *narodnost'* was shared by his romantic contemporaries, as was his belief in art's divine powers. Nevertheless, given his fascination with the medieval

tradition, he clearly endorsed the medieval man's aesthetic values that a true work of art was inspired by God.

### 5.5 The Demonic

As in Gogol's earlier stories, the demonic also plays an important role in *Selected Passages*. As mentioned, Gogol's devil was initially, the comic, ubiquitous type based on superstition. Then his presence was symbolized by banality. Finally, he took on a more human form and appeared as a conniving swindler, who, at times, exemplified the vice of pride. In the letters and essays of *Selected Passages* Gogol still reminds his readers of the devil's presence. By this time, Gogol had come to see the devil in a different light. His Evil One was no longer comic or forever changing his nature, but he was just as ubiquitous. He was more subtle, but also more "corrosive" and all-encompassing. The devil in his most powerful and insidious form had come to represent the vices Gogol saw in the world, the vices that surrounded and tempted mankind away from the Right Path, the Truth. Now, he was represented by pride, idleness, greed and bribery, as well as banality.

Gogol frequently rails against the vice of pride in *Selected Passages*. He says only unreasonable things are done from pride. The only weapon that can fight the pride

that has filled the heart and soul of nineteenth-century man is Christian humility, a virtue he sees in decline in the world around him. He sees many people as being one-sided (*odnostoronnii*), i.e., stubborn. They are the dangerous fanatics and the ulcer of society because they have no Christian humility. (VIII, 274) He devotes the chapter "To a Short-sighted Friend" to pride and urges his readers to guard themselves against this evil vice. They must pray to God that they will receive public disgrace and insult so as to rid themselves of pride, which Gogol equates with the devil:

Дух гордости перестал уже являться в разных образах и пугать суеверных людей, он явился в собственном своем виде. VIII, 415)

The spirit of pride has already ceased to appear in various forms and to frighten superstitious people; it has appeared in its own shape.

In his attack against pride, Gogol quotes Jesus, Son of Sirach. He directs his attack to those who speak pompously and superfluously on subjects about which they know nothing. They must refrain from speaking unnecessarily:

Наложи дверь и замки на уста твои, говорит Иисус Сирах, растопи золото и серебро, какое имеешь, дабы сделать из них весы, которые взвешивали бы твое слово, и выковать надежную узду, которая бы держала твои уста. (VIII, 232)

(*Ecclesiasticus*: 28: 24 - 26) Make a door and bars for your mouth, says Jesus of Sirach. Melt the gold and silver you have and make a balance with which you can weigh your words, and forge a trusty bridle for your mouth.

As mentioned, the *Book of Sirach* with its moral ideology was very important in Old Russia. It was an important source for the *Izbornik of 1076*, among other miscellanies. Undoubtedly, in this case Gogol turned to the *Old Testament* and/or to one of the works of medieval East Slavic literature in which *Ecclesiasticus* was cited.

Idleness was also considered to be a serious vice in early East Slavic literature dealing with morals. It was also a vice that Gogol strongly opposed. For example, in the *Emerald*, we read "idleness teaches many evils" and in the *Izbornik of 1076*, "the mother of evils is idleness." In *Selected Passages*, we read: в лени он грешит против Бога (VIII, 323) (with idleness one sins against God.) One cannot say for certain whether Gogol was aware of the advice given to servants in the old miscellanies. He certainly based his views on Holy Writ, as he himself suggested.<sup>10</sup> This was what the compilers of the miscellanies had done. In short, the views of both the earlier writers and Gogol stemmed from the ancient Christian tradition.

Another serious vice for Gogol was greed. He was always against the accumulation of wealth and summoned the rich to distribute their wealth (*Selected Passages VI.*) He also considered any underhanded dealings with money as evil

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<sup>10</sup>See *Pss VIII, 322*.

vices. He painted a black picture of the usurer in *The Portrait*. In *Selected Passages*, he warns his readers in "Parting Words" not to deal with bribe takers. They do not tremble at their unscrupulous deeds. The heavenly powers shudder at the thought of the eternal punishment that awaits bribe takers beyond the grave. (VIII, 368)

Merezhkovsky's contention that for Gogol the devil was eternal *poshlost'* is certainly applicable to *Selected Passages*. Gogol despised banality and summoned all to have passion. He condemned other nations for having no passion in their celebration of Easter Sunday. In his essay on this topic, "Bright Resurrection," he says that nineteenth-century man, (Russians excepted), was turning away from Christ by not celebrating the day of His resurrection. The consequences are dire:

[...] черствей и черствей становится жизнь; все мельчает и мелеет, и возрастает только в виду всех один исполинский образ скуки, достигая с каждым днем неизмеримейшего роста. Все глухо, могила повсюду. Боже! пусто и страшно становится в твоём мире! (VIII, 416)

[...] life has become more and more callous; everything is becoming petty and shallow, and a gigantic figure of boredom only grows in the sight of all, everyday attaining a more immeasurable size. Everything is deaf; a grave is everywhere. God, how empty and terrible it is becoming in your world!

By not accepting Christ, one accepts the devil as the complete denial of God, according to Merezhkovsky. And by

accepting the devil, banality enters man's life with full force. Gogol was imploring his fellow man not to let that happen.

Thus, although the devil had changed his shape from much of Gogol's earlier fiction, he was always a constant part of Gogol's thought and writings. In Gogol's early fiction he was based on medieval pagan beliefs. The more mature Gogol showed that the devil had come to represent man's vices. Many of these vices were also the evil vices that early Slavic writers railed against in their moral and didactic works. The transition was a sort of internalization of the devil/evil. This last state was far more dangerous and pernicious than ever before.

### **5.6 Ethical Issues**

A concern for morality is one of the central issues to be found in early East Slavic literature. As the medieval writer's aim was to instruct people what to do in order to be saved, specific fundamental virtues were incorporated into the literature. Humility, obedience, fear of God, charity, and love for one's fellow man were all part of the ethical matrix of the culture. Gogol dealt with some of these moral issues in his early writings. In *A Terrible Vengeance* and *Old-World Landowners* he suggested that

vengeance should not be met with vengeance. In "Al-Mamun" he showed the need for brotherly love. In *The Inspector General* he indirectly suggested that charitable acts must come from the heart. In *Selected Passages* Gogol again reiterates these messages, though, more overtly and forcefully. The main focus of his ethics in his final book is to encourage his readers to lead a Christian life.

In order to be a true Christian, Gogol argued that it was necessary to submit oneself to Christ. He firmly believed that by letting Him into one's life, everything is made easier, regardless of the situation. For example, in *Selected Passages XXVIII*, "To One Who Occupies An Important Position," he tells his addressee, (most likely a general), that if he were in a battle and acted as a true Christian, his Christian humility would protect him from any harm. Moreover, he assures his reader that if he is truly humble before Christ, he will act intelligently because Christian humility will override any sort of arrogant intelligence. In order for Christian humility to win the battle, man must humble himself and embrace mankind.

In a manner characteristic of early asceticism, Gogol also endorses public humiliation and derision. He summons women to pray and be prepared for humiliation so that they will have the fortitude to ask for alms for the poor. (VIII, 339) If they pray to God for strength, their Christian



humility will help them in their duties.

Apart from submitting oneself to Christ, Gogol also insisted on submission to the Tsar, God's vice-regent on earth. He frequently pays tribute to the Tsar in *Selected Passages*. In his "On the Lyricism of Our Poets," Gogol refers to the Tsar as "the anointed of the Lord" (*Bozhii pomazannik*), one who has been entrusted to show his people God's light. He compares Tsar Nicholas to Moses and the monarch in general he sees as the image of God:

Все полюбивши в своем государстве, до единого человека всякого сословья и званья, и обративши все, что ни есть в нем, как бы в собственное тело свое, возболев духом о всех, скорбя, рыдая, молясь и день и ночь о страждущем народе своем, государь приобретет тот всемогущий голос любви [...], который один может только внести примиренье во все сословия и обратить в стройный оркестр государство [...] [Он устремит] как одну душу, весь народ свой к тому верховному свету, к которому просится Россия. (VIII, 256)<sup>11</sup>

Loving everything in his state, every man of every class and rank, and turning everything in them into his own body, a sovereign acquires that all-powerful voice of love. Empathising with his whole soul, grieving, sobbing and praying day and night for his suffering people, he alone can reconcile all classes and turn the nation into a harmonious orchestra [...] [The Tsar] will direct all his people like one soul towards that supreme light to which

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<sup>11</sup>Such a view certainly corresponds to Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii's statement regarding medieval eschatological thought that secular power was either divine or diabolical. There was no in-between.

Russia cries out.

The need to honour princes is found in some of the earliest works of East Slavic literature. In the *Izbornik of 1076*, for example, it was stressed that one had to fear and honour the prince for he served as God's servant on earth.<sup>12</sup> A similar message to honour the Tsar is found in the sixteenth-century *Domostroi*. In chapter seven of the old manuscript, the author tells his readers that by serving the earthly king, one will learn to serve the heavenly king. Gogol clearly endorsed this point of view. In fact, he believed that both Russian history and historiography had prepared the way for the earthly king, who was to serve the heavenly king on behalf of his subjects. In 1846 he wrote the following:

Страницы нашей истории слишком явно говорят о воле промысла: да образуется в России эта власть в ее полном и совершенном виде. Все события в нашем отечестве, начиная от порабощенья татарского, видимо, клонятся к тому, чтобы собрать могущество в руки одного [...] (VIII, 256 - 57)

The pages of our history all too obviously speak of the will of Providence. Let this power arise in Russia in its complete and perfect form. All the events of our fatherland, beginning with the Tatar Enslavement,

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<sup>12</sup>Similarly, in the cycle of works dealing with SS Boris and Gleb, it is implied that the ruling dynasty is to be praised. Biblical citations were often employed to reinforce this political message. See Riccardo Picchio, "The Function of Biblical Thematic Clues in the Literary Code of Slavia Orthodoxa," *Slavica Hierosolymitana* Vol. 1 (1977), 1 - 31.

are evidently aimed at the gathering of power in the hands of one person [...]

Gogol also wrote about the role of the Tsar in another article around this time, "On Classes in the State:"<sup>13</sup>

Он должен отречься от себя и от своей собственности, как монах; его пищей должно быть одно благо его --- счастье всех до единого в государстве; его лицо не иначе, как священно. (VIII, 490 - 91)

He [a monarch] should renounce his own self and his property like a monk; his food must consist of only one thing: the happiness of every last person in the kingdom; his person should be none other than sacred.

Gogol may have had Tsar Nicholas in mind when he wrote these lines. However, his praise for the monarch certainly corresponds to the panegyrics written about rulers in the medieval period. Indeed, the sovereign's Christ-like love brings to mind such early saintly princes as Alexander Nevsky (1220 - 63), who fought to protect his nation and its Faith out of love for his people.

Gogol's belief in subordination to the Tsar also extended to his conviction that one should submit to one's superiors in general. He insisted that servants obey and submit to their masters. This principle was outlined in

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<sup>13</sup>This has been pointed out by Priscilla Meyer in her article, "False Pretenders and the Spiritual City: A May Night and The Overcoat," in *Essays on Gogol. Logos and the Russian Word*, edited by Sussanne Fusso and Priscilla Meyer (Evanston, Ill., 1992), p. 63.

works dealing with medieval lay ethics, probably stemming from *Romans* 13:1:<sup>14</sup> "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." It is expressed in both the *Emerald* and the *Domostroi*, which provide specific advice on the conduct of servants, slaves and peasants. Both works stress that the head of the household is responsible for the well-being of his servants. Any aberrant behaviour on the part of the servants was the master's responsibility. He would have to answer before God for his servants' idleness, thievery and other wrong-doing.

In a letter to B. N. B., "The Russian Landowner," Gogol explains how he feels peasants are to be treated:

[...] Собери мужиков и объясни им, что такое ты, и что такое они. Что помещик ты над ними не потому, чтобы хотелось повелевать и быть помещиком, но потому, что ты уже есть помещик, что ты родился помещиком, что взывает с тебя Бог, если б ты променял это звание на другое, потому что всяк должен служить Богу на своем месте, а не на чужом [...](VIII, 322)

[...] Gather the peasants and explain to them what you are and what they are, that you are a landowner over them not because you wanted to command and be a landowner, but because you are already a landowner, because you were born a landowner, because God would make you answer if you changed this rank for another because everyone must serve God in his place and not in someone else's

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<sup>14</sup>Pouncy, *Rules for Russian Households*, p. 71.

[...]

This brings to mind the concept of "place" as alluded to by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. A landowner is a landowner and a servant a servant as commanded by God. Therefore, Gogol argued that since God made a master answerable for his servants, it was the master's responsibility to see that the servants worked honestly. He warned that if a peasant became lazy, he would ruin his soul and a ruined soul meant eternal torment. His master would then be held accountable before God. (VIII, 323)

The theme of charity central to the medieval ethos (and to Christianity in general) is also central to Gogol's ethics in *Selected Passages*. The plea to help the less fortunate and the need to give alms were repeated throughout Vladimir Monomakh's *Instruction*, the *Izbornik* of 1076, the *Emerald* and the *Domostroi*. Similar admonitions occur time and again in *Selected Passages*. Gogol devotes an entire chapter to rendering help to the poor, aptly entitled, "Help the Poor." The chapter is an excerpt from a letter to Mme A. O. Smirnova, Gogol's long-time confidante. Gogol felt that donations to the poor were lacking in Russia and thus wished to encourage people to help those whom misfortune had befallen:

Туда несите помощь. Но нужно, чтобы помощь эта произведена была истинно христианским образом; если же она будет состоять в одной только выдаче денег, она ровно ничего не будет значить и не обратится в добро. (VIII,

235)

Bring your help there. But it is necessary that this help be given in a truly Christian way. If it consists only of the distribution of money, it will mean exactly nothing and will not be turned into good.

This message has obvious parallels with the medieval ethical notion of charity which insisted that the act of giving be both an activity of the hands and of the soul. The mere distribution of wealth was not enough. Gogol provides a perfect example of this in "What The Wife of A Provincial Governor Is." He refers to one woman who became famous as a benefactress in Petersburg for donating to a number of charitable institutions, although she herself did nothing to help directly. A second woman, however, is remembered by everyone "with tears" for she worked with and for the people, though she had donated nothing material. And again, in "Woman in the World" he urges all women to treat others as they would treat the sick in a hospital: smile and be gentle with them; let them know they are loved. (VIII, 227 - 28) Gogol's call for charity and alms-giving parallels the message on charity in the *Domostroi*.<sup>15</sup>

While Gogol encouraged charitable donations, as noted, he was also very much against the accumulation of wealth. In *Selected Passages XXIV*, "What a Wife Can Do for Her Husband

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<sup>15</sup>See pages 77 and 78 of this thesis; also, *PLDR* VII, p. 74.

in Simple Domestic Matters as Things are Now In Russia," in a manner akin to the sixteenth-century *Domostroi*, (e.g., Chapter 32), Gogol instructs wives how they are to divide up their money into specific piles for specific expenditures. One pile was to be for God, that is, for the Church and for the poor. Extra money was not to be used for cheap bargains (*vygodnye pokupki*). Gogol's condemnation of wealth and greed were views he had held for many years.<sup>16</sup>

Another important ethical message given by Gogol in his final book was the need for brotherly love. He called for everyone to unite and embrace each other with Christian love. The age-old dictum so often expounded upon in Christian medieval literature required that a charitable act be both an activity of the soul and an action of the hands. But Gogol believed that only in thought was brother willing to embrace brother. He was not doing so in deed. He felt that these two components were not being completely carried out because of man's chief obstacle --- pride (and hence, the devil.) Nineteenth-century man had fallen in love with his own beauty and thought himself better than his ancestors. He was prone to judge others and unwilling to forgive. He had also fallen in love with his own intellect, the most powerful and insidious type of pride. Because of

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<sup>16</sup>For example, Chertokutsky, Khlestakov, Chichikov, and even Chertkov are seen as negative types partly because of their greed.

pride, he did not know how to feel Christian love for another human being. (VIII, 410 - 14)

Nevertheless, Gogol thought that there was still hope, at least for his fellow countrymen. Christ's Second Coming would signal the celebration of brotherly love. On that day many will dream of how to transform all mankind. It is the day when the law of Christ is introduced into familial and governmental life. (VIII, 411) Light would triumph over darkness on that day; Heavenly Truth would permeate the earth.<sup>17</sup> On that day, all of humanity may enter the Heavenly House of the Lord. However, Gogol believed that while other nations ignored the resurrection of Christ, in Russia it still lived on in spirit. He asks the question,

Что значит в самом деле, что самый  
праздник исчез, а видимые признаки его  
так ясно носят по лицу земли нашей:  
раздаются слова: Христос воскрес!  
(VIII, 416)

What in fact does it mean that the  
celebration itself has disappeared,  
while visible signs of it are so clearly  
displayed across the face of our land  
[where] the words "Christ is risen!"  
resound.

He answers by stating that the celebration will come to Russians before all other nations, suggesting that they are the chosen ones. He recalls the conversion of Rus' when Christ came to the Rus'ians without the sword. This, he

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<sup>17</sup>As noted in chapter two, the Hesychasts also held the belief that Heavenly Truth would permeate the earth through divine light.



says, prepared the base for the brotherhood of Christ amongst Russians. All enmities will be forgotten by Russians first. In Russia first, brother will embrace brother. The resurrection of Christ will be celebrated amongst Russians first for, as Gogol says, his soul told him so:

У нас прежде, чем во всякой другой  
земле,        воспримается        светлое  
воскресенье Христово. (VIII, 418)

In our country, earlier than in any  
other country, will the Bright  
Resurrection of Christ be celebrated.

This statement ends Gogol's final book. It summarizes his eschatological and messianic vision of Russia and Russians. They could attain salvation. However, they must lead a Christian life and heed the words of Christ. Gogol, acting as a disciple of Christ, wished all to heed his words in *Selected Passages*.

\*   \*   \*   \*   \*

The road to salvation that Gogol believed man should follow was a long one. Throughout his final book he discusses the various steps to be taken in order to accomplish this trip. In both forceful and rhetorical language he talks about the need to give alms and to help the less fortunate. He discusses the moral responsibilities

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of husbands, wives and servants. He calls for brotherly love. Of importance is the use of words, and in this respect he underscores the poet's role in society. With their biblical lyricism they must appeal to the masses. Time and again he stresses that the Tsar is the anointed of the Lord and that his countrymen must submit to him. He implores everyone to rid themselves of the various vices afflicting society. They obstruct the road to salvation. Also central to Gogol's vision of salvation was the need to love Russia.

When Gogol was twenty-two he wrote the following words to his mother:

У меня болит сердце, когда я вижу, как  
заблуждаются люди [...] хотел бы  
кажется помочь им [...] (X, 283)

My heart aches when I see how people go  
astray [...] I think I would like to  
help them [...]

This burning desire to help others became his mission in life. It was his reason for writing *Selected Passages*, his contribution to his fellow man before his death, in which he attempted to fulfill his goal. He believed it was his preordained duty as a writer to present the facts and to guide others to the Truth. This called for all to follow certain ethical standards, to rid themselves of the devil's vices and to come to learn to appreciate true beauty, for it represented supreme Good. Gogol had always held these views and had expressed them indirectly in his early creative

stories. *Selected Passages* was the overt summation of these views, all of which Gogol deemed to be essential for salvation.

### 5.7 Influences: The Old Testament and Old Slavic

It has been suggested that many of Gogol's religious views may be attributed to the influence of his overpowering mother, Maria Ivanovna.<sup>18</sup> No doubt Maria Ivanovna's religiosity had some effect on her children. Indeed, she always took them to church and frequently told them bible stories. However, as Vasilii Gippius has maintained, the role played by Gogol's mother in influencing her son's religiosity has often been overemphasized. Gogol knew that his mother was a borderline fanatic who was inclined to fall into mystical trances and prone to anxiety attacks. More than once, he insinuated to his mother that she did not know how to raise children, and it seems that he did not fully share her religious views.<sup>19</sup> Gippius refers to the following excerpt from a letter Gogol wrote to his mother on October 2, 1833:

[...] я ходил в церковь потому, что мне приказывали или носили меня, но стоя в ней, я ничего не видел, кроме риз, попа и противного ревеня

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<sup>18</sup>See, for instance, Magarshack, *Gogol*, p. 20.

<sup>19</sup>Gippius, *Gogol*, pp. 8 - 9.

дьячков. Я крестился потому что видел, что все крестятся. (X, 282)

[...] I used to go to church because I was ordered or because I was carried there; but when I stood in church, I saw nothing but the chasuble, the priest, and the repulsive bellowing of the deacons. I crossed myself because I saw everyone else crossing themselves.

Gogol was referring to a time when he was quite young. Nevertheless, he was certainly very spiritual and believed in a higher power. In the same letter he urged his mother to teach his sister, Liza, the fundamentals of religion and especially encouraged her to tell Liza about everlasting life and the torment of sinners.

While both Magarshack and Gippius may have a point regarding the influence of Gogol's mother's religiosity on her son, Gogol's religious and ethical views were greatly influenced by a much earlier source: the medieval Eastern Orthodox Slavic tradition. Medieval Eastern Orthodox Slavic literature in its turn was influenced above all else by biblical texts. Therefore, these dual, overlapping sources were the ultimate source of Gogol's religious and ethical views.

One of the most influential books of the Bible on early East Slavic literature dealing with religious and moral issues was *Ecclesiasticus*, also known as the *Book of*

*Sirach*.<sup>20</sup> In the *Izbornik of 1076* it was by far the most widely cited of all the sapiential books of the Old Testament.<sup>21</sup> *Ecclesiasticus* was also the main source of the instructions given in the *Emerald*.<sup>22</sup> In the *Domostroi*, the sixteenth-century work on morals, there are at least 59 citations from the *Book of Sirach*. (The chapters dealing with instructions to children are based almost entirely on quotations from and/or adaptations of *Sirach*.)<sup>23</sup> Thus, these three important and influential works on ethics in pre-Petrine Russia were clearly under the influence of the Wisdom of *Sirach*.

While Gogol was familiar with the Old and the New

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<sup>20</sup>Fedotov, I, p. 225, who notes that only the *Psalter* was more popular. The *Book of Sirach* was written in Hebrew by Jesus, Son of Sirach, sometime between 200 and 175 B.C. and translated into Greek around 132 B.C. The primary purpose of the book was for moral instruction. It covers a wide range of topics: the role of the individual, the family and the community in relation to God; education; the role of women; the poor and the rich; man's vices; the treatment of servants; and death, among other issues. The book is recognized as canonical and considered divinely inspired by the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. A good introduction to and translation of *Ecclesiasticus* appears in *The New American Bible* (London, 1970). My citations are based on this edition.

<sup>21</sup>William Veder estimates that more than 20% of the biblical citations in the *Izbornik of 1076* come from *Ecclesiasticus*. See his "Introduction" in *The Edificatory Prose of Kievan Rus'*, p. xvii.

<sup>22</sup>Fedotov, II, p. 75.

<sup>23</sup>Carolyn Pouncy has painstakingly matched every passage of the *Domostroi* to its biblical citation in her *Rules for Russian Households*.

Testaments, it is arguable that, as was the case for many medieval Slavic writers of ethics, the most influential of the sapiential books of the Bible on Gogol's religious and moral views was also the *Book of Sirach*. This influence may have come directly from Gogol's reading of *Ecclesiasticus*,<sup>24</sup> or from the Old Slavic literary monuments which themselves were based on the teachings of Jesus of Sirach, or both.

*Selected Passages* is Gogol's *summa* on ethics. Many of the didactic messages in this work correspond to the moral maxims in the *Book of Sirach*. In Gogol's book, they appear mainly as direct quotations, adaptations and/or elaborations of citations from *Ecclesiasticus*. For example, in Gogol's advice to landowners, (*Selected Passages* XXII), he insists that servants are to submit to their masters and that under no circumstances is a slave to be left idle:

[...] будь патриархом, да, начинателем  
всего и передовым во всех делах [...]   
подстрекая всех работать молодцами,  
похваливая тут же удальца и укоряя тут  
же ленивца [...] (VIII, 324)

[...] ибо знаешь, да и они знают, что,  
заленившись, мужик на все способен ---  
сделается и вор и пьяница, погубит  
свою душу [...] (VIII, 322)

[...] be a patriarch, the initiator of  
everything, and be in the vanguard of  
all matters [...] inciting everyone to  
work diligently, praising the hard  
worker and reproaching the lazy [...]

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<sup>24</sup>Gogol was definitely familiar with *Ecclesiasticus*. As mentioned, he quoted *Ecclesiasticus* 28: 24 - 26 in his "On the Meaning of Words."

[...] for you know, and even they know that a peasant (*muzhik*), once having become lazy, is capable of anything. He'll become a thief and a drunkard and will ruin his soul [...]

Similarly, we read in *Ecclesiasticus* 33: 20:

Let neither son nor wife, neither brother nor friend, have power over you as long as you live.

33: 26 - 28: Make a slave work and he will look for rest; let his hands be idle and he will seek to be free.

Force him to work that he be not idle, for idleness is an apt teacher of mischief.

These instructions have been transcribed in both the *Izbornik of 1076* and the *Emerald*.<sup>25</sup> Gogol's insistence that the idleness of servants could lead to their ruination was likely based on one or more of these sources.

Gogol's views on the monarchy may also have stemmed in part from the Wisdom of Sirach, or, later works under its influence.<sup>26</sup> As mentioned, Gogol always held that one had to humble oneself not only before the Lord, but also before the Tsar. He was God's vice-regent on earth to whom all in the earthly state had to submit. Only God was higher than the Tsar. (VIII, 225) This corresponds to *Ecclesiasticus* 10: 4 - 5:

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<sup>25</sup>See chapter two of this thesis, pages 70 and 73.

<sup>26</sup>The Pauline epistles may also have influenced Gogol's views on this matter.

Sovereignty over the earth is in the hand of God, who raises up on it the man of the hour;

Sovereignty over every man is in the hand of God, who imparts his majesty to the ruler.

The need to pay homage to the Tsar is also an integral part of the *Domostroi*.

As noted, Gogol believed that all charitable acts had to come from the soul and not merely from the hands. He therefore encouraged all to help the poor, especially those whom misfortune had suddenly befallen. Alms-giving was central to Gogol's notion of charity. While the need to give charity is found throughout the Bible, (especially Christ's admonitions on charity), Jesus of Sirach's maxims on charity likely influenced Gogol (as they likely did medieval Slavic writers of ethics.) Of the extensive advice on the giving of charity in the Book of Wisdom, the following are but a few citations which correspond to Gogol's instructions in *Selected Passages*:

4: 4: Avert not your face from the poor.

18: 17: A grudging gift wears out the eyes.

29: 1 - 2: He does a kindness who lends to his neighbour and he fulfils the precepts who holds out a helping hand. Lend to your neighbour in his hour of need.

Gogol not only called for all to give and share with others, he also frowned upon the accumulation of wealth, as



did Jesus of Sirach:

31: 1: Keeping watch over riches wastes the flesh, and the care of wealth drives away rest.

Again, all of these precepts were central to the medieval Slavic works on ethics.

Gogol's writings show that he viewed women in both a positive and a negative way. The debate between Plato and Telekles in his short piece *Woman* exemplifies this. The former idealized women while the latter saw them as the incarnation of evil. In *Selected Passages*, Gogol says much of the same:

Душа жены --- хранительный талисман для мужа, оберегающий его от нравственной заразы [...] и наоборот, душа жены может быть его злом и погубит его навеки. (VIII, 224)

A woman's soul is a preserving talisman for a man, protecting him from moral infection [...] On the other hand, a woman's soul can be his evil and can ruin him forever.

It is not easy to determine the source of Gogol's views on women. The motif of the good versus evil woman is centuries old. It occurs throughout the Bible.<sup>27</sup> *Ecclesiasticus* may have been a source or at least had some influence on Gogol. The advice given to women and about women in the medieval Slavic works on ethics also appears to

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<sup>27</sup>Stories of the *zlaia zhena* of medieval Slavic monastic origin go back to Adam and Eve.

be based partly on conflations or adaptations from *Ecclesiasticus*. Sirach says the following about good wives/women versus bad wives/women which correspond to Gogol's views:

25: 18: There is scarce any evil like that in a woman.

26: 1 - 2: Happy is the husband of a good wife, twice lengthened are his days. A worthy wife brings joy to her husband, peaceful and full is his life.

26: 7: A bad wife is a chafing yoke; he who marries her seizes a scorpion.

Another example which may further suggest that *Ecclesiasticus*, or works under its influence, helped shape Gogol's religious and moral vision is Jesus of Sirach's message on death and salvation:

7: 36: In whatever you do, remember your last days, and you will never sin.

Similarly, in *Selected Passages*, while Gogol constantly implored all to lead a good life through deeds and thoughts, he also insisted that the constant thought of death was imperative for salvation. This message was also central to the *Domostroi* which Gogol was no doubt aware of.

Thus, based on the similarities between the moral maxims in *Selected Passages* and the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, especially *Ecclesiasticus*, as well as the Old Slavic works under its influence, it is likely that the biblical and medieval texts were instrumental in shaping Gogol's religious and ethical outlook.

I have suggested that Gogol's religious and moral views did not change radically over the course of his life. This would imply, therefore, that his earlier works which touched on moral issues may also have been influenced by *Ecclesiasticus*. This is not to say that Gogol modelled his earlier, more creative works on the *Book of Sirach*. Rather, some of the maxims in the sapiential book, (or works based on it), may have served as "thematic guides" to Gogol's earlier stories. In other words, Gogol may have based some of the moral messages in his creative writings on citations from *Ecclesiasticus*.

In *A Terrible Vengeance*, for instance, the admonition is given to forgive others for sins committed against oneself. Those who are vengeful, (as was Petro in Gogol's story), will pay eternally. Similarly, in *Ecclesiasticus* 28: 1 - 2 we read:

The vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance, for he remembers their sins in detail. Forgive your neighbours injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven.

In *Vii*, Khoma Brut's downfall is due to his succumbing to the wiles of an old lady/witch. She transforms into a beautiful girl whom he lusts after. His lack of resistance ultimately leads to his death. For Gogol, evil was often disguised as beauty. Khoma neglected this and became ensnared. A similar message is found in *Ecclesiasticus*:

9: 3: Be not with a strange woman, lest  
you fall into her snares.

9: 8: Through woman's beauty many  
perish, for lust for it burns like fire.

There is a section in the *Book of Sirach* on dreams which corresponds to the dream versus reality theme in Gogol's *Nevsky Prospect* and *Diary of a Madman*. Piskarev's confusion between dream and reality over the prostitute and his subsequent suicide brings to mind the following words by Jesus of Sirach:

34: 6 - 7: Unless it be a vision  
specially sent by the Most High, fix not  
your heart on it;  
For dreams have led many astray, and  
those who believed in them have  
perished.

Poprishchin imagines himself the King of Spain after he realizes he cannot marry his supervisor's daughter. His inability to distinguish reality from fantasy is thematically linked to *Ecclesiasticus* 34: 1:

Empty and false are the hopes of the  
senseless, and fools are borne aloft by  
dreams.

In *The Portrait*, Chertkov's downfall is brought on by his desire for fame and fortune at the expense of his integrity. His lust for riches indirectly leads to his death. This is related to the following admonition by Sirach:

31: 5 - 7: The lover of gold will not be  
free from sin, for he who pursues wealth  
is led astray by it.

Many have been ensnared by gold, though

destruction lay before their eyes; it is  
a stumbling block for those who are avid  
for it, a snare for every fool.

Finally, Khlestakov's and Chichikov's conniving deeds  
may have been based on the following maxims on deception  
from the *Book of Sirach*, chapter 7: 12 - 13:

Plot not mischief against your brother,  
nor against your friend and companion.

Delight not in telling lie after lie,  
for it never results in good.

Again, the similarities between Gogol's moral and  
ethical views in his early stories and the moral maxims in  
*The Book of Sirach* are striking. The fact that  
*Ecclesiasticus* was so frequently quoted and assimilated into  
medieval Slavic and patristic works, especially the  
miscellanies and the *Domostroi*, and, given Gogol's  
fascination and familiarity with the medieval literary and  
cultural tradition, it is likely that one of the ultimate  
sources of Gogol's religious and moral views was  
*Ecclesiasticus* and/or the Slavic works which were influenced  
by the biblical text.

## CONCLUSION

In his *Comparative History of Slavic Literatures* (1971) Dmitrii Chyzhevskii convincingly argues that "the entire development of Slavic literatures can be presented as an alternation between two diametrically opposed styles."<sup>1</sup> Each style, he says, is associated with an ideological attitude. Although Chyzhevskii rightly cautions against overgeneralizing, he points out that in the history of literature there is often a tendency for literary styles to fluctuate between opposites. One style, such as classicism, is superceded by another, such as romanticism. And romanticism in turn gives way to realism. Of course, no precise chronological break can be applied to these styles. One often overlaps with the next. Nevertheless, in a given time, a certain homogeneity in the style of literary works occurs which allows for a rough periodization of literature.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Chyzhevskii, *Comparative History*, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, pp. 14 - 16. The semiotic study by Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii ("Binary Models") indirectly supports Chyzhevskii's remarks. They suggest that such a "binary opposition" as "old/new," which has always been a part of Russian cultural history, indicates that there has

The periodization shows that the styles and ideologies of literary works may generally be divided into two diametrical oppositions. According to Chyzhevskii's schematic outline, on one side of the "bipolar field" can be placed literature of the Early Middle Ages (up to the twelfth century), the Renaissance, Classicism and Realism. Literature of the Late Middle Ages (twelfth - fifteenth/early sixteenth centuries), Baroque, Romanticism and Neo-Romanticism or Modernism are in direct opposition.

This schema can certainly apply to Russian literature from its beginnings up to the present. Indeed, there are many characteristics of Russian romanticism which correspond to the pre-Petrine literature of the Late Middle Ages.<sup>3</sup> For example, both the medieval writer and the romantic writer saw their roles as a divine lofty calling. Both experimented with ornamental language. Both strove to contrast the ephemeral nature of life to the eternal. Both were fascinated with the supernatural. And there is no doubt that the romantics were attracted to things medieval.

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never been a complete break from the past for different stages of Russian cultural history. See pp. 31 - 33 of their study.

<sup>3</sup>To a degree, even some of the literature of the Early Middle Ages (e.g. the *Izbornik of 1076*, Vladimir Monomakh's *Instruction* and *The Igor Tale*) corresponds thematically to romantic themes as seen in Gogol's writings, for example.

Indeed, the national awakening of the romantics and their corresponding quest for national originality prompted many romantic writers to search through all aspects of their past for inspiration.

Nikolai Gogol, like the other great Russian romantic writers,<sup>4</sup> was also fascinated with the medieval period. As a romantic writer, he was on the same side of the "bipolar field" as the medieval writers. The difference with Gogol, however, is that he took more from medievalism than did many of his contemporaries. In fact, in many ways Gogol's whole outlook on life was very much medieval. The function of the writer and his place in society, the importance of the monastic vocation, eschatological concerns, particular aesthetic values, an abiding concern for the presence of the demonic in the world and the preoccupation with morality characterize medieval East Slavic literature and the medieval East Slavic world-view. These aspects were also integral to Gogol's thoughts and writings. Like the medieval man, he believed in the divine calling of the artist-writer and the fulfilment of one's duties in life according to one's place in life. A true Christian life could be attained through monasticism. Gogol shared this belief and claimed to have had a lifelong desire to be a monk. The Final Judgement, a notion which preoccupied the

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<sup>4</sup>In spite of "the enigma of Gogol" (cf. Peace), he is still most commonly classified as a romantic writer.



medieval writer, was likewise an overwhelming concern of Gogol's eschatological, messianic and ethical views. Through his characters and in his essays he urged everyone to live like brothers and lead a moral life in order to attain salvation. Gogol's views on beauty and evil were also linked to the medieval tradition in that his aesthetic values were closely linked to his religious values and he was crucially aware of the presence of the demonic in the world.

Medieval literature was highly influenced by biblical texts and patristic exegesis. Gogol was very familiar with these works and their renderings in the early literature of his country. They were clearly decisive in shaping his thoughts and writings. His correspondence, publicistic and creative work alike are testimony to this. In his early creative works, he indirectly expressed many of the concerns shared by the medieval man. But it would take his final book for him to spell out more overtly what he had been saying all along. Although Gogol was consistent from day one, in his last work, he was finally fulfilling a yearning that he had always --- to guide his fellow countryman to the path to salvation.

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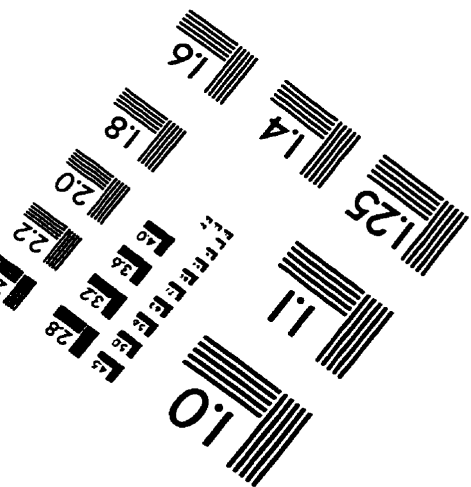
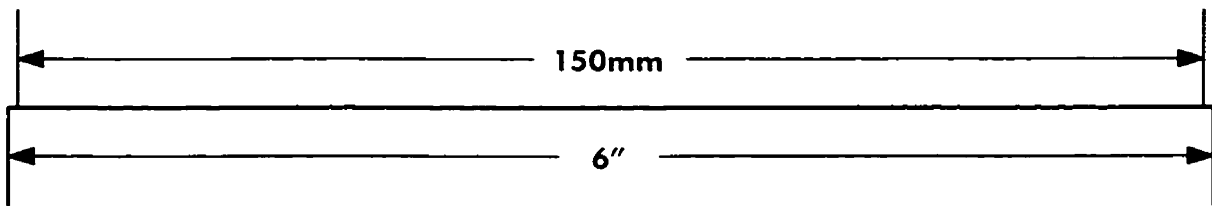
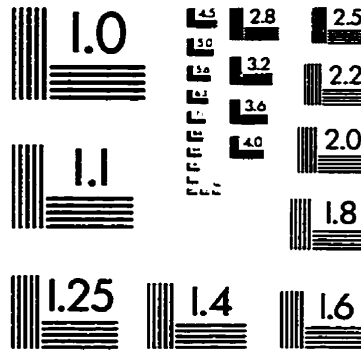
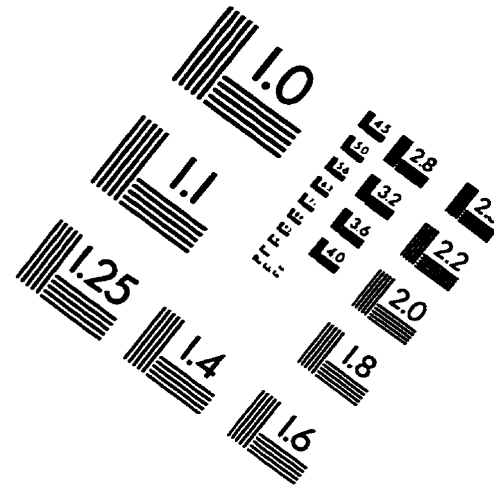
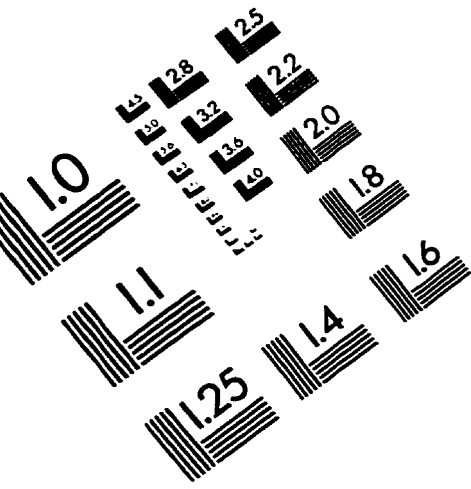
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