GOGOL'S EARLY HUMOUR

SOME ASPECTS OF GOGOL'S EARLY HUMOUR

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: An analysis of the comic techniques used by Gogol in his early works, Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka and Mirgorod, to illustrate the transition from mere aesthetic laughter to mature humour. In addition, an examination is made of his purpose as a satirist.

PREFACE

The nineteenth century was a crucial period in the history of Russia. Yet during the social and political upheaval, while the young intellectuals were plotting the destiny of Russia, Gogol remained indifferent to these crises and worked in an atmosphere of calm neutrality, neither actively nor spiritually participating in the cause of political, social or cultural enlightenment. This classic writer's humour, whose laughter has become known as "laughter through tears", reflects the pessimistic temperament of the age.

During the first period of his creative activity, Gogol was disillusioned by the depressing life in St. Petersburg, and unable to realize his loftyambition of being useful to his country. His laughter became an escape mechanism from reality. To divert and amuse himself, Gogol composed the _Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka_, in which he invented ridiculous situations replete with comic types, farcical action and slapstick comedy. But as he matured, this youthful fancy was replaced by a more sober outlook on life.

In the second phase of his literary career, influenced by Pushkin, Gogol abandoned the gay and idyllic depiction of peasant life, and instead, he turned to the contemporary scene. He was

consumed with creative activity and he begged his muse not to fail him. With his satiric pen he attacked stupidity, vanity and triviality.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the comic techniques of the two works, Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka and Mirgorod, written during the first and second period respectively of Gogol's literary creativity and to indicate the transition from aesthetic laughter to satiric laughter. Gogol's humour, "laughter through tears", harmonizes with the dismal spirit of nineteenth century Russia.

All quotations from Gogol are from Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka, Mirgorod - Being a Continuation of the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, n.d.) and Sobraniye Sochinenii v Shesti Tomakh (Moscow, 1959). References consisting of E. (signifying Evenings) or M. (signifying Mirgorod) or S. (signifying Sobraniye), plus Volume and Page number [e.g. E. (II, 145)], are appended directly after these quotations.

References to secondary sources are indicated in the usual fashion.

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. L. J. Shein, Chairman, Department of Russian, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario and to Mr. D. J. Jones, Assistant Professor Russian, for their advice and assistance.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Descriptive page		ii
Preface		iii
CHAPTER I I	Introduction: A Biographical Sketch	1
CHAPTER II	Gogol's Comic Techniques	14
CHAPTER III	Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka	29
CHAPTER IV	Mirgorod - Being a Continuation of Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka	55
CHAPTER V	Conclusion	78
BIBLIOGRAPHY		87

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The following biography of Gogol does not probe into the depths of his personal life. It is simply an attempt to sketch Gogol's personality and those events in his life which influenced his treatment of humour. This appraisal is indispensable in examining the nature of Gogol's laughter.

Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol-Janovsky was born on March 19, 1809, at Sorochintsy, near the family estate at Vassilevka, to a Ukrainian family of lesser nobility. (Gogol dropped the Polish-sounding name of Janovsky shortly after his arrival in St. Petersburg in 1828). His father, Vassily Gogol, received a fairly substantial income from an estate, a distillery and a fair which was held in Vassilevka four times a year. In addition to supervising the above enterprises, Vassily Gogol was both a playwright and actor. Gogol's mother, Maria Ivanovna, a domineering person inclined towards fanatical worship, inspired in young Gogol fear of the devil and hell which tormented him throughout his later years.

Pampered and sheltered by his mother at home, Gogol became a shy and self-conscious student at school. As a student, he was never a keen scholar, but was contemptuous towards his teachers. Yet at the same time, Gogol was actively interested in

contemporary Russian literature, copying poems written by Pushkin and reading literary journals and theatrical magazines. In 1828, Gogol graduated from high school with poor grades. One contemporary critic of Gogol, David Magarshack, has described Gogol as the "least formally educated of all great Russian writers of the nineteenth century."[1]

At school, Gogol was described as an enigma, a mysterious young man, round-shouldered and near-sighted, who silently and pensively shuffled through the corridors. Prior to leaving school, in 1828, he wrote a haughty letter to his mother in which he complained of the ingratitude, injustice and contempt which he had had to endure. In this letter, Gogol also tried to reveal his true character. " 'In one place I am quiet, modest, polite; in another - sullen, dreamy, uncouth, and so on; in a third - loquacious and tiresome to the extreme; some think I am clever, others that I am stupid. Think what you like of me, but it is only from my true career that you will find out my true character . . .'".[2]

Gogol's formal education contributed little to his training as a writer. It was through the literary circles, organized extramurally by the students, that Gogol received a broad background of Russian literature. His potentialities as a writer found an outlet in the publication of a monthly literary magazine. The school stage offered Gogol a chance to display his creative wit. He was applauded

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[1]David Magarshack, Gogol: A Life (London, 1957), p. 38.

[2]Ibid., p. 24.

for his colourful portrayal of Prostakov in Fonvizin's satirical play, The Minor.

In 1828, Gogol moved to St. Petersburg. Here his attendance at social gatherings revealed his promise as a witty comic writer. He mingled casually among friends at parties which were noted for their gaiety and ridicule of the baseness and hypocrisy of certain literary and journalistic figures. Gogol was the centre of attention, for everyone was captivated by his plays, epigrams and jokes about mutual acquaintances. Every shade of emotion was painstakingly captured. There was a comic element in his elocution. Gaiety was expressed in "his odd face with its pointed nose, while his little grey eyes smiled good humouredly and he kept tossing up the hair which always fell across his forehead."[3] People smiled at his small figure, thin bent nose, bowed legs and his abrupt speech which was continually interspersed by slight nasal sounds.

Possessing a keen power of observation, Gogol was particularly sensitive to any idiosyncracies which he discovered in people. Nothing escaped him. He seemed anxious to see even the most obvious things. Replying to a letter by Aksakov in which the latter had complained of a dull, monotonous world, Gogol replied in the following manner. "'This is not true. Comedy is seen everywhere. Living in the midst of it, we do not see it, but that if the artist translates

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[3]David Magarshack, Gogol: A Life (London, 1957), p. 71.

it into art, onto the stage, then we will collapse with laughing at ourselves, and will be astounded that we had never noticed it before.'".[4]

Gogol was greatly interested in speaking with people, particularly with those who were frank. "The kind of poetry which one obtains from the contemplation of living, existing real things was so deeply felt by him that while constantly and persistently avoiding the clever fellows who have already definitions of every imaginable subject and constantly and stubbornly laughing at them, he could spend hours talking."[5]

Gogol's early life in St. Petersburg, during the year 1828, was one of disappointment, leading gradually to frustration. At the age of seventeen, Gogol had had a vision of happily serving his country as a famous and useful citizen. His ambitious expectations of life in the capital were sadly disappointed however, by the realities of existence there. The prospect of a dismal existence as a "transient and insignificant guest on earth"[6] frightened him. However, these laudable ambitions were slow in being realized.

He did not succeed in becoming a professional actor in St. Petersburg. Under the pen-name of V. Alov, he wrote a poem entitled

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[4] G. N. Pospelov, Tvorchestvo N. V. Gogolya (Moscow, 1953), p. 84.

[5] David Magarshack, Gogol: A Life (London, 1957), p. 67.

[6] Marc Slonim, The Epic of Russian Literature (New York, 1950), p. 160.

Hans Küchelgarten. In spite of Gogol's great expectations, the literary critics deemed it a failure. It appeared as though Gogol's literary career was doomed.

In 1829, Gogol became a petty clerk in the Ministry of Interior in the Department of Public Works where he served for only three months, from November 1829 to February 1830. He was then transferred to another department where he worked for an additional eleven months. After a short trip abroad, Gogol returned to St. Petersburg where, to supplement his income and at the same time to bolster his waning spirits, he began to write short prose tales about Ukrainian life for a literary review. At the end of May 1831, the first volume of Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka was completed, as well as part of the second volume. By January 1832, all the tales were assembled. Each volume contains four narratives: Volume 1, The Fair at Sorochintsi, St. John's Eve, A May Night and The Lost Letter; Volume 2, Christmas Eve, A Horrible Vengeance, Ivan Fyodorovich Shponka and His Aunt, and A Place Bewitched.

The tales of the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka were based to a large extent on Ukrainian folklore and presented a curious combination of legend and fairy tales, blended with other romantic elements from Gogol's own imagination. It was natural for Gogol to turn to the heroic traditions, songs and folk-dances of the Ukrainian people.

During his childhood on his parent's small estate he was surrounded by peasants, Ukrainian Cossacks, the provincial gentry and petty officials. The Ukraine was a source of literary inspiration

for many Russian writers. Ryleev and Pushkin both saw a wealth of material in its historical subjects and folklore. The Ukrainian people and their picturesque folklore were a refreshing and pleasant change from the cold and dismal atmosphere of St. Petersburg with its governmental offices.

Gogol was aided by his mother in compiling the material for the tales in the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka. He received from her by mail comedies written by his father, Vassily Gogol. "In all their types and subjects, in all their elevated aesthetic mode, these comedies of the farcical tradition were closely connected with the national prosaic epoch - with everyday tales representing in their genre the comic stories of national life, sometimes with fantastic elements and national superstitions. Furthermore, in his creative work in the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka, Gogol relied partly on this tradition."[7] His mother also sent him material based on folklore, and information regarding the local customs, manners and dress of the village people.

Gogol synthesized all this material into scenes where evil spirits blend with comic adventure. The fantastic element in the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka illustrated the naive belief of the people in the supernatural and was the expression of Gogol's youthful dalliance with romanticism. The comic appearances of the devil, the

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[7] G. N. Pospelov, Tvorchestvo N. V. Gogolya (Moscow, 1953), pp. 34-35.

witch and the drowned maiden were intended to illustrate the superstitious temperament of the old Ukrainian peasants. The supernatural and the humorous elements thus became salient features of the tales.

When he completed the collection Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka, Gogol, still in his early twenties, was a novice in the field of literature. He was disappointed by the sedate atmosphere of St. Petersburg, where everyone could speak only of daily duties. Gogol was dissatisfied with the unexciting life which fate had destined him to lead. "'To spend all my life in a place where I can see no future for myself, where all the years spent in worthless occupations would haunt me with awful reproaches - what a horrible prospect! What good is it to be promoted after fifty years of service to the rank of some State Councillor . . . if you have not the power to contribute a farthing's worth of good to humanity? What a terrible punishment!'"[8]

With the publication of the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka, Gogol's life and literary creativity reached a turning point. The sudden leap from insignificance to fame - from literary obscurity to friendship with such famous Russian contemporary writers as Pushkin and Zhukovsky - revived his languishing spirits.

Although Gogol suffered from a lack of experience in the field of creative literature and a pessimistic outlook on life, this collection contained whimsical tales, expressive and eloquent of his youthful fancy. In a letter addressed to Pushkin, Gogol described the impressive

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[8] David Magarshack, Gogol: A Life (London, 1957), p. 57.

effect which the stories had had on the compositors of the book. As soon as they saw Gogol, they began to chuckle and finally burst out laughing, for, as they later told him: "'The stuff you were good enough to send us from Pavlovsk for printing is very comical, indeed, Sir, and has greatly amused the compositors.'"[9]

The criticism of the book by several nineteenth century Russian literary critics was unfavorable. They attacked the tales for their poor invention and deviation from the accepted canons of good taste and elegance, whereas Pushkin highly praised the collection for their genuine gaiety and sincerity.

The early life of Gogol in St. Petersburg with its problems of adjustment had a direct bearing on his approach towards the treatment of the comic in the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka. This approach is examined in Chapter II. The publication of these tales marks the end of the first period in Gogol's literary creativity.

Although the publication of the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka established Gogol as a leading figure in the literary world, he, nevertheless, became restless and moody. Laughter, as an escape mechanism, had become obsolete in his war against despondency. "From the many letters of this period, we can see that he waged a ceaseless, relentless struggle with his melancholia, which, at times violently attacked him."[10]

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[9] David Magarshack, Gogol: A Life (London, 1957), p. 76.

[10] V. V. Ermilov, Genii Gogolya (Moscow, 1959), p. 129.

In a letter addressed to Pogodin in September, 1833, Gogol complained of the frustrations he was encountering in trying to write again. He confided to Maksimovich that, " 'I have one hundred different beginnings, but not one story, not even a completed excerpt, suitable for the almanac.' "[11]

Once again, inspired with the idea of literary achievements, Gogol began writing creatively. " 'What will you be my future! Brilliant? Grand? Will you seethe with great feats for me? Oh, be brilliant, be active - be my angel too. If indolence and insensitivity, even for a time should dare to touch me, oh, awaken me then. Do not let them take control of me.' "[12]

Within the short interval of two and a half years, 1834 to 1836, Gogol partially completed all his major works. These included the Arabesques or Tales of St. Petersburg, The Inspector-General, his minor plays The Gamblers, The Lawsuit, A Busy Man's Morning and The Wedding, and the first volume of Dead Souls, in addition to numerous articles on history, literature and art.

Amidst the excitement of literary fame following the publication of the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka, two years later, Gogol had the idea of publishing a further collection of tales under the name of Mirgorod - Being a Continuation of Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka. The book was printed in 1835. The collection is divided

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[11] M. V. Khrapchenko, Tvorchestvo Gogolya (Moscow, 1954), p. 134.

[12] V. V. Ermilov, Genii Gogolya (Moscow, 1959), p. 131.

into two parts: Part I) The Old-World Landowners and Taras Bulba. Part II) Viy and The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich.

As in the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka, Gogol, in Mirgorod, presents a variety of tales, ranging from an epic description of the life of a Ukrainian hero in the tale Taras Bulba, to a comic description of the banal existence of two men in The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich. Each of the four tales is distinct in subject matter and peculiar in style.

In this second period in Gogol's literary creativity, marked by the publication of Mirgorod, Gogol abandoned the gay and light-hearted peasants of the Ukraine, and turned to the contemporary Ukrainian scene. More mature and visibly adjusted to his environment, Gogol was critical of his literary aims and the purpose of his laughter. "The strength of laughter, of which I have a large reserve, will enable me to depict the imperfections more clearly, which the reader will begin to hate." S. (VI, 230).

The depressing life in St. Petersburg had dampened Gogol's youthful zest, but had, on the other hand, awakened his earlier assertion that literature must have a moral basis. "It is necessary that the pen of the reviewer or critic should be guided by a true desire for what is good and useful."[13]

Pushkin was partly responsible for further stimulating Gogol's analytic approach towards his subject matter. "Pushkin caused me to look at a thing seriously." S. (VI, 227).

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[13]David Magarshack, Gogol: A Life (London, 1957), p. 38.

Following his unsuccessful attempts at historical research and teaching, Gogol returned to writing novelettes. In 1835, his famous play The Inspector-General was completed and was presented on the stage in the following year. The play produced a flurry of excitement and was hailed as a national comedy. On the one hand, the official class saw it as an insolent parody on themselves while others found it a highly amusing expose of the bureaucratic class. It was only Tsar Nicholas' favourable reaction to the play which saved Gogol from the vengeance of the ruling class. Gogol escaped this agitation by fleeing abroad, finally settling in Rome, where he defended his position regarding the comedy and its social implications. He said that he felt very sad that he had come under the attack of his countrymen, whom he loved so much and who had unjustly accused him of interpreting everything in a perverted fashion.

By 1838, Gogol had published several St. Petersburg tales, including Nevsky Prospect, The Nose, The Portrait, and Diary of a Madman. In these tales, reality merged with the weird. The Overcoat, a short story published in 1842, had a great impact upon the reading public. In this tale, Gogol expressed great feeling and compassion for the"small" man, downtrodden and humiliated, who had neither the strength nor opportunity to escape poverty and social inferiority.

In Rome, Gogol continued to work on his penetrating novel, Dead Souls, which was written at the apex of his literary career. During its completion, Gogol was besieged by personal doubts regarding his mission as writer, combined with neurotic instability and religious torment. The novel was prepared at irregular intervals, from 1836 to 1841, as Gogol travelled across the Continent. He returned to Moscow in 1839 to supervise the publication of the book and to make whatever changes were demanded by the censor. Dead Souls was hailed by Vissarion Belinsky as a purely national literary masterpiece, which stripped the veil from the reality of Russian life.

In 1847, Gogol published Selected Passages from Correspondences with Friends. In these Gogol takes up positions diametrically opposed to his former views. In these 32 didactic essays and sermons on the State, he glorifies autocracy and serfdom. This astonishing volte face was largely an attempt to find a refuge from his deepening mental crisis and to justify himself against charges of irreverence towards the established order.

Now unable to write constructively, Gogol turned to God and prayer in his search for spiritual and moral solace. In furtherance of this goal, he undertook a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

After a six-year sojourn in Europe, Gogol returned to Russia, where he fell under the influence of a fanatical father confessor. Under this man's spell, Gogol burned the second manuscript of the

second volume of Dead Souls, an act which further increased his depressed state. In February, 1852, Gogol died of nervous exhaustion at the premature age of 42.

CHAPTER II

GOGOL'S COMIC TECHNIQUES

We shall now attempt a description of the comic techniques of the two periods in Gogol's literary creativity and the nature of the resultant laughter. The publication of the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka marks the first period in Gogol's career, while the second period is represented by Mirgorod.

Gogol draws a clear distinction between aesthetic laughter and satiric laughter. The former is peculiar to his early period and is essentially light-hearted in nature and free of rancour. Such laughter is enjoyment on a purely physical level. Satiric laughter, on the other hand, is bitter in tone and is elicited through derision and mockery.

In the first period, to divert attention from his neurotic instability and hypochondria, Gogol invented characters and placed them in humorous situations. The laughter elicited by these characters was fresh, spontaneous and gay providing an escape from his gloomy disposition. "'I have been attacked by fits of melancholia, inexplicable even to myself. In order to amuse myself, I have invented all kinds of amusing things which I could possibly invent. I have invented absolutely comic figures and characters,

deliberately placed them into the most absurd situations, without bothering myself in the least as to why and to whom this would be to any advantage.' " S. (VI, 226).

The comic effect in the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka is achieved by the techniques of slapstick and farce, which are commonly used in "low comedy". These techniques are external or visual means of achieving a comic effect. Slapstick involves an exaggeration in dramatic and pictorial form of the action, while in farce it is the situation which is the object of this exaggeration.

Slapstick, the first element to be examined, is defined as unrestrained movement and boisterous action, which momentarily transforms the person into a "thing". The character resembles a piece of clockwork, wound up and capable only of working automaticCally. For example, in Don Quixote de la Mancha laughter is caused when Sancho Panza is tumbled into a bedquilt and tossed in the air like a rubber balloon; or when four men, running from opposite directions violently collide and fall to the ground like pin-balls. In each instance, the people cease to be men of flesh and blood. Instead, they resemble dice, falling and striking each other. The overall picture created "conveys the impression of pure mechanism, of automation without life."[1]

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[1] Henri Bergson, "Laughter", intro. and appendix by Wylie Sypher, Comedy (New York, 1956), p. 117.

This boisterous and violent visual action, however improbable it may appear, appeals to the imagination of the reader. The old Mack Sennett or Charlie Chaplin movies are unalloyed examples of this type. Rough and tumble action converts the slight and foppish figure of Charlie Chaplin to a mere bouncing ball, as he is violently knocked about.

In slapstick comedy, the moral aspect is ignored and the attention is drawn to the physical aspect of the person - that is, his likeness to a "thing". The laughter thus created is purely aesthetic, i.e. laughter for its own sake, and has no serious cognitive value. This aesthetic laughter may be described as belly-laughter, which is friendly and kind, as compared to the bitter and stinging laughter of satire which appeals to the intellect in deriding the object of contemplation.

Pure slapstick action is used in the three tales, The Fair at Sorochintsi, the May Night or the Drowned Maiden and Christmas Eve. The techniques of farce and slapstick complement each other and create a well-rounded and balanced comic effect. The rough and tumble gestures animate the farcical situation.

The comic technique of farce in the three tales The Fair at Sorochintsi, May Night or the Drowned Maiden and Christmas Eve classify these tales as situation comedies in which the ludicrous qualities of the types are fully exploited. "Comic types, one dimensional characters, are thrust into ludicrous situations, while probability in motivation and events are freely violated to evoke the

maximum laughter."[2]

It is the action in the farcical situation, through the "snowball effect" and "inversion" method, which evokes the heartiest laughter. Upon a closer examination of the "snowball" technique, one finds that the comic effect gathers in momentum and scope, similar to a rolling snowball which increases in size as it moves along. For example, in Christmas Eve the bags containing the suitors are moved from place to place. A series of changes in their location automatically causes serious and unexpected changes in the situation of the persons. Chub, the favorite beau of Solokha, realizes that she has been deceiving him and he severs his intimate relationship with her.

The "inversion" technique is a by-product of the "snowball" effect. The action results in a circular effect in which there is a return to the point of departure. By way of illustration, the henpecked husband imagines that, by divorce, he has escaped from his nagging wife and mother-in-law. He marries again, but in doing so, the double combination of divorce and marriage bring him back to his former wife in the form of a second mother-in-law who nags him constantly. A further instance is the classic example of the cheat being cheated. The person sets a trap only to plunge into it himself. In May Night or the Drowned Maiden, the Head prides himself on capturing the young pranksters who have mocked him, but each time he falls victim to his own snares.

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[2] M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York, 1961), p. 14.

Like slapstick comedy, which assumes a burlesque or a clowning effect, the element of farce acquires grotesque overtones. This is visible in the Lost Letter, where the weird or fantastic merges with reality.

Since "comedy of situation is akin to comedy of character",[3] the majority of the characters in the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka are the types or stock figures which Gogol borrowed heavily from the Ukrainian puppet theatre: the mischievous devil, the wicked old woman, the boastful Pole, the courageous Zaporozhian, the rascally gypsy, the simpleton husband and the devil with grandiloquent language.

The majority of the types are "flat" one dimensional characters, whose traits are constructed around a single idea or quality. Egoism is symbolized by Yevtukh Makogonenko, who is appropriately nicknamed "the Head". Dull-wittedness is personified by the phlegmatic Cherevik. They are shallow creatures, like hollow wooden puppets, whose actions are manipulated by Gogol, the puppeteer. They are rigid and mechanical in their gestures as they pursue their various tasks.

The comic characters in The Fair at Sorochintsi, May Night or Drowned Maiden and in Christmas Eve are all secondary characters. Their primary function in each story is to create aesthetic laughter, as they are thrust into wild escapades. The hero and heroine cause no comic laughter but simply provide the conventional theme of love

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[3] M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York, 1961), p. 14.

and marriage.

In each of the tales, The Fair at Sorochintsi, May Night or Drowned Maiden and Christmas Eve, unity in character is achieved by grouping the people into social types. In The Fair at Sorochintsi, the comic atmosphere of the tale is created by the peasant folk: Cherevik, the dull-witted farmer; Khivrya, the coarse country wife; Paraska, the sweet peasant daughter, and the sly peasant lad, Gritsko Golopupenko. In May Night or Drowned Maiden, the comic types are again village folk: Levko, the crafty young Cossack; Hannah, the village belle, the enterprising distiller, and the village Head. The town types from Christmas Eve are refined and sophisticated people: Oksana, the elegant maiden; Solokha, the blase widow; the "saintly" sacristan Osip Nikiforovich and the wealthy Cossack, Corny Chub, are all prominent citizens in the community.

Each of the above-mentioned tales contains a "humour character", who provides comic relief: Tsibulya in The Fair at Sorochintsi; Kalenik in May Night or the Drowned Maiden and Pannas in Christmas Eve. Their fate and the destiny of the secondary characters remain unsolved at the conclusion of each of the tales.

The plot is subordinate to the comic effect, which is achieved in minor episodes: in the love scene in The Fair at Sorochintsi and Christmas Eve, in the visit of Grandad to the devils in The Lost Letter and in the minor adventure in the melon patch in The Place Bewitched.

To economize in characterization, Gogol uses the simple technique of name-play. The names are frequently derived from common

objects - vegetables or animals - and suggest to the reader's mind a resemblance between this object and the character thus named.

This name-play serves a double purpose in the tales. Each appellation suggests the character of the comic figure, and, at the same time, makes him a vivid and picturesque personality. Through a careful juxtaposition of vowels and consonants, it creates also a pleasant acoustic effect - an onomatopoeic toning. For example, by the use of the assonant -o- and -u- the surname Golopupenko creates in the reader's mind a humorously rounded image of the character, whose name, translated, means Bare-Belly-Button.

Name-play achieves a comic effect in the tales and evokes a merry laughter. In the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka, the following examples may be found: Kasyan Sverbiguz - Mr. To-Itch-Big-Lump; Corny Chub - Mr. Scalp-Lock; Makogonenko - Mr. Wooden-Bowl-with-Pestle; Gritsko Golopupenko - Gritsko Bare-Belly-Button; and Krutotushchenko- Mr. Sharply.

This invention of suggestive names places Gogol among the world humourists, such as Dickens and Johnson. Name-play was a popular device in eighteenth and nineteenth century comedy which produced such names as Thwackum and Allworthy. Gogol was especially adept at this practice, and had made it a habit of inventing picturesque names when he retired for the night. In his travels he searched for unusual names on sign-posts and billboards. The name of the main protagonist in Dead Souls, Chichikov, was found on a sign post in such a manner.

In a candid account of the literary merits of the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka, Gogol thought these tales to be of little value. Youth, he explained, spurred him on. "This is the origin of the first works which made some people laugh as light-heartedly and unconsciously as myself, while others seemed at a loss to decide how an intelligent man could have thought of such nonsense." S. (VI,226). In fact, so strict was he in his appraisal of this early collection of tales, that he modestly dismissed them as the "'first immature experiments which are unworthy of the reader's critical attention, containing the first sweet moments of youthful inspiration.'"[4]

Thus, in the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka, representing his early period, the resultant laughter was light-hearted and friendly, i.e. aesthetic laughter. In the second period, beginning with the tale Ivan Fyodorovich Shponka and His Aunt from Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka, and in the two tales in Mirgorod, The Old-World Landowners and The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich, Gogol abandoned this aesthetic laughter in which he had found an escape mechanism from his neurotic instability. Laughter became now a conscious weapon beneath his satiric pen. "'If we are to laugh, then it is better to laugh hard at that which is really worthy of universal mockery.'" S. (VI,227).

In the tales of the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka, comic effect was achieved through both the dialogue and action. In the

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[4]David Magarshack, Gogol: A Life (London, 1957), p. 82.

second period, represented by Mirgorod, farce and clowning are replaced, for the most part, by "indirect" satire with its concomitant techniques. "Indirect satire" takes the form of a plot in which the characters are shown to be ridiculous by means of action and dialogue. The stylistic devices of "indirect satire" - mock-epic form, the grotesque, parody, irony, sarcasm and alogism - distort or disfigure the object of ridicule, thereby illuminating those aspects of the person which are distasteful to the author.

Distortion and disfiguration assume the form of exaggeration or degradation. "A comic effect is always obtainable by transposing the natural expression of an idea into another key."[5] To speak of small things as being large is an example of exaggeration. This is a common technique in the telling of "tall-stories". A situation or event is so exaggerated that it loses its sense of proportion and becomes absurdly incredible. We may describe this as the element of the bizarre which causes bewilderment in the reader's mind.

Mock-epic form and the grotesque are examples of exaggeration. In the mock-epic form, commonplace subjects are raised to the level of the absurdly important. In the grotesque, the prominent physical features of a person are exaggerated to the point of making him ludicrous.

Degradation is the opposite of exaggeration. In the stylistic device of parody, the dignified becomes small, mean and petty. Irony

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[5]Henri Bergson, "Laughter", intro. and appendix by Wylie Sypher, Comedy (New York, 1956), p. 141.

and sarcasm are also means of degrading the object of satire. Irony is usually expressed in the tone of the author who states one thing, but in reality means the opposite. Sarcasm is a form of irony which involves the "caustic and heavy use of apparent praise for actual dispraise".[6]

Alogism, the element of the absurd, is neither a form of exaggeration or degradation, but its aim is the same as the other techniques of "indirect satire" - to distort and disfigure the object of ridicule so that it becomes laughable. Alogism is the practice of juxtaposing two apparently unrelated ideas, which are internally logical and significant.

For example, in The Inspector-General, Kochkarov says: "She either married or broke her leg."[7] Superficially, this statement appears to be meaningless. It merely creates a hearty laugh. Yet, internally, there is a logic in this absurd statement. But before any further examination of it can be made, the character of the speaker and the circumstances which prompted him to utter it must be examined. Kochkarov is unhappily married. The coarse relationship which exists between the couple is revealed in their conversation. He places no great value on the sacred institution of marriage. To him therefore, matrimony and a broken leg are both catastrophes in the life of a man. This statement reveals but another trait of Kochkarov - his coarseness and preoccupation with material things.

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[6] M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York, 1961), p. 46.

[7] V. V. Ermilov, Genii Gogolya (Moscow, 1959), p. 151.

The stylistic device of alogism is used in the dialogue and in the motivation of behaviour. It creates an effect of absurdity and nonsense in order to illuminate the ridiculous nature of the characters and their paltry existence.

The final stylistic device to be examined is the "objective-subjective" technique. The story is conducted upon two distinct emotional levels (1), the objective (comic) and (2), the subjective (serious) levels.

Gogol is objective in his presentation of the character's thoughts and actions, for example, he presents them without revealing his own personal feelings. He creates a solid background for the actors, and presents a well-rounded description of their behaviour and the subsequent development of events. He constructs a sound comic foundation with his use of techniques of "indirect satire" - parody, the grotesque, alogism, irony and sarcasm. He remains aloof, noncommittal and uninvolved. Following this objective approach, there is a comic breakdown, or breakdown of comic events.

A climax occurs which shatters this gradual comic build-up, and at this point Gogol reverts to a subjective approach. Suddenly, the tone becomes serious and sad as he appears on the scene in the role of an outside observer and speaks in the first person. Gogol becomes very critical of the people, and their behaviour, and passes judgement upon the victims whom he has described. He projects into the narration his own feelings and reactions. This final stylistic device is the basic characteristic of Gogol's mature humour

called "laughter through tears". "Through laughter, which had never as yet appeared in me with such strength, the reader overheard sadness." S. (VI,228).

This peculiar style of Gogol's writing, the objective and subjective approach or comic-serious technique, is seen in an embryonic stage in the tales in the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka. Rudi Panko, the humorous and practical philosopher, acts as observer and guide as he directs the reader's attention through the tales. He is very outspoken in his attitude towards the actions of the characters and makes several sarcastic generalizations, as for example, when he deplores the condition of the roads or intellectual pretensions.

In the two tales from the Mirgorod collection, The Old-World Landowners and The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich, a clearly defined use is made of the objective and subjective approaches. In the laughter one detects an element of pathos and pessimism.

Comic perception proceeds to what is general. Rather than deal with the failings of a single individual, it seizes upon those peculiarities which are common to many. Its aim is to depict general types whose idiosyncracies are common failings. These character flaws take on a universal significance. Secondary characters, who are simplified versions of the main protagonist, are grouped around the central character. These secondary characters display the same general qualities of the heroes and revolve around them like satellites.

The plot in Ivan Fyodorovich Shponka and His Aunt, The Old-World Landowners and The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich is only of relative importance. The true dynamism of the comic effect lies in each tale in the absurd behaviour of the characters.

In Mirgorod, Gogol is less concerned with farcical action and slapstick comedy in which man became a mechanical robot or bouncing ball. His laughter is now directed at the moral side and reveals the contradictions in human personality. "Every comic effect, it is said, implies contradiction in some of its respects."[8] In general, contradiction may be expressed in two ways. It may be revealed internally, that is, in pertinent incongruity of ideas and thought, or externally, in actions and behaviour. In Don Quixote de la Mancha, contradiction is revealed in ideas, in which "the presence or affirmation of the truth or reality of one is equivalent to the absence or denial of the other, since between them they exhaust the universe of discourse."[9] Don Quixote insists that the windmills are giants and attacks them to rid his country of evil. Sancho Panza, on the other hand, maintains that the windmills are windmills and nothing else. In this example, when the rational and practical man contradicts the irrational dreamer, the contradiction in the vain delusions of Don Quixote are revealed.

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[8] Henri Bergson, "Laughter", intro. and appendix by Wylie Sypher, Comedy (New York, 1956), p. 177.

[9] Marie Collins Swabey, Comic Laughter (New Haven, 1961), p. 111.

Gogol exposes the absurdity of certain types of behaviour in order to stress man's corrupt moral side. This behaviour is common to those persons who appear, for the most part, to be people of high breeding and finesse, yet whose every action contradicts these pretensions. These people are wealthy landowners who have received a fairly good education and occupy an esteemed place in society but who, however, devote their entire energy to petty trifles. Gogol strips them of their pretensions and exposes their meaningless activity and intellectual shallowness.

When the moral aspect of the person is stressed, the satiric laughter exposes these defects and immediately censures them. When there is a burst of laughter or even a smile, the contradiction has been recognized and laughter has acquired a serious cognitive value. In becoming bitter and pungent, it has lost its aesthetic quality, its gaiety and vivacity. Gogol defined the nature of this bitter laughter and its aim as follows: "'This laughter, which aggravates the object or exaggerates the object, makes that shine which would have remained dim, without whose penetrating force the emptiness and pettiness of life would not so frighten man.'"[10]

When the pretensions of pride, false dignity and vulgarity are unmasked, the demand is felt for a corrective which will expurgate these failings. This corrective, a social gesture, is laughter. It follows, then, that laughter has a logic in its madness.

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[10] G. N. Pospelov, Tvorchestvo N. V. Gogolya (Moscow, 1953), p. 51.

Laughter assumes a social function and is not merely an outward expression of a form of internal energy. "It is a critical overseer which obliges members of a group through chiding and correction to conform to its code of behaviour."[11] Although it encourages conformity, it does not necessarily imply that eccentricities will be corrected and that conformity will ensue. "Laughter, then, does not belong to the province of aesthetics alone . . . it pursues a utilitarian aim of general improvement."[12]

Gogol exposes Shponka, the elderly Ukrainian landowners and the two Ivans to ridicule. The reader condemns them, along with their eccentricities, by means of laughter. The reader has recognized these foibles as being absurd, and is ready to admit his own misdeeds as being equally ludicrous and worthy of condemnation. A self-scrutiny ensues. An appraisal of ones own behaviour follows in the light of what has been projected by the author. Thus this laughter acts as a defense against further self-deception. When the stupidity and vanity of those who "quarrel over trifles and attach vast importance to all sorts of rubbish"[13] is recognized, its further spread will be prevented. Matthew Arnold considered this defense of laughter essential to culture. " 'And thus culture . . . saves the future . . . from being vulgarized, even if we cannot save the present.' "[14]

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[11] Marie Collins Swabey, Comic Laughter (New Haven, 1961), p. 34.

[12] Henri Bergson, "Laughter", intro. and appendix by Wylie Sypher, Comedy (New York, 1956), p. 73.

[13] Marc Slonim, The Epic of Russian Literature (New York, 1950), p. 164.

[14] Wylie Sypher, "The Meanings of Comedy", intro. and appendix by Wylie Sypher, Comedy (New York, 1956), p. 253.

CHAPTER III

EVENINGS ON A FARM NEAR DIKANKA

The aim of this chapter is an analysis in depth of the particular stylistic devices used in each of the individual stories in the collection, Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka.

Volume I begins with a short introduction in which Gogol creates a whimsical and amusing setting for the folk tales.

In this introduction, Gogol appears as Rudi Panko, the local bee-keeper, who embodies the temperament of the Ukrainian peasant folk. The humorous tone of the introduction is achieved by the racy, colloquial language combined with an ingenuous air of diffidence.

In a tone of feigned surprise, Rudi Panko expresses his astonishment at finding much excited talk about the appearance on the market of his new publication. "'What oddity is this, Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka? What sort of 'evenings' could they be? And thrust into the world by a bee-keeper! Mercy on us. Why, so much stuff gets into print nowadays that one has more wrapping-paper than one can use.'" E. (I,11).

The contradiction which arises between his pretensions as a

philosopher with a deep insight into life, and his actual occupation as an illiterate bee-keeper, is amusing. "'A month ago, I had a forboding in my heart that there would be this kind of talk. For a villager like me to poke his nose out of his hole into the great world is just like what happens if you go into the apartments of some great lord: they all come round you and make you feel like a fool . . . I would rather go twice a year to Mirgorod . . . then show myself in that high company; still if you do it, you must face the consequences, whatever they may be.'" E. (I, 12).

Continuing his digression, Panko addresses the readers in a very confidential and intimate tone of voice. "'At home, dear readers - no offence meant (please do not be annoyed at a bee-keeper like me addressing you as if I were speaking to some old friend or crony) . . .'" E. (I, 13).

It is Panko's artless naïveté and assumed modesty that make him humorous for us. "'Why the villagers call me Ginger, I really cannot say. My hair, I fancy, is more grey nowadays than red. But you see, when a nickname has once been given in our parts, it sticks to a man all his life.'" E. (I, 13).

In mocking story-tellers, Panko also satirizes his own style of narration. "When he tells a story he holds up his finger and studies the tip of it and he uses as many tricks and flourishes as you would find in a book . . . you find that for the life of you, you cannot make head or tail of it." E. (I, 13).

Rudi Panko's manner of address loses its warmth and acquires a sarcastic sting as he soberly directs the reader to the village of Dikanka. "'I have put the name on the title page on purpose so that our hamlet may be more easily found.'" E. (I, 15). In a confidential tone he cautions his readers not to swagger with their hands behind their backs, since the Russian roads are quite rough. "'The year before last, Foma Grigoryevich, driving over from Dikanka, fell into a ditch, with his new trap and bay mare and all, though he was driving himself and had on a pair of spectacles, too.'" E. (I, 15).

He concludes by requesting the readers to come quickly to Dikanka where they will be royally treated.

The Fair at Sorochintsi

This first tale describes incidents which befall Cherevik, a peasant farmer, Paraska, his pretty daughter, and Khavronya (Khivrya) Nikiforovna, Paraska's peasant stepmother, at Sorochintsi. On the way to the fair, Paraska meets a handsome young peasant lad, Gritsko Golopupenko. After a second meeting, they fall in love.

The comic techniques used are type characterization, slapstick comedy, farcical action, and humorous dialogue.

The type characters, Cherevik and Khivrya, are the main sources of humour in this tale. Cherevik is an industrious peasant farmer who takes his numerous products to the fair. An impractical

businessman however, he passes his time at the fair in drinking and conversing with his friend Tsibulya.

Although he is a strong worker, his character is weak. Living under the control of his domineering spouse, Khivrya, he has grown meek and submissive. A coarse relationship exists between Cherevik and Khivrya. When Gritsko plasters her face with mud, he refuses to defend her honour and dismisses the rude insult lightly, saying: "'He merely plastered your face with dung.'" E. (I, 28). He is openly contemptuous of Khivrya and wishes he were rid of her. Yet he is afraid to contradict her for fear of her vicious tongue. He is desirous of a marriage between Paraska and Gritsko, but because of his lack of moral fibre he complies with Khivrya's demands and prohibits the marriage.

Cherevik is a comical simpleton. It takes him three days before he learns how to hug his first wife after they are married: "'And I owned that to a friend who was my best man. He gave me a hint.'" E. (I, 25). But this slow-wittedness does not detract from his trusting nature. Because he has known Gritsko's father to be a good man, he trusts that Gritsko, his prospective son-in-law, will be equally honest.

He is blind to the liason between Khivrya and the young scholar, Afanasy Ivanovich. Even when Afanasy falls from the loft of their house into the gathering he fails to understand that

Khivrya and Afanasy have been deceiving them and ignores the incident.

Beneath his deceptively grave mien, Cherevik possesses a keen sense of humour. When his wife attempts to awaken him, he waves his arms as though beating a drum, and nearly strikes Khivrya in the face. Blankly he exclaims: "'The devil take me, my dear, if I did not fancy your face was a drum.'" E. (I, 40).

Cherevik is a coward. When he is arrested for stealing a mare, he makes no attempt to escape, but sobs dejectedly on the shoulder of his old crony, Tsibulya. A superstitious man, he is easily alarmed and timidly avoids the "enchanted" hut where the devil is said to have lived. When the pig's face is thrust through the window, he flees, trembling, from the house, with his wife on his shoulders.

Although Cherevik is dull-witted and cowardly, he is, nevertheless, a man of honour and later permits the marriage between Paraska and Gritsko to take place, ignoring Khivrya's screams of protest.

Khavryona Nikiforovna is a coarse and domineering peasant woman. Her colourful personality is vividly expressed by her flamboyant attire - a green jacket with red tails, a skirt like a chess board and a flowered chintz cap.

She is a strong woman both in physique and temperament and shows no love and compassion towards her husband Cherevik, treating

him rudely and coarsely: "'You are a fool - a fool! It must have been ordained at your birth that you should remain one!'" E. (I, 27). She holds Cherevik in contempt when he fails to defend her honour.

She is a practical woman - a good cook as well as a thrifty housekeeper and it is in fact her culinary skill that lures Afanasy Ivanovich through the nettles to her kitchen. He woos her in the evenings, with one hand around her waist and clasping a doughnut in the other.

Khivrya's protests at her husbands lack of business practicality are not without an element of self-interest. When Cherevik sells the mare, she hastens to town to buy herself new clothing.

She rules the household with an iron hand and heartily disapproves of the marriage between Gritsko and Paraska, even attempting to prevent the ceremony from taking place. She equates Gritsko with Cherevik: "'To be sure, if he is a sot and a tramp, he is a man after your own heart.'" E. (I, 27). At first she successfully prevents the marriage, but later her husband stubbornly refuses to heed her protests and the wedding takes place.

The secret rendezvous between Khavronya Nikiforovna and Afanasy Ivanovich, the young scholar, is a parody on a love scene and is replete with farcical action and slapstick comedy.

Here, the formidable spouse is reduced to a tender lover

as she is exposed to the young and mischievous "intellect", the priest's son. After gallantly climbing the fence which separates him from his sweetheart, Afanasy hesitates at the top, then, plunges headlong into the rank weeds in Khavronya's yard. She trembles for fear that he has seriously injured himself.
"'Heavens! I hope you haven't hurt yourself? Please God you've not broken your neck!' Khivrya faltered anxiously." E. (I, 31).

Khavronya entices the young suitor with her delicious dough-nuts and other pastries. During their romantic meeting, the sound of footsteps are heard, and Cherevik enters with his friend. The young scholar panics. "The doughnut stuck in the young man's gullet and his eyes nearly popped from his head." E. (I, 32). The young man clambers into the loft, where he shivers for fear of discovery. The unsuspecting Cherevik finds his wife trembling, but attributes this to fever.

A serious tone ensues as the conversation turns to the devil. All remain in suspense, mouths gaping, as they listen to the legend about the Evil one. Suddenly, the devil appears and pops his head into the window. There is an interlude of slapstick comedy. One of the visitors leaps up and knocks his head against the rafters, the boards shift, and the priest's son falls with a thud to the floor. Tsibulya takes refuge under his wife's skirts, while another guest climbs into the oven and shuts the door on himself. Instead of his cap, Cherevik claps the pot on his head,

and frantically runs through the street with his wife on his back. The entire gathering disperses in panic and dismay.

Saint John's Eve

This second tale of Volume I is related by Foma Grigoryevich and tells of the attempts of Petro to win the heart of Pidorka, a young peasant girl, through witchcraft, efforts which ultimately result in tragedy.

The devil appears in the form of Basavryuk, an amusing rascal who cavorts about town, drinking, making merry and playing pranks on all the young girls. The maidens are all terrified of his escapades, yet, at the same time, are attracted to him as he offers them earrings, necklaces and ribbons. When he ceases to attend church the priest reprimands him severely and excommunicates him. This causes a sudden change in his character and he becomes a vicious evil doer.

There is a humorous interlude at the conclusion of the tale which softens the effect of the tragic deaths of Petro and Pidorka. The comical figure of Father Afanasy appears. He walks through the village sprinkling the streets with holy water, firm in his naive belief that this will rid the town of Basavryuk, the devil.

By the very nature of the plot, there are few comic techniques in this tale and the tale does not, therefore, display to any great extent Gogol's creative art as a comic writer.

The May Night or The Drowned Maiden

This story revolves around a legend of a beautiful girl who lived happily with her father in a large house on a hill. Her father remarries and a series of tragic events occur which lead to her death by drowning. She discovers that her step-mother is a witch; whereupon her father, losing his love for her, evicts her from the house. The secondary plot, that of the love between Levko, the young son of the village Head, and Hanna, runs parallel with the main story.

Comic effects in this tale are produced by slapstick comedy and the character types, Yevtukh Makogonenko (the Head), the distiller and Kalenik.

Translated, the surname "Makogonenko" means a "wooden-bowl-with-pestle". This appellation describes his character most appropriately. He is a flat and shallow creature who is inflated with egoism and pride, qualities which have earned him the nickname the "Head".

Yevtukh Makogonenko is a cruel person who believes that having once had the privilege of being the Tsarina's guide, entitles him to a leading role in his community. He pokes his finger into everyone's snuff boxes and treats all like servile serfs. In an austere and haughty manner, he pursues all the pretty young maidens in town, including Hanna, the sweetheart of his son Levko.

Taking advantage of his powerful position in the village council, he revenges himself upon all those who refuse to yield to

his demands and sends them out to repair roads or to dig ditches.

Yevtukh Makogonenko is amusingly obtuse. In the discussion about the new techniques of distilling by the use of steam, Makogonenko can only comment: "'Did anyone hear the like of boiling anything by steam? According to that, you could not take a spoonful of soup without boiling your lips like a sucking pig.'" E. (I, 85-86).

Basically, he is a coward. He trembles when his sister-in-law threatens him with curses. When he goes courting, he is frightened that she may follow and punish him severely.

His pride is easily injured, particularly when his intellectual pretensions or vain disposition are ridiculed. He is quick then to defend his honour and threatens to punish brutally those who mock him.

Reluctantly, the Head gives his permission to Levko to marry Hanna, but does so only when he is told that a distinguished visitor (a Commissar) will be present. He believes that weddings are mere ostentation.

The distiller is another comic character. He is a conscientious entrepreneur who has been commissioned to establish a distillery in the district. He and the Head, Yevtukh Makogonenko are staunch friends.

The distiller is a pompous person who can talk only about the distillery business. It is ironic that he should occupy the

place of honour, under the ikons, in the Head's house,for he smokes and spits while seated there.

Like the Head, he is a dull-witted person. Unable to understand the German's new techniques of using steam in distilling, he curses and condemns them out of hand. He has no sense of justice, and knows only two methods of punishment - hanging or working in the distillery.

Kalenik, the bumbling town drunk, is,in the words of Rene Welleck, a "humour character". He is a middle-aged peasant who is always pursuing the pretty young girls and drunkenly mistaking other people's houses for his own. His unexpected entrance into the home of Yevtukh Makogonenko is a case of mistaken identity which relieves the dry and sedate conversation between the Head and the distiller. In a drunken stupor he mistakes the sister-in-law of the Head for his own wife and orders her to fetch him his sheepskin.

He curses Yevtukh Makogonenko. "'May he choke, the cur! I spit on him! I wish a waggon would run over him, the one-eyed devil!'" E. (I, 87). He settles himself in the house and refuses to move.

Kalenik's periodic appearances in the tale serve to create a light and whimsical atmosphere. Comic unity is sustained at the conclusion of the story when the intoxicated Kalenik still staggers along the silent streets in search of his cottage.

Slapstick action occurs after the Head hears the song describ-

ing his prankish activities and dashes into the street to arrest those ridiculing him. Seizing someone in the dark; he throws him into the storeroom and bolts the door. Upon closer examination of the captive, he discovers that it is his sister-in-law. Outraged at the rough treatment she has received, she ejaculates: "'Was there a grain of sense in your one-eyed pate when you pushed me into the dark storeroom!'" E. (I, 124).

The Lost Letter

This is the fourth, last tale of the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka. In it Forma Grigoryevich relates how his Grandad delivered a letter to the Tsarina from the noble Hetman.

Humour in this tale, takes the form of clowning. Flesh and blood characters mingle with witches and devils in scenes of bizarre revelry. When Grandad finds himself in the middle of a dark forest, he sees many witches dressed in finery, dancing a hopak. Together with the devils, they partake in a weird celebration. With their dog-like faces and thin legs, the devils cavort about the witches while the musicians beat on their cheeks with their fists.

Volume II

This second volume of the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka, like Volume I, begins with a short introduction in which Gogol creates a nonchalant atmosphere for the short tales.

The humour of this second introduction is more mellow than that of Volume I, and lacks the gay and witty tone of the latter. As in the first introduction, Gogol appears to be amusing himself by the digressions of Rudi Panko. "Last year . . . I had visitors to see me - Zakhar Kirilovich Chukhopupenko, Stepan Ivanovich Kurochka, Taras Ivanovich Smachnenky . . . Kharlampy Kirilovich Khlosta . . . Everybody talked - I must tell you we never talk about trifles . . . we discussed how to pickle apples." E. (II, 124).

A quarrel ensues about whether it is best to pickle apples by soaking them in kvass or to sprinkle them with tansy. Rudi Panko carries the description of the argument to the point of absurdity, thereby emphasising its pettiness and at the same time extracting the maximum comic effect.

Rudi Panko ends the introduction on a pensive note. "One year will pass and then another - and none of you will remember or regret the old bee-keeper." E. (II, 126).

Christmas Eve

This tale is the first story in Volume II of the *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*. It describes how Vakula, the village blacksmith secures the aid of the devil to attain the love of Oksana, the proud daughter of Chub the Cossack. Although Oksana is frivolous and egotistical, ignoring Vakula's marriage proposals,

Vakula remains faithful to her and finally wins her.

Korny Chub and Pannas are strongly delineated characters. Korny Chub is a powerful Cossack whose important position in society has not spoilt his frank and amicable disposition. He is, in addition, a lover of wine, captivating women and gay parties, and it is this latter quality that becomes the source of the comic chaos.

When the sacristan appears at Solokha's house, Korny Chub is concealed in a coal sack, and is eventually abandoned in the middle of a road. So indolent is he that he feels it would demand too much effort to button his sheepskin coat, to tighten his belt and to crawl two hundred paces to his hut. Instead, he remains in a "superior" position in the sack, sitting on top of the trembling sacristan. Pannas, finding the sacks, drags them to his house where he and his wife quarrel over the contents.

Comic confusion arises when Chub crawls out and startles the opponents who had thought him to be pig. Further surprise is caused by the emergence of the sacristan. The unexpected appearance of the sacristan surprises Chub who, realizing that Solokha has been deceiving him, now decides to abandon her.

Pannas is a strong "humour character" who creates a comic atmosphere in the tale. He is a tall lean man who, despite his inferior social position, is a faithful companion of the wealthy Korny Chub. It is ironic, that, in spite of his allegeably expert knowledge of business methods he is unable to manage his finances.

He and his wife live in poverty and are totally dependent upon their friends for food and money. His wife, in return for her flattering compliments to wealthy women, is rewarded with dinners. He takes advantage of his friends' generosity at the tavern and deliberately seeks out those who will buy him free drinks.

The comic characters provide farcical action. The popular widow of the town, the blasé Solokha, is unexpectedly besieged by all her suitors one evening. Comic pandemonium follows. When the Head appears, the devil, her first suitor, hastily takes refuge in a large, empty coal sack. When the sacristan appears, Solokha has difficulty in concealing the Head because of his size. "She shook the coal out into a barrel, and the stalwart Head - moustaches, cap, pelisse and all - crept into the sack." E. (II, 148). The sacristan, her next suitor, feels elated in Solokha's presence and dances in rings around her as he first touches her arm and then her neck. Suddenly, Chub's voice is heard; the sacristan panics, fearing that it might be Father Kondrat, his superior, he also crawls into a sack. In reality, he fears his "better half", his wife, who, Gogol adds sarcastically, "turned his thick mane into a very scanty one." E. (II, 149). Chub enters, secretly gloating that he will be alone with Solokha. When Vakula unexpectedly appears, he, too, creeps into the bag containing the poor sacristan. Meanwhile, the Cossack Sverbiguz enters and Solokha ushers him hurriedly

into the kitchen garden.

The comic action becomes further complicated and amusing as Vakula, seeing the sacks on the floor decides to tidy the room by tying the bags securely and dragging them off outside. Somehow he does not hear "how Chub gasped when the hair of his head was twisted in the string that tied the sack and the stalwart Head began hiccupping quite distinctly." E. (II, 151).

The episode becomes farcical when the sacks are discovered by a neighbour. Pannas, his wife and a friend quarrel over the contents in the bag. There are shrieks of glee as they hope to discover a "porker" at the bottom of the bag. But to their dismay, first Chub, and then the sacristan weakly emerge from the interior.

Ivan Fyodorovich Shponka and His Aunt

Sorcery, blended with comic adventure, is no longer evident in this tale. Instead, Gogol turns towards the contemporary scene and aims at a satirical portrayal of a petty squire, who upon retirement from the army, is faced with the unhappy prospect of marriage. The tale ends on an incomplete note as the cowardly Shponka, obsessed by nightmares, pictures his future wife, or rather wives, as geese, who hiss and pursue him. The tale has strong autobiographical overtones in view of Gogol's own fear of women and the fact that he never married.

A comic effect is achieved by the stylistic devices common to "indirect satire" - the mock-epic form, the grotesque element and alogism - which emphasize the absurd actions of the characters.

Shponka is the personification of "poshlost." He is a timid landowner who is approaching the age of 40. During his youth, he was unable to pursue his studies beyond the second grade, to which he was promoted at the ripe age of 15. His mental capacities slowly grew dulled as he spent his time ruling neat margins and sharpening pencils. Gradually, he becomes incapable of any intellectual activity and cultivates no interests outside of reading fortune-telling books. Even these he consulted purely from habit.

Life pulsates so feebly in this timid creature that he is close to being a complete imbecile. When he attempts to take an intelligent part in a conversation his speech verges upon idiocy. At the mention of a book he applies himself "diligently to taking sauce." E. (II, 256). When the conversation turns to Palestine and Jerusalem Shponka attempts to contribute to the discussion only because he had heard a great deal about Jerusalem from his orderly. "'I have had occasion to observe what distant lands there are in the world!' said Ivan Fydorovich, genuinely gratified that he had succeeded in uttering so long and difficult a sentence." E. (II, 257). This absurd truism, characteristic of Shponka's

speech, reveals both his childish naïveté and the vanity of his intellectual pretensions.

In the absence of any genuinely creative urge, he is forced to model his life on order and routine. He chose the rank of platoon leader so that he could repeat the same tactics of drill procedure every day. This occasioned him no mental strain or fatigue. Reading, too, was a habit. "It was because he liked to meet again what he had already read several times. In the same way one who lives in the town goes every day to the club, not for the sake of hearing anything new there, but in order to meet there friends with whom it has been one's habit to chat at the club from time immemorial." E. (II, 242).

On the few occasions when he applies himself to a serious task, his efforts inevitably meet with failure. When he approaches Storchenko for a deed, he naively accepts Storchenko's explanation that "it is a lie." E. (II, 253). He next shows his incompetence, this time as a lover, when he unsuccessfully attempts to court Marya Grigoryevna.

Although a wealthy landowner, Shponka amuses himself with trifles which serve no purpose except to occupy the time which hangs so heavily upon his hands. Methodically and meticulously, "he spends his time in pursuits peculiar to a mild soul: he either polished buttons, or read a fortune-teller's book, or set mouse-traps in the corners of his room, or he took off his uniform and lay on his bed." E. (II, 239).

But Shponka's actions are simply the expression of a barren intellect and a fetishistic obsession with trifles. To relieve the boredom of travelling, Shponka unlocks his trunk, removes his underclothes, inspects them thoroughly to see whether they are properly washed and folded; carefully removes the fluff from his new uniform and then repacks it all in the best possible way. This infantile behaviour is symptomatic of his complete mental stultification.

He is a completely negative creature, unendowed with capacities for either good or evil. Devoid of any intellectual curiosity or an inclination towards physical activity, his life degenerates to the level of a vegetable and he remains entirely oblivious to the world beyond his own estate.

The secondary figures, Grigory Grigoryevich Storchenko and Auntie Vasilisa Kashporovna act as comic foils to Shponka.

At first glance, Grigory Grigoryevich Storchenko appears to be the embodiment of masculine comradeship, ease and joie de vivre. But Storchenko actually represents a further aspect of "poshlost". He is a wealthy landowner who lives on his flourishing estate with his mother and two sisters. In spite of a noble upbringing, Grigory Grigoryevich is a boorish man, who abuses his position as a rich landowner and treats even his friends as inferiors.

Storchenko will not tolerate any inconveniences. His sole concerns are possible sources of discomfort such as hard beds or

annoying cockroaches which crawl into his ear. His conversations, centred on insignificant details, reveal his shallow thoughts. "'I must tell you, sir, that I have the habit of stopping up my ears at night ever since the damnable occasion when a cockroach crawled into my left ear in a Russian inn . . . Impossible to describe what happened to me; there was such a tickling, such a tickling in my ear - it almost drove me crazy!'" E. (II, 245).

Storchenko's vegetative existence stems from his mental stagnation. His conversation with Shponka centres around large melons grown by the latter's father. Melons and cockroaches compromise the entire range of his mental activity. Unlike Shponka, who is at least able to stammer and stutter an answer, albeit in the form of a truism, Storchenko, on the other hand, refutes every statement as being a "lie", thus ending any further discussion on the matter.

The story of Shponka's life and the journey to his Aunt's estate is solemnly narrated in the grand style of a mock-epic. By elevating the petty importance of Shponka's life to this level, Gogol emphasizes the emptiness of his existence.

In Chapter one, entitled "Ivan Fyodorovich Shponka", Gogol ridicules the petty character of Shponka and the trivial incidents in his life by presenting them in all the pomp and ceremony of epic narration and characterization. Shponka's brave pursuits of ruling neat margins and meticulously sharpening pencils are solemnly lent epic importance. "If anyone wanted a penknife to sharpen his pen,

he immediately applied to Ivan Fyodorovich, knowing that he always had a penknife, and Ivan Fyodorovich - at that time simply Vanyusha - would take it out of a little leather case attached to a buttonhole of his grey coat, and would request that the sharp edge should not be used for scraping the pen, pointing out that there was a blunt side for the purpose." E. (II, 237).

Indeed, this early preoccupation with sharpening pencils and ruling margins is symptomatic of a mental state which is later to develop into an almost neurotic obsession with petty, senseless activities.

Shponka attains the peak of heroism by slyly eating a buttered pancake in class, a daring exploit which for him is as important as the heroic slaying of a dragon. But instead of being rewarded with laurels, Shponka is severely reprimanded and becomes even more meek and submissive.

Chapter two, entitled "The Journey", is a parody of the uneventful journey of Shponka. Instead of an exciting trip, fraught with dangerous exploits and adventures, Gogol describes the trifling manner in which Shponka passes the journey. Gogol begins abruptly: "Nothing of great interest occurred on the journey . . . During these intervals he undid his trunk, took out his underclothes, inspected them thoroughly to see whether they were properly washed and folded; carefully removed the fluff from his new uniform which had been made without epaulettes, and repacked it all in the best possible way." E. (II, 242).

In Chapter three, entitled "Auntie", the petty character of Vasilisa Kashporovna is presented in epic form. Auntie, as she is commonly called, is a woman of gigantic stature. Her towering figure is almost Herculean. "She was of almost gigantic stature and her corpulence and strength were fully in proportion. It seemed as though nature had made an unpardonable mistake in condemning her to wear a dark brown gown . . . though a dragoon's moustaches and top-boots would have suited her better than anything." E. (II, 248).

Her exploits are almost super-human. Each day she performs her strenuous manual tasks single-handed. "Her pursuits completely correspond to her appearance: she rowed the boat herself and was more skilful with the oars than any fisherman; shot game; supervised the mowers all the while they were at work; knew the exact number of the melons in the kitchen garden; . . . climbed the trees and shook down the pears; beat lazy vassals with her terrible hand . . . Almost at the same moment she was scolding, dyeing yarn, racing to the kitchen, brewing kvass, making jam with honey." E. (II, 248). Her self-assured masculine activities provide a comic antithesis to Shponka's emasculated behaviour.

The grotesque element appears in the physical constitution of the characters. Ivan Ivanovich, a guest of Grigory Grigoryevich, is introduced as a "gentleman . . . in a frock-coat with long skirts and an immense stand-up collar, which covered the whole back of his

head, so that his head sat in it, as though in a chaise." E. (II,254). The short old lady, mother of Grigory Grigoryevich Storchenko, looks like a "regular coffee-pot in a cap." E. (II, 253).

The element of the grotesque is further employed in narrative description. In the following description common-place objects, such as the dogs and sow, are used to create an absurd scene. "He had no sooner driven into the yard than dogs of all kinds - brown, black, grey, spotted - ran up from every side. Some flew under the horse's hoofs, barking, others ran behind the cart, discovered that the axle was smeared with bacon fat; one, standing near the kitchen and keeping his foot on a bone, uttered a volley of shrill barks; and another gave tongue in the distance, running to and fro, wagging his tail, and seeming to say: 'Look, good Christians, what a fine young fellow I am!' Boys in grubby shirts ran out to stare. A sow who was strolling through the yard with sixteen little pigs lifted her snout with an inquisitive air and grunted louder than usual." E. (II, 246-247).

The tale assumes grotesque overtones as Shponka's fear of marriage is exaggerated to the point of comic absurdity. He dreams that he married. Instead of a single bed, there is a double bed in his room. "He felt strange: he did not know how to approach her, what to say to her, and then he noticed that she had the face of a goose." E. (II, 265). But then he sees wives everywhere, with faces of geese. One wife is sitting in his hat. "He put his hand in his pocket for his handkerchief and in his pocket, too, there

was a wife; he took some cotton wool out of his ear - and there, too, sat a wife." E. (II, 265). Shponka begins to hop on one leg and his Aunt says brusquely. "'Yes, you must hop on one leg, for you are a married man.'" E. (II, 265). After having a wife measured from a bolt of cloth and cut off, he awakens, bathed in perspiration.

The first instance of alogism appears in the letters exchanged between Auntie and Shponka. In the letter written by Auntie to Shponka, she explains that she is sending him some linen, socks, and shirts. She then informs Shponka that she desires him to return and manage the estate, for she is growing old. She adds a postscript: "There are wonderful turnips in our kitchen-garden, they look very strange, more like potatoes than turnips." E. (II, 241).

Shponka replies to his Aunt in much the same style. He thanks his Aunt for the fresh linen adding that he especially welcomes the socks, since his old ones had been darned so many times they were becoming tight. He agrees to return to the estate, adding as a closing note that: "As regards pigs here, they are mostly fed on brewers' mash together with a little beer when it has grown flat." E. (II, 241). In both instances laughter arises through the abrupt and illogical change of topics.

Shponka, Gogol's first attempt at a satirical portrayal of a figure chosen from Ukrainian contemporary society, is the prototype of the later Mirgorodian inhabitant.

This tale forms a transition from the light and whimsical folk tales and Ukrainian stock figures to the bitter and stinging satire seen in the Mirgorodian Ivans.

A Place Bewitched

The narrator of this tale, Foma Grigoryevich, describes how his Grandad discovered a mysterious treasure and then lost it.

Humour in this tale takes the form of clowning. Grandad cuts a ridiculous figure as he cavorts like a goat in front of his friends. The elderly gentleman displays his agility at dancing as he bends, flings his legs, and whirls and twirls in the cucumber beds.

Farcical action ensues when Grandad, concealed beneath a large barrel, returns home, dragging his cauldron with him. Mother, believing it to be one of the children playing a prank, empties a large pail of hot dishwater and melon peelings on the barrel. The children laugh and scoff at seeing Grandad's grey head drenched in the dishwater and decorated with melon peelings. Grandad, on the other hand, remarks that he feels like a "pig who has been given a hot bath before Christmas." E. (II, 276).

It is clear from the material examined in Chapter III that the laughter evoked by these tales is carefree and light-hearted. Gogol has no purpose other than to amuse his reader. As we have noted, the character of the tales stems largely from Gogol's own wish to escape from the crushing depression of life in

St. Petersburg. These stories provided an outlet for his frustrated talents and yearnings. He naturally turned for material to the scenes of his happier youth in the Ukraine.

After he had achieved some measure of fame and had come into contact with other literary figures, Gogol paused to take stock of himself and to consider whether there was not some deeper purpose in writing besides pure amusement. Pushkin was, in some measure, responsible for encouraging this change in Gogol.

We note, therefore, at this stage the highly significant change in Gogol which was to radically alter his approach to his subjects. This changed outlook was to find its expression in Mirgorod which we shall consider next.

CHAPTER IV

MIRGOROD -
BEING A CONTINUATION OF THE EVENINGS
ON A FARM NEAR DIKANKA

In this chapter we shall attempt to show the changing nature of Gogol's humour.

In *Mirgorod*, representing the second phase of his literary work, the laughter acquires a more serious nature. Through ridicule and the stylistic devices of "indirect satire" laughter censures the "poshlost" of man - vanity, pettiness and complacent mediocrity - human imperfections, which intensely irritated and depressed Gogol.

The stylistic devices of "indirect satire" used by Gogol in *Mirgorod* - the objective-subjective technique, alogism, and the element of the grotesque - differ from those used in the earlier tales.

In his earlier period, as we have noted, farcical action, slapstick comedy, and stock figures from the Ukrainian puppet theatre were employed to evoke a light-hearted laughter.

The Old-World Landowners

Gogol left Moscow in July, 1832 and upon arrival at Vassilevka, found his ancestral estate in a state of almost complete neglect. He was deeply depressed by the degenerate condition of the formerly wealthy estates in the area and the poverty of the landowners, most of whom were in debt. Gogol witnessed the futile attempts of these landowners to embark upon manufacturing enterprises in an effort to restore their estates to their former prosperity. But lacking the necessary financial resources, the poverty-stricken landowners were unable to accomplish anything constructive and forsook these endeavours to abandon themselves to the less demanding pursuit of hunting.

The general atmosphere of moribund stagnation prevailing among the Ukrainian landowning class aroused in Gogol a sense of disgust and hostility and prompted him, during his stay at Vassilevka during the summer and autumn in 1832, to draft the tale, The Old-World Landowners. In the tale he used his grandfather and grandmother, Afanasy Demyanovich and Tatyana Demyonovna Gogol-Janovsky as the models for his two gentle heroes, Afanasy Ivanovich and Pulkheria Ivanovna.

Appalled by the tedious and barren existence of the landowning class, Gogol attempted to unmask and ridicule their smug and self-satisfied outlook. Gogol's comical description of the placid life of the affectionate elderly couple, Afanasy and Pulkheria was not as biting as his attack upon "poshlost" in the stories about Shponka and

the two Ivans. Gogol's pleasant personal reminiscenses of this stay in Vassilevka may have somewhat mellowed his treatment of the couple. Of interest here is the letter to Dmitriyev in which Gogol confesses his love for the refreshing country air which had lulled him into a pleasant state of stupor. "'The whole of August was lovely here, and the beginning of September is like summer - and I am enjoying myself thoroughly.'"[1]

Gogol uses a kindly laughter to expose the empty life of his old world landowners. This is not to say, however, that it is less effective than the more obviously scathing humour in the tales about Shponka and the two Ivans.

In the tale, The Old-World Landowners, Gogol satirizes the unprogressive nature of their superficially idyllic life. Although the description of the singing doors and the buzzing flies evokes an atmosphere of placid serenity, one detects beneath it all a sense of stagnation. "But the most remarkable thing in the house was the singing of the doors. As soon as morning came the singing of the doors could be heard all over the house . . . each door had its own voice - the door leading to the bedroom sang in the thinnest falsetto and the door into the dining-room in a husky bass; but the one to the outer room gave out a strange cracked and at the same time moaning sound so that as one listened to it one heard distinctly, 'Holy Saints! I am freezing!'"
M. (I, 18).

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[1]David Magarshack, Gogol: A Life (London, 1957), p. 89.

Using caustic praise instead of dispraise, Gogol sustains his gentle attack upon the egocentric life of the elderly couple without resorting to such stylistic devices as the grotesque or alogism which figure so prominently in <u>The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich</u>. In a heavily sarcastic tone and through the use of carefully selected details, Gogol proceeds to present an amusing description of the couple's gluttony. Gogol shows Pulkheria toiling zealously in her "chemical laboratory", pickling and preserving food in a multitude of cauldrons, flasks and pots. "Her house was quite like a chemical laboratory. There was everlastingly a fire built under an apple-tree; and a cauldron or a copper pan of jam, jelly, or fruit cheese made with honey, sugar and I don't remember what else, was scarcely ever taken off the iron tripod on which it stood. Under another tree the coachman was forever distilling a copper retort vodka with peach leaves or bird-cherry flowers or centaury or cherry stones . . . Such a quantity of all this stuff was boiled, salted and dried that the whole courtyard would probably have been drowned in it at last." M. (I, 19-20).

Gogol further intensifies the comic effect of their gluttony with a description of Pulkheria's and Afanasy's daily preoccupation with eating. "As soon as the sun had risen . . . they were sitting down to a little table, drinking coffee . . . An hour before dinner Afanasy Ivanovich would have another snack, would empty an old-

fashioned silver goblet of vodka, would eat mushrooms, various sorts of dried fish and so on. They sat down to dinner at twelve o'clock. At dinner the conversation usually turned on subjects related to the meal. " 'I fancy this porridge,' Afanasy Ivanovich would say, 'is a little bit burnt. Don't you think so, Pulkheria Ivanovna?' 'No, Afanasy Ivanovich. You put a little more butter to it, then it won't taste burnt, or have some of this mushroom sauce' . . . After dinner Afanasy Ivanovich went to lie down for an hour, after which Pulkheria Ivanovna would take a sliced water-melon and say, 'try this nice melon, Afanasy Ivanovich.' " M. (I, 21-23). After a short stroll through the garden, Afanasy Ivanovich would eat a few pears. Then two snacks would be consumed before dinner time and "at half past nine they sat down to supper." M. (I, 21-23).

This almost religious dedication to food is further seen in the naive yet sincere manner with which Pulkheria entertains her guests, regaling them with her choicest dishes, while at the same time enlarging upon their therapeutic values. " 'This,' she would say, taking a cork out of a carafe, 'is vodka mulled with milfoil and sage - if anyone has a pain in the shoulder-blades or loins, it is very good; now this is mulled with centaury - if anyone has a ringing in the ears or a rash on the face, it is very good; . . . If anyone getting up in the morning knocks his head against a corner of the cupboard or table and a bump comes up on

his forehead, he has only to drink one glass of it before dinner and it takes it away entirely; it all passes off that very minute, as though it had never been there at all.' " M. (I, 27).

In the description of their blissful and serene life, with its underlying tone of irony, Gogol reveals its true character to be entirely directed toward the habitual indulgence of appetite. They perform the motions of living without any creative mental activity or genuine emotional experience.

Eating is of such quintessential importance to them that they can conceive of no worse disaster than one affecting food, and in fact a conversation takes place in which they discuss the horror of such a catastrophe. " 'But if the kitchen were burnt too?' 'What next! God preserve us from such a calamity as both house and kitchen burnt down all at once!' 'And if the store-room were burnt down?' 'God knows what you are saying! I don't want to listen to you! It's a sin to say it, and God will punish you for saying such things!' " M. (I, 24-25).

Although their hospitality is warm and sincere, their tedious conversation reveals a state of intellectual barrenness. Their thoughts seldom reach beyond the realm of food, and they remain completely indifferent to events occurring in the outside world.

Oblivious to the world beyond their warm kitchen and devoid of any high ideals or aspirations, they lead a life of

contented gluttony. The uninspired pattern of their lives reaches its logical conclusion in the absurd nature of their deaths. Pulkheria takes as a portent of death the disappearance of her favorite little cat. Submissively, she prepares for her inevitable end. And after her death, Afanasy sinks into a torpor.

In the tragi-comical description of Afanasy's helplessness at the dinner table and his inability to partake of food without recalling to mind his deceased wife, Gogol attempts to reveal the shallow nature of their affection for one another, which had been based exclusively upon their mutual love of food. "'This is the dish', said Afanasy Ivanovich . . . 'This is the dish,' he went on, . . . 'This is the dish which my . . . my . . . dear . . . my dear . . .' And all at once he burst into tears; his hand fell on the plate, the plate turned upside down, slipped and was smashed, and the sauce was spilt all over him." M. (I, 36-37). Now unable to cope with his daily routine, Afanasy loses his interest in life and he undergoes complete demoralization until he, too, dies.

It is significant that in Mirgorod Gogol deliberately juxtaposed The Old-World Landowners with Taras Bulba, the story of the sixteenth century Cossack who championed the cause of Cossack liberty and ultimately gave his life in the struggle. In these two stories, Gogol depicts two extremes of human character: Taras Bulba's courageous dedication to a high ideal is contrasted to the purposeless and egocentric existence of Afanasy Ivanovich and

Pulkheria Ivanovna. The energetic Ukrainian hero strove to realize his ideal of liberating his fellow countrymen from the feudal power which the Poles attempted to impose upon the free Cossacks. In complete antithesis to Taras Bulba, Pulkheria and Afanasy present a depressing image of self-centred indulgence. One cannot help but note the implied contrast between their meek resignation in the face of death and the dramatic martyrdom of Taras Bulba.

The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich

In this tale about a ludicrous quarrel between two individuals - Ivan Ivanovich Pererepenko and Ivan Nikiforovich Dovgochkun, Gogol employs the objective-subjective approach, alogism, and the element of the grotesque in order to reveal the absurdity of the character's actions. Gogol achieves a well-balanced comic effect through a careful choice of stylistic devices coupled with strongly negative character types whose dull existence is in complete harmony with the dreary atmosphere of their dreary town.

The main source for the humour in this tale are the type characters - Ivan Ivanovich Pererepenko and Ivan Nikiforovich Dovgochkun.

Ivan Ivanovich Pererepenko is a wealthy Ukrainian landowner, who lives an uneventful and placid life on his sumptuous estate in the little town of Mirgorod. He possesses a luxurious house, a fruitful garden and a sturdy serf-girl, Gapka, who is his

housekeeper. With his material and physical demands fully satisfied by his servants, time weighs heavily on Ivan Ivanovich's hands. He therefore seeks diversion in trifles. After eating a melon he places the remaining seeds in an envelope upon which he then inscribes the date on which they were eaten and the name of anyone present at the time. In addition he carves small wooden bowls. These activities serve no useful purpose except to satisfy the limited demands of his shallow intellect.

Ivan Ivanovich is extremely meticulous, both in dress and manners. In his neatly tailored clothing, he assumes an arrogant and sophisticated pose as compared to the dishevelled appearance of Ivan Nikiforovich, whose clothes are ill-matched: trousers so wide "that you could put the whole courtyard with the barns and barn-buildings into them" M. (II, 242) and soiled yellowish-brown Cossack coat.

In addition to his insistence upon sartorial elegance, Ivan Ivanovich is sensitive to blasphemy. Even the word "devil" upsets him. When Ivan Nikiforovich exclaims: "'You can go and kiss your sow or the devil, if you prefer him!'" M. (II, 252), Ivan Ivanovich answers disconcertedly: "'Oh! You'll see your tongue will be pierced with red-hot needles for such ungodly sayings. One has to wash one's face and hands and fumigate oneself after talking to you!'" M. (II, 252).

Ivan Ivanovich's dry and emaciated figure fully matches his prosaic character. His _tête-à-têtes_ with Ivan Nikiforovich

show him to be a tedious companion. He solemnly arrives at the absurd conclusion that Russia is at war with Turkey because the Turks desire to impose their religion upon the Russians. "'I imagine that the kings want us all to accept the Turkish faith.'" M. (II, 251).

Like Ivan Fyodorovich Shponka, Ivan Ivanovich bases his life on habit and routine. With monotonous regularity he labels melon seeds or carves little wooden bowls. Occasionally he travels into the country, but more often he simply inspects his large estate and then retires to the balcony of his mansion where he can rest and observe the passers-by in the street below.

Ivan Ivanovich's graceful actions are the perfect embodiment of finesse. He is the centre of attention in church as he genuflects politely and pompously in all directions. When he is offered a cup of tea, he bows politely five times, courteously refusing on each occasion, and then humbly accepts the refreshment when pressed the sixth time.

Ivan Ivanovich, the vain and egocentric landowner, is extremely conscious of his elevated social position and is easily offended when his fine breeding and illustrious parentage are called into question. When Ivan Nikiforovich impulsively and tactlessly calls him a "gander" he considers this so insulting to his social position and distinguished ancestors, that he severs the friendly ties between himself and Ivan Nikiforovich. He

exclaims in outrage: "'A gander is not a man but a bird, a fact thoroughly well known to everyone, even though he may not have been to a seminary. But the aforesaid pernicious gentleman, though fully aware of all this, abused me with the aforesaid foul name for no other purpose than to direct a deadly insult against my rank and station.'" M. (II, 266).

Ivan Ivanovich is formal and austere towards others. He shows no genuine human feeling towards anyone, even including his old friend Ivan Nikiforovich. If there is any human bond between them, it is that of long established habit. Ivan Ivanovich displays no deep regret when their once amiable relationship is severed, but becomes even more austere and cold towards his friend as he instigates his legal procedures against him, legal actions which ultimately develop into an interminable lawsuit.

Ivan Nikiforovich Dovgochkun, a wealthy landowner, lives on his dilapidated estate in Mirgorod and leads a life as mediocre and barren as that of Ivan Ivanovich.

He is a complete antithesis to Ivan Ivanovich in physical constitution and personal conduct. His corpulent and voluminous figure accentuate his slovenly habits and attire. Whereas Ivan Ivanovich is meticulous, Ivan Nikiforovich dresses carelessly, with a total disregard for elegance. Dressed in his ill-matched clothes - wide trousers and yellowish-brown Cossack coat - he is as gaudy as the colourfully littered courtyard of his estate.

Neglectful of his duties as overseer and landowner, Ivan Nikiforovich has allowed his estate to lapse into a state of disrepair. Unlike the luxurious house and fruitful gardens of Ivan Ivanovich, Ivan Nikiforovich's grounds are unkempt and littered with melon rinds and barrel hoops.

Ivan Nikiforovich is untroubled by either curiosity about the outside world or a desire for social contacts. Addicted to habitual inertia and solitude, Ivan Nikiforovich is oblivious to the world beyond the village and is thus incapable of forming opinions about it.

After the fatal insult, he meekly and submissively allows Agafya Fedosyevna to intervene in the personal quarrel between himself and Ivan Nikiforovich. She further aggravates their now delicate relationship by hiring a man to draw up a lengthy legal petition for Ivan Nikiforovich.

In spite of Ivan Nikiforovich's indolence and apparently total lack of self-respect, he is just as vain and pompous as his comic foil, Ivan Ivanovich. He is extremely dissatisfied with Ivan Ivanovich's practical tokens of exchange: two sacks of oats and a sow, and brusquely refuses them. "'This is a gun, a thing everyone knows; while that - the devil only knows what to call it - is a sow! If it had not been you speaking, I might have taken it as an insult.'" M. (II, 251).

Based solely on the affinity of their social standing and

outlook, their friendship terminates as easily as it once began. They become eternal enemies just as quickly as they had once been habitual friends.

Gogol depicts a humorous setting which is intended to complement the temperament of the town inhabitants. In an ingenuous tone, full of irony, Gogol describes the absurd little town, Mirgorod, which is a complete antithesis to its actual meaning of "city-of-peace". "Mirgorod is a delightful town. There are all sorts of buildings in it . . . A street to the right, a street to the left, everywhere an excellent fence; . . . Splendid! The fence is always adorned with objects which make it more picturesque - a check petticoat stretched out on it or a shirt or trousers . . . There is a pool in it - wonderful pool! You have never seen one like it. It fills up almost the whole square . . . But to my thinking there is not a better house than the district court . . . there are eight windows in it! Eight windows in a row, looking straight on the square and onto that stretch of water of which I have already spoken and which the mayor calls the lake! . . . Its roof is all made of wood and would indeed, have been painted red, if the oil intended for that purpose had not been eaten by the office clerks with onions for . . . it was Lent; and so the roof was left unpainted." M. (II, 260-261).

Gogol skilfully balances this comic setting with a vivid description of its best known inhabitants, Ivan Ivanovich

Pererepenko and Ivan Nikiforovich Dovgochkun. Although differing in physical appearance, they display the same eccentric and absurd behaviour and are the staunchest of friends, assisting one another over puddles or buying flea powder together.

The subsequent comic events which follow the quarrel are described in minute detail and are in full harmony with the ridiculous character of the heroes. Comic suspense is created as Ivan Ivanovich slinks stealthily into the yard, ignored by the dogs "who, as yet, know nothing of the quarrel between them, and so allowed him as a friend to approach the pen, which stood firmly on four oak posts." M. (II, 259). Gogol sarcastically implies that only the dogs have the intelligence to ignore that which is considered by the prominent citizens of Mirgorod as an incident of grave significance.

The comic effect increases in scope and momentum. The now delicate relationship between the two Ivans assumes a farcical character as Ivan Nikiforovich appears at the court to file his petition. His portly figure lodges in the doorway and he is unable to move either backwards or forwards. After removing the second half of the door, the clerk and his assistant are successful in rescuing Ivan Nikiforovich from his unfortunate predicament. "Then one of the clerks, a broad-shouldered fellow with thick lips and a thick nose, with a drunken look in his squinting eyes, and ragged elbows, approached the foremost half of Ivan Nikiforovich,

folded the latter's arms across his chest as though he were a baby, and winked to the veteran, who shoved with his knee in Ivan Nikiforovich's belly, and in spite of the latter's piteous moans he was squeezed out into the waiting-room." M. (II, 269).

Events even become grotesque when the grey sow "ran into the room and, to the surprise of all present, seized - not a pie or a crust of bread, but Ivan Nikiforovich's petition, which was lying at the end of the table with its pages hanging over the edge." M. (II, 272). This incident inflames the situation and leads to further legal procedures.

At the town ball, the guests seek to reconcile the two litigants. But all their combined efforts to reconcile the two gentlemen dissolve into comic pandemonium. In this farcical scene, coloured by slapstick comedy, both characters are brought face to face. "Then the mayor gave a wink, and Ivan Ivanovich . . . the one who squinted . . . stood behind Ivan Ivanovich's back, and both began shoving them from behind . . . Ivan Ivanovich . . . though he shoved Ivan Nikiforovich a little askew, yet pushed him fairly successfully to the place where Ivan Ivanovich was standing; but the mayor took a line too much to one side . . . lurched a long way off in quite the opposite direction . . . so that Ivan Ivanovich fell against a lady in a red dress who had been compelled by curiosity to thrust herself into their midst . . . As soon as the judge gave Ivan Ivanovich a shove, then Ivan Nikiforovich, . . . pushed with all strength and shoved

Ivan Nikiforovich together." M. (II, 291). An unexpectedly serious note is sounded by the guests who exclaim: "'God bless you, Ivan Nikiforovich and Ivan Ivanovich! Tell us truthfully now: what did you quarrel about? Wasn't it something trifling? Aren't you ashamed before men and before God!'" M. (II, 291).

The tactless repetition of the word "gander" by the undiplomatic Ivan Nikiforovich puts a final end to all hopes for a possible reconciliation. The hitherto comic tone ceases at this climactic point as both men confront each other in violent anger. "He cast on Ivan Nikiforovich a glance - and what a glance! If that glance had been endowed with the power of action it would have reduced Ivan Nikiforovich to ashes." M. (II, 293).

The conclusion of the tale is sad and tragic as Gogol returns to Mirgorod in the role of an outside observer, recalls the once firm friendship of the two men and reflects upon the preceding events. He now sees two decrepit old men, who are hopefully anticipating that their case will be settled "tomorrow". Gogol's point of view has changed from an objective description of comic events to a subjective mood of contemplation. Mentally he travels beyond life in _Mirgorod_ into generalizations and concludes the tale with some pessimistic reflections on life. "What a dreary world this is, sirs!" M. (II, 295). The tale, conceived as a lively comedy, collapses in gloom and sadness.

Alogism, or comedy through irrelevance, fulfills a major

function in the tale and is the basis upon which much of the humour is constructed. Alogism figures prominently in the comparison of character traits, in the motivation of behaviour, and in the speeches of the personalities.

In using the element of the illogical - the juxtaposition of two unrelated ideas - in order to compare the two characters psychologically, Gogol achieves a harmonious balance between their personalities. We can see the interplay between their characters in the following description: "Ivan Ivanovich is very angry if a fly gets into his borshch: he is quite beside himself then - he will leave the plateful, and his host will catch it. Ivan Nikiforovich is exceedingly fond of bathing, and when he is sitting up to his neck in water, he orders the table and samovar to be set in the water too, and is very fond of drinking tea in such refreshing coolness." M. (II, 242).

Gogol continues to describe how Ivan Ivanovich is of a "timorous character." M. (II, 242). "Ivan Nikiforovich, on the other hand, wears trousers with such ample folds that if they were blown out you could put the whole courtyard with the barns and barn-buildings into them." M. (II, 242). These sartorial details suggest the character of the two men. While Ivan Ivanovich is somewhat reticent by nature, Ivan Nikiforovich is an extrovert.

Alogism is also used in direct narration to create a comic effect and, by implication to expose Ivan Ivanovich's moral laxity.

In the opinion of Father Pyotr, the chief priest, "he knows of no one who fulfills the duty of a Christian and knows how to live better than Ivan Ivanovich does." M. (II, 239). Yet Gapka, Ivan's chief housekeeper, has children who run about the yard. "At that time he had been a widower for nearly ten years. He has no children. Gapka has children and they often run about the yard . . . His Gapka is a sturdy wench . . . with fine healthy calves and fresh cheeks." M. (II, 239). Although the paternity of Ivan Ivanovich is not stated, it is nevertheless implied to the reader by Gogol's veiled wording and ironic tone.

Alogism is further employed to expose the heroes' absurd behaviour. In this case, alogism reveals their motivation to be non-motivation and cause to consist of non-cause. For example, Ivan Ivanovich eats melons, collects the seeds in an envelope and inscribes the date on which they were consumed. "This melon was eaten on such and such a date. If some visitor happens to partake in the meals, he adds: 'So and so was present'." M. (II, 238). Although Ivan Ivanovich performs this trivial action painstakingly and methodically, there appears to be no useful purpose in it.

Alogism is further used to reveal the ridiculous behaviour of Ivan Ivanovich. Ivan Ivanovich desires Ivan Nikiforovich's gun because "'it is a nice thing! I have been wanting to get one like that for a long time past. I should very much like to have that nice gun.'" M. (II, 245). His only purpose in desiring the gun is to satisfy his passion for acquisition.

Alogism, in its keenest form, appears in comically absurd deductions. The stupidity and vanity of their intellectual pretensions are revealed in the conversation about the war between the Turks and the Russians. "'They say,' began Ivan Ivanovich, 'that three kings have declared war on our Tsar.' 'Yes, Potyr Fyodorovich told me about it. What does it mean? And what's the war about?' 'There is no saying for certain, Ivan Nikiforovich, what it's about. I imagine that the kings want us all to accept the Turkish faith.'" M. (II, 251).

A further illustration of this occurs in the dispute between Pyotr Fyodorovich and Ivan Ivanovich regarding punishment for the "illegal" entry of Ivan Ivanovich's sow into the courtroom. Here, Ivan Ivanovich sets forth the argument that: "'Good gracious, Pyotr Fyodorovich! Why, a sow is god's creation!' 'Agreed. All the world knows that you are a learned man, that you are versed in the sciences and all manner of subjects . . .'

. . . .

'But my duty,' the mayor went on, 'is to obey the orders of government. Are you aware, Ivan Ivanovich, that anyone who purloins a legal document in a court of law is liable like any other criminal to be tried in a criminal court?'

'I am so well aware of it that if you like I will teach you. That applies to human beings; for instance, if you were to steal a document; but a sow is an animal, God's creation.'" M. (II, 277).

Gogol protracts the conversation in order to achieve the

maximum comic effect. In the conversation between the two Ivans regarding the gun, Ivan Ivanovich implores Ivan Nikiforovich to give the gun to him. Ivan Nikiforovich is hesitant and says that it is indispensable to him. Ivan Ivanovich is persistent and offers him a sow in exchange for the rifle. "'What use is your sow to me? Am I going to give a wake for the devil?'

. . . .

'How could you really, Ivan Ivanovich, give me for the gun the devil knows what - a sow?'

'Why is she the devil knows what, Ivan Nikiforovich?'

'Why is she? I should think you might know that for yourself. This is a gun, a thing everyone knows; while that - the devil knows what to call it - is a sow! If it had not been you speaking, I might have taken it as an insult.'

'What fault have you found in the sow?'

'What do you take me for? That I should take a pig?'

. . . .

'What, two sacks of oats and a sow for the gun!'

'Why, isn't is enough?'

'For the gun?'

'Of course for the gun!'

'Two sacks for the gun?'

'Two sacks, not empty, but full of oats; and have you forgotten the sow?'

'You can go and kiss your sow or the devil, if you prefer him!'"

M. (II, 251-252).

The characters repeat the same question and answer, but in different forms. As they monotonously question and answer each other, their conversation fails to progress beyond the observation that the sow, is "the devil knows what" and the rifle is a "thing". For the reader, comic suspense lies in awaiting their conclusions.

The secondary figures in the tale, Agafya Fedoseyevna, Anton Prokofyevich Golopuz and Demyan Demyanovich, are comic foils of the heroes - Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich.

After describing Ivan Ivanovich's cloak, Gogol introduces us to Agafya Fedoseyevna, who figures prominently in the quarrel between Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich. "He had it made before Agafya Fedoseyvna went to Kiev. You know Agafya Fedoseyevna? The lady who bit off the assessor's ear." M. (II, 238). This reminiscence, casually dropped into the conversation, evokes in the reader's mind a not altogether pleasant image of Agafya Fedoseyvna.

There is a logic in the juxtaposition of unrelated ideas in the description of Anton Prokofyevich Golopuz who plans to reconcile Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich. It is ironic that he has been chosen by all his dull-witted friends as being the most capable and skilful in affairs requiring diplomacy, for he is as incompetent dealing with people as he is in business. "He has no house of his own. He used to have one at the end of the town, but he sold it and with the money he got for it he bought three bay horses and a small chaise, in which he used to ride about visiting the neighbouring landowners. But as the horses gave him a great deal of trouble, and besides he needed money to buy them oats, Anton Prokofyevich

swopped them for a fiddle and a serf-girl, receiving a twenty-five ruble note into the bargain. Then Anton Prokofyevich sold the fiddle and swopped the girl for a morocco purse set with gold, and now he has a purse the like of which no one else possesses."
M. (II.284-285).

The narrow mental horizon of Demyan Demyanovich, the municipal town judge, is exposed by the technique of alogism in dialogue bordering on the grotesque. During the reading of petitions, the judge is involved with the court assessor in an "interesting conversation" over a cup of tea. "'I purposely tried to find out,' said the judge . . . 'how they manage to make them sing so well. I had a capital blackbird two years ago. And do you know, it suddenly went off completely and began singing God knows what; it got worse and worse; it took to lisping and wheezing - no use at all! And you know, it was because of the merest trifle! I'll tell you how it happens. A little pimple no bigger than a pea grows under the throat. This must be pricked with a needle. I was told that by Zakhar Prokofyevich and if you like I'll tell you just how it happened: I was going to see him -'" M. (II, 262). At this point, the judge is interrupted, but ignores this and promptly switches to another ludicrous theme. "'Well, so I arrived at this house . . . I can even tell you exactly what he gave me. With the vodka some sturgeon was served, unique! . . . but I tried the caviare - splendid caviare! there can be no two words about it, superb!'"
M. (II, 263).

The judge's true character is revealed by this non-sequitur conversation, in which the topics range from blackbirds and a pimple to vodka, sturgeon and caviare. This meagre range of topics reveals that his main interests centres around the subject of food.

The grotesque element plays only a minor role in the tale and is used to ridicule certain outstanding features of the characters. Thus Gogol completes the portrait of Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich. For example, Gogol compares their heads: "Ivan Ivanovich's head is like a radish, tail downwards; Ivan Nikiforovich's head is like a radish, tail upwards." M. (II, 241).

Gogol attempts to suggest the repulsive character of the meddlesome woman, Agafya Fedoseyvna, by exposing to ridicule her physical peculiarities. "Agafya Fedoseyevna wore a cap on her head, three warts on her nose . . . Her whole figure resembled a tub, and so it was as hard to see her waist as to see one's nose without a looking-glass." M. (II, 258).

From our examination of the stylistic devices used by Gogol in this tale to achieve a satiric effect, it will be seen that the resultant laughter is no longer sharp and biting, but tinged with sadness and gloom as when Gogol declares: "What a dreary world this is, sirs!" This peculiarly Gogolian laughter, traditionally described as "laughter through tears", is tinged with poignancy and grief over the failings of mankind.

Indeed the mature humour of _Mirgorod_ foreshadows that of his later works: _The Cloak_, _The Inspector-General_, and the novel _Dead Souls_, where Gogol uses his fully mature artistry in devastating exposés of moral corruption and man's inhumanity to man.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

We come now to a general appraisal of Gogol's humour in the works considered and offer our conclusions as to its purposes. In addition, the differing appraisals of this humour by nineteenth and twentieth century critics are assessed.

In the whimsical tales of the first collection, Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka, which enjoyed great success, Ukrainian peasant life and customs provide the background for the humorous action. Set in Gogol's native Ukraine, these light stories are partly romantic, containing as they do elements of the supernatural and folklore, in addition to elements from the Ukrainian puppet theatre. Frequent use is made of slapstick comedy and farcical action in which the person loses his individuality and changes into an automaton, blindly pushed hither and thither. As we have noted, Pushkin welcomed these tales for their "real gaiety, straightforward, unforced, without affectation and without prudishness"[1] and they became popular among the general reading public.

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[1] David Magarshack, Gogol: A Life (London, 1957), p. 76.

But this first collection had as its sole aim aesthetic laughter - an end in itself - providing satisfaction free of malice or derogatory intent. In Mirgorod, the later series of tales, the humour acquires a new dimension and seeks to expose follies and vices through ridicule. Gogol, writing in the satirical vein, had by now abandoned the gay and whimsical depiction of Ukrainian peasant life and embarked upon a careful scrutiny of characters drawn from the landowning class. No longer seeking to escape into a world of romantic fantasy, Gogol attains in Mirgorod a new level of vision and insight. He directs his attention principally towards the landowning class with the aim of condemning their parasitic life and the vices resulting from such an existence. Stupidity, vanity and complacent inferiority are the targets of his ridicule: at the other end of the scale he presents to the reader the positive man of action, Taras Bulba, and thus presents the moral contrast between an unselfish life and one of sloth.

The laughter in The Tale of Ivan Fyodorovich Shponka and His Aunt represents a transition between the light-hearted comedy of the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka and the pathetic humour in The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich. In Shponka, Gogol's first attempt at a satiric portrayal of "poshlost", he utilizes the stylistic devices of sarcasm, irony, alogism and the grotesque, to emphasize the prominent faults and features of Shponka. By means of degradation and ridicule, Gogol arouses derisive laughter - bitter and pungent.

From his sarcastic treatment of Shponka, Gogol proceeds to a caustic description of the vegetative life of Afanasy Ivanovich and Pulkheria Ivanovna, completing the series with a biting portrayal of the two Ivans. None of the characters are attractive types - they are too lacking in positive or negative qualities.

Comedy of situation has now been replaced by "internal" humour. The antics of the heroes, engaged in slapstick comedy and farcical action, no longer arouse a smile of pure enjoyment. The contradictions in the behaviour of the people reveal the incongruity between their lofty pretensions and their actual base behaviour and arouse at once derisive and pained laughter. Previously, comedy and farce were used by Gogol for the sole purpose of savouring the absurdity of human actions, whereas this new satire aims at an exposure of human failings. In scrutinizing the behaviour of the characters, the reader is now required to select and acknowledge what is worthy of derision. Thus, Gogol's humour now seeks to appeal to the intellect, rather than evoke pure enjoyment.

In the _Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka_ Gogol was a pure comedian, finding pleasure in human frailities. In _Mirgorod_, as a satirist, he was totally subjective in his hostile approach towards the characters and their actions. In this latter collection, Gogol sought to give a moral and social purpose - an aim motivated by his earlier assertion that the pen of the reviewer or critic should be guided by a true desire for what is good and useful. Thus, he became a moral artist in aiming at the eradication of universal

failings and the ultimate regeneration of human nature. This was to be achieved by general recognition through laughter, of human vices. In his role as satirist, Gogol was not only deriding human weaknesses, but, by arousing the desire for something better and nobler, he was working towards a higher ideal. As a moral satirist, he had unconsciously achieved his youthful dream.

Although brutal in tearing the veil from hypocrisy, Gogol nevertheless feels compassionate towards human nature and cherishes hopes for its ultimate improvement. But this improvement must of necessity be preceded by a severe jolt out of apathy. This jolt was to be administered by laughter. Gogol's laughter at the pretensions, incongruities and base hypocrisies of humanity does not signify his hatred of it. Gogol holds to perverse and foolish humanity a mirror in which it may behold its own reflection.

In his Author's Confessions, he confesses that the heart of man in general was the source of his inspiration. From childhood he was acutely aware of others and constantly observed those idiosyncrasies which escaped others. His was an insatiable curiosity, a tendency to speculate upon the life and background of passers-by and an ability to forecast human reactions. Gogol's later literary treatment of human nature was the logical outcome of these early views and interests. His laughter was born not of hate for mankind but of love for it.

The widely differing views of certain nineteenth century literary critics of Gogol's works are to some extent coloured by their political and social leanings. Stepan Petrovich Shevyryov, Slavophile

man of letters and professor of literature at Moscow University, turned away in disgust from Gogol's works. He could find no aesthetic justification for drawing attention to the vulgar side of life.

Reared in the idealistic school of Schelling and believing in art for its own sake, Shevyryov was understandably appalled by these essentially realistic tales. For him, comedy consisted of "harmless nonsense" and not in the presentation of the sordid and banal. He further objected to what he referred to as the "slovenliness" of Gogol's style by which, in fact, he meant the colloquial character of the author's language.

In this unjustifiably harsh and, in our view, erroneous interpretation of Gogol's art, Shevyryov misunderstood Gogol's important role as satirist. He completely failed to understand that Gogol's introduction of sordid topics into Russian literature was for the purpose of indicating what required moral correction if society was ever to attain salvation. Gogol, in his role of satirist, was compelled to seize upon those weaknesses and idiosyncracies which aroused disgust in him. By exaggeration and distortion of his subjects, even to the degree of monstrous caricature, Gogol unmasked smug self-deception.

Gogol's uniqueness lies in his abandonment of the literary canons of his period and his branching into an entirely new field. Although Radishchev and Novikov in the eighteenth century had unmasked certain social abuses, it was for Gogol to innovate a

literary medium which combined the exposure of these evils with a new artistic method.

Whereas life in the Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka had been carefree and happy, in Mirgorod Gogol plunges beneath its apparent stability and shows us the opposite end of the human scale. Gogol's exposure of the parasitic landowning class is completely opposed to the idyllic pastoral scenes characteristic of the sentimental school, in which the landowner was depicted as a benign patriarchal figure.

Belinsky and his ideological successors, in their sociological approach to literary criticism, assessed Gogol's work on the basis of its contribution to national identity and progress. They felt that Gogol's creative art had assisted Russia in gaining some degree of critical self-consciousness by enabling her to see her own reflection in Gogol's works.

Belinsky praised Gogol as a keen portrayer of Russian life and manner. For Belinsky, the strength of Gogol's humour lay in the faithfulness with which he reproduced Russian reality, presenting people and things with devastating insight. For Belinsky, there were in Gogol no caricatures or distortions. He felt that the essence of Gogol's comedy lay in his having recorded the entire gamut of human nature, ranging from the senselessly petty to the monstrously grotesque.

Soviet critics have understandably carried to extremes these interpretations of Gogol's satire. For them, deeply committed as

they are to social problems, Gogol's work is of immense moral and social significance. Viewing Gogol through the prism of socialist realism, they see in him a writer savagely pillorying the entire decadent Czarist-feudal system. In their eyes, Gogol is thus primarily a political writer. If they do acknowledge him as a humourist, this takes second place to his ideological role, whose function was to bring to view all the foulness and insolvency of the Czarist regime.

The narrow and rigid interpretations of Gogol by Soviet critics (and to some extent by Belinsky) are quite untenable in the light of our examination of what Gogol intended as the purpose of his humour. Although passionately interested in the dignity of man and the hope of humanity's ultimate redemption from its imperfections, Gogol, at the same time, is keenly aware of the absurdities and incongruities of existence. His is too embracing a sense of humour to allow so rigid an approach as that adopted by Belinsky and the Soviet critics.

Even at an early stage in his search for a panacea for human vices, Gogol falls prey to depression over the possibility of man's ultimate moral perfection. Does he not conclude Mirgorod with the pessimistic words: "What a dreary world this is, sirs!"

In Revizor and Dead Souls, he was later to paint an even broader canvas of mankind. Eventually his search for some satisfying solution to this world and its problems became too much for Gogol and he abandoned the path of self-knowledge to seek refuge in the

established institutions of Church and State, a step for which he was severely taken to task by Belinsky.

This final period does not however enter into the scope of this study.

From the works examined we have seen the transition in the nature and purpose of Gogol's comedy. Passing from his initial stage of purely aesthetic humour, he enters a maturer realm, in which the laughter which he seeks to arouse, ceases to be an end in itself and acquires a serious moral and social significance.

Gogol is acknowledged as occupying a unique place in Russian literature. For his contemporaries this unique quality lay in the completely original style which he pioneered in literature. He successfully combined romantic elements with realistic detail and used these comic techniques, which we have examined, to fuse this material into tales where bizarre comedy blends harmoniously with reality.

Opinions differ as to his purpose in writing. Many consider Gogol as a humourist, pure and simple, while others see in him a moralist and political writer. All these opposing schools unite, however, in acknowledging Gogol as a pioneer of the comic method in literature.

Gogol has exerted a tremendous influence on the subsequent development of Russian literature. Most notable among his spiritual heirs stands Anton Chekhov, whose bizarre and poignant humour is strongly reminiscent of Gogol. Another writer whose work evidences

Gogol's influence is Saltykov-Shchedrin. With his plays The Inspector-General and The Wedding, Gogol paved the way for future dramatists such as Ostrovskii and Sukhovo-Kobylin.

Dostoevskii derives his concern for the underdog in society from such stories as The Overcoat. Descriptions of the dreary and oppressive atmosphere of St. Petersburg seen in so many of Dostoevskii's work owe much to earlier tales by Gogol.

In the Soviet period we can see clearly the influence of Gogol on writers like Zoshchenko and Ilf and Petrov, who direct their humour towards exposing bureaucratic corruption and the helplessness of the individual in the face of officialdom.

Gogol's satirization of egoism and ignorance is as effective today as it was for the readers of his own day and the types which he created have become a part of world literature.

Chernyshevskii used the following words to describe Gogol's life-purpose: ". . . his entire life was a passionate struggle against ignorance and coarseness both in himself and in others: it was wholly animated by a fixed and burning goal - the thought of serving the good of his country."

This is perhaps something of an exaggeration.

One cannot help but feel that Gogol's exposure of the evils of mankind was not to be achieved at the expense of laughter. He undoubtedly wrote his tales with the primary aim of amusing himself and his readers. That he succeeded admirably in this intention is superlatively clear from a reading of these stories.

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