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**Europe as Object of Aversion and Desire:  
Cultural Antinomies in Gogol's 'Taras Bul'ba'**

The fact is that we never moved forward with other nations, never belonged to one of the great families of humankind: we are neither of the West nor of the East and have the traditions of neither one nor the other.

— Petr Chaadaev, *Philosophical Letters*

The place of Russian society and culture both within and outside the framework of European civilisation was a major preoccupation for Gogol', as it was for many of his contemporaries. According to Pavel Annenkov, his copyist in Rome over the summer of 1841, Gogol' 'was convinced then that the Russian world comprised a distinct sphere with its own laws about which Europe had no idea' (119). Such a conviction makes itself keenly felt in the conception and teleology of *Mertvye dushi* (Dead Souls). As the author variously indicates in his correspondence and in the famous final apostrophe of his magnum opus, *Dead Souls* has as its general aim nothing less than the essentialisation of Russia (*Rus'*) and Russianness. It is the ability to invoke 'our Russian Russia, not the one . . . invoked for us from abroad by Russians-turned-foreigners' (8: 409), which Gogol' later identifies as the true measure of worth for Russian poetry in his *Vybrannye mesta iz perepiski s druz'iami* (Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends). This did not, nevertheless, prevent him from being, at the same time, an enthusiastic cultural as well as physical resident of Europe himself. The fact that Gogol' composed several essays on European history, art and architecture and elected to spend most of his creative life in Italy — a country from which he drew inspiration and to which he often referred as his second homeland (11: 109, 111–12, 141) — points to a marked ambivalence in his attitude towards Europe.

The source of such ambivalence can, in part, be traced to the peculiarities of Russia's historical engagement with the West. As has been abundantly noted by historians, the development of Imperial Russian culture came to rely heavily on direct borrowing of European ideas, tastes and forms over the course of the eighteenth century, beginning in

the wake of Peter the Great's Western-oriented reforms. Musical, artistic and architectural activity evolved under the strong influence of European traditions, more often than not at the hand of generously commissioned foreigners. French language came to dominate at court and in high society, while French literary styles and Enlightenment ideas had a profound impact on Russian letters in the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Even earlier calls by Mikhail Lomonosov to create a literary language independent of European influences were couched in terms of inevitable comparisons. Russian, he argued, possesses 'the majesty of Spanish, the vivacity of French, the firmness of German, the delicacy of Italian, and the richness and concise imagery of Greek and Latin' (quoted in Lincoln 68). Almost one hundred years later, no less pivotal a figure in the development of a modern Russian literary language than Aleksandr Pushkin nevertheless felt compelled to open a letter to Chaadaev with the confession, 'je vous parlerai la langue de l'Europe, elle m'est plus familière que la nôtre' (10: 60).

It was such a situation of willing subordination by Imperial Russian culture to the major languages and cultural traditions of Europe that set the stage for the acrimonious split among Russian intellectuals into Slavophile and Westerniser camps in the late 1830s. Gogol's own sympathy with the Slavophiles, while never openly declared, is implied in several of his essays, later instructional prose and correspondence. His close personal association with the prominent Slavophiles Mikhail Pogodin, Stepan Shevyrev and the Aksakov family similarly bespeaks his nativist ideological orientation. These facts, nonetheless, need to be considered alongside the equally well-known fact that Gogol's fictional works, notably *Dead Souls*, were read by the zealous Westernisers Visarion Belinskii and Aleksandr Gertsen as supporting their own Europe-oriented vision for Russia, no less than conservative critics welcomed the author's writings as an affirmation of Slavophile ideals.

Gogol's purposeful efforts not to become directly embroiled in the Westerniser-Slavophile debate are belied in his fictional writing by occasional reactions against contemporary Russian Euromania. Just as his first major prose work, *Večera na khutore bliz Dikan'ki* (Evenings on a Farm near Dikan'ka), might be read as seeking to include what their

author regarded as Russia's unjustifiably overlooked native margins,<sup>1</sup> Gogol's later prose makes a point in several places of excluding from Russianness foreign traditions that have taken root at Imperial Russia's centre. The narrator's observation in *Dead Souls* that 'there were now many respectable people living in enlightened Russia, just as in enlightened Europe' (6: 10) lampoons slavish imitation of all things European. Even more amusingly, the narrator suggests at another point in the novel that French was 'an essential element of a happy family life' (6: 26). One of Gogol's first letters to his mother from the Russian capital roundly condemns such displacements of Russian identity by European cosmopolitanism: 'foreigners settling here have made themselves at home and in no way appear to be foreigners, while Russians have for their part become foreign [*ob"inostranilis'*] and made themselves neither one nor the other' (10: 139).

Yet, Gogol's reluctance to side openly with the Slavophiles by pursuing similar arguments more explicitly masks subtle appreciation of the complexities attending Russia's historical engagement with the West elsewhere in his oeuvre. An attempt to resolve these complexities is directly taken up in 'Taras Bul'ba', which first appeared in *Mirgorod* (1835) and, later, in a much expanded form in the 1842 edition of Gogol's collected works.<sup>2</sup> In tracing the Zaporozhian Cossacks' history of resistance against Polish efforts at Europeanising Ukraine, Gogol's tale sets up elaborate antinomies between civilisations separated by disparate social and political orders, cultural heritage, religion, geography and history. At the same time, in contesting the incursions of foreign traditions into Ukraine (and, as we shall see, by extension, Russia), 'Taras Bul'ba' admits the relentless attraction of such traditions. The plot of Andrii's willing desertion of the misogynist cult of Cossack brotherhood in order to woo a Polish lady in conformity with European norms of chivalry is central in this respect, while the narrator's own in-

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of Gogol's inscription of Ukrainian elements into Russian literature as a means of destabilising ethnic and geographical assumptions at work in the Russian literary canon of his day, see my article, "'Noch' pered Rozhdestvom' Mykoly/Nikolaia Gogolia: k voprosu o 'maloi literature'." *Russian Literature* 49 (2001): 259–70.

<sup>2</sup> Unless noted otherwise, all quotations from 'Taras Bul'ba' are drawn from the 1842 edition.

termittent susceptibility to regarding favourably the trappings of European civilisation — despite his otherwise jingoistic preference for Cossack ways — marks an ambivalence born of grudging admiration. The overall image of Russia's relationship with Europe that emerges from 'Taras Bul'ba' reflects, as I shall argue, the outward aversion and hidden desire simultaneously underpinning Russia's regard of the West in Gogol's day — as well, perhaps, as the ambiguous prejudices of the work's long-time expatriate author.

'Taras Bul'ba' has been traditionally interpreted as a mythicised historical epic following late Romanticism's preoccupation with national identity and history (see, for example, Denisov). The fact that these categories have more often than not been defined as Russian in relation to Gogol's Cossack tale has long been the subject of revisionist criticism by Ukrainian-diaspora and, more recently, post-Soviet Ukrainian scholars, as has been the Ukrainian element in the *Dikan'ka* and other *Mirgorod* stories.<sup>3</sup> By appealing to historical realities, Ukrainocentric approaches have identified Taras Bul'ba and his factual contemporaries as distinctly Ukrainian Cossacks functioning outside the orbit of Russian imperialism. Several key facts support such claims, quite apart from persuasive evidence for a burgeoning sense of national consciousness among the Ukrainian Cossacks.<sup>4</sup> Muscovite Russia, it might be recalled, did not establish a protectorate in Left-Bank Ukraine until the second half of the seventeenth century, well after the story timeframe of 'Taras Bul'ba', while it was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that Ukrainians became *de jure* subjects of Imperial Russia.

Historical fact notwithstanding, there is a compelling case to be made for the construction of a particular type of Russianness in 'Taras

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<sup>3</sup> Hrabovych [Grabowicz] and Barabash have produced insightful readings of Ukrainian elements in Gogol's writing, focusing on Gogol's mythologisation of Ukrainian history and on the writer's debt to Ukrainian baroque literary traditions respectively. Luckyj provides a broadly representative survey of scholarly and popular literature on the Ukrainian Gogol up until 1998 (1–20).

<sup>4</sup> See Rudnytsky's review of *The Cossacks* by Philip Longworth and the ensuing exchange of views between the two authors in *Slavic Review*. For a balanced account of the Ukrainian Cossacks' contribution to both the formation of Ukrainian national identity, as well as the Europe-wide phenomenon of social banditry, see Gordon.

Bul'ba' that functions as an implicit apologia for Russian imperialism.<sup>5</sup> The epithet *russkii*, which characterises Gogol's Cossacks (seldom in the *Mirgorod* version but with purposeful frequency in the revised 1842 edition) is, in an historically ethnic sense, sufficiently broad to encompass any of the three distinct nations that claim their origins in Kyivan Rus'. At the same time, by Gogol's day *russkii* had already become synonymous with the ruling constituent nationality of Imperial Russia. This is evident in his own designation of Ukrainians and Russians as *malorossiiane* and *russkie* in his correspondence. The omission of the ethnically specific prefix *veliko-* (Great) implicitly indicates the position of political predominance that Moscow had acquired as metropolitan successor to Kyiv in the 'restored' Russian Empire. In other words, the common nineteenth-century understanding of *russkii* reflects the fact that it is the Great Russian who is the dominant carrier of Russianness, the multifarious ethnic dimension of the term having been displaced by the political ascendancy of Imperial Russia.

A more pointedly contemporary designation for the seventeenth-century Cossack is 'Southern Russian' (*iuzhnyi rossiianin* [2: 41, 2: 65]), which, by the time that 'Taras Bul'ba' was being written, drew on the shared political identity of 'southern' and 'northern' Russians as imperial subjects of *Rossiiia*, while conspicuously evading the question of their ethnic difference. By conflating historical and contemporary understandings of *russkii* and *rossiianin*, therefore, 'Taras Bul'ba' combines collective ethnicity with a highly specific sense of political selfhood in order to inscribe the Zaporozhian Cossacks into Imperial Russian history as forerunners of the 'reunification' of 'southern primordial [*pervobytnaia*] Russia' (2: 46) with Muscovite Russia. It is in accordance with the then prevailing historiographical motif of Ukraine's aberrant separation from Russia, to which Gogol' actively subscribed,<sup>6</sup> that the narrative is framed. The historical preamble of the middle of

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<sup>5</sup> In arguing that Gogol' merges the Cossacks' Ukrainianness with an overarching Russian identity, Kornblatt does not contextualise the possible socio-political reasons for his doing so, much less provide an adequate account of the historically conditioned meaning of ethnic and national nomenclature used in 'Taras Bul'ba' (43–46). I attempt to fill this gap in the following paragraphs.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, his 'Ob'iaвление ob izdanii istorii Malorossii' (Announcement on the Publication of a History of Little Russia) 9: 76–77.

the first chapter accounts for the rise of the Cossacks in response to the political vacuum created by Mongol incursions, the migration of Kyiv's rulers to their northern realms and Polish expansionism — a vacuum which is eventually filled when Ukraine is absorbed into Imperial Russia, as prophesied by Taras at the close of the work: 'And already nations far and near sense that from the Russian land her own Tsar is rising and no power on earth will fail to submit to him! . . .' (2: 172).

In integrating the Zaporozhians into Imperial Russian history and politics, 'Taras Bul'ba' sets the stage for what is the thematic mainstay of the narrative, namely, Russia's hostile encounter with Europe, or, more precisely, the chief conduit of Europeanness for Russia from the late sixteenth through seventeenth centuries — Poland. That Europe is represented by Poland in the work helped create an unfavourable picture of the West *vis-à-vis* Russia for Gogol's contemporary readers, owing to popular anti-Polish sentiment in the wake of the 1830–31 Polish uprising against Russian rule.<sup>7</sup> It is a similar reaction against Polish incursions of another age — during the peak of Poland's cultural and political power in the Baroque and Counter-Reformation period — that informs Gogol's Cossack tale.

What serves to vitiate the Poles is their attempt to occupy the space of Russianness, reverentially marked as 'the Russian land' (*Russkaia zemlia*) in the narrative. Iurii Lotman notes the extra-geographical, specifically religious-ethnic terms of reference of *Russkaia zemlia* as a prevalent leitmotif in medieval East Slavic literature that serves to contrast the sanctity and unity of Rus' with the sinfulness and plurality of foreign lands (414). Such factors are far from being merely implicit in 'Taras Bul'ba'. Fervent adherence to Orthodoxy and ancient law and an obligation to defend them to the death are the central defining characteristics of the Zaporozhians' martial way of life. In the decisive battle at Dubno recounted in the ninth chapter, 'the Russian land dear to Christ' (*liubimaia Khristom Russkaia zemlia*) features as a martyrological topos that recurrently underscores the sanctity of the cause and land for which the Cossacks Shilo, Kukubenko, Guska, Bovdiug and Balaban lay down their lives. The largely undifferentiated Poles, for

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<sup>7</sup> Gogol himself was not immune from such sentiment, distancing himself, around this time, from possible Polish or Polonised ancestry by ejecting 'Ivanovskii' from his originally hyphenated surname.

their part, are characterised in terms of their malignant foreignness, the focal point of which is their Catholicism. They are labelled as *nedoverki* — literally, ‘insufficiently faithful’ — whose transgressions against Orthodoxy are presented as being no less and, on occasion, even more invidious than those of the Turks, Tatars and Jews. As an indication of their being collectively outside the salvational realm of the *Russkaia zemlia*, all four non-Orthodox peoples are almost entirely divested of human attributes. In the single instance of a Tatar being directly encountered, for example, both Taras and the narrator employ zoological terms in describing him: “Look, children, at the Tatar galloping over there!” A small moustached head directed its narrow eyes at them, sniffed the air like a hound [*gonchaia sobaka*] and, like a chamois, disappeared’ (2: 60). In this vein, the appellation *sobaka*, as Vladislav Krivonos has shown, is consistently applied throughout the work to demarcate any adherent of a foreign faith or apostate among Cossack ranks, whether a knowing quisling or unwitting blasphemer (144–46).

Despite the generically xenophobic terms in which the heathen Other is delineated in ‘Taras Bul’ba’, the Poles stand apart on the grounds of their active efforts to displace Orthodox traditions with their own Catholic ones. The central historical episode around which the story’s events are loosely structured is the 1596 Union of Brest, which established the so-called Uniate Church when a majority of Ukrainian and Belarusian Orthodox bishops accepted communion with Rome in exchange for the right to retain eastern rituals and liturgical practice. Whatever the actual extent to which the churchmen were coerced into the union or the degree of popular opposition to it, Gogol’ clearly advances a chauvinistically Orthodox view. Such a view prevails in the historical literature upon which the author directly drew, notably the anonymous *Istoriia rusov*.<sup>8</sup> In particular, the *Istoriia rusov* provides historically uncorroborated sources for Gogol’'s description of Orthodox Christians being harnessed to carriages bearing Catholic clergy and Jews seizing ecclesiastical vestments and utensils (see quoted text from *Istoriia rusov* in Gogol’ 2: 718–19). Polish efforts to enforce the union

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<sup>8</sup> Although *Istoriia rusov* was not published until 1846, copies were widely circulated in the 1830s. Gogol’ refers to it, under the wrongly assumed authorship of the anti-Uniate Archbishop of Belarus Hryhorii Konys’kyi, in a letter to Izmail Sreznevskii (10: 299).

were, at any rate, one of the chief historical pretexts for the Cossacks' insurrections in the first half of the seventeenth century, culminating in the sweeping revolt led by Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi in 1648, on which 'Taras Bul'ba' may well have been loosely based.

It is interesting to contextualise the confessional politics of the period amid the three reasons Taras outlines for justly going to battle, namely,

when the commissioners failed to doff their hats before senior members among our ranks, when Orthodoxy was mocked and our ancestral law not shown respect and, finally, whenever our enemies were Muslims or Turks against whom he considered it always permissible to raise arms for the glory of Christianity. (2: 48)

Of these three reasons, the first two differ from the last in being a direct affront to Cossack ways and faith. In this sense, although the Zaporozhians and Poles share the same monotheistic cult and broad imperative to wage a crusade against Islam, the Poles feature lower down the Zaporozhians' hierarchy of confessionally foreign peoples than do Muslims. In rallying his comrades to remain at Dubno in the *Mirgorod* edition, Taras differentiates the Tatar from the Pole by conceding that 'At least the Muslim has a conscience and the fear of God in him — Catholicism never did and never will' (2: 325). In Gogol's other works on Cossack themes, notably 'Strashnaia mest'" (A Terrible Vengeance) and two chapters from the unfinished novel *Get'man* — 'Glava iz istoricheskogo romana' (A Chapter from a Historical Novel) and 'Krovavyi bandurist' (The Bloody Bandura-Player) — the more active voice ceded to Polish characters is almost entirely limited to the utterance of blasphemies against the Orthodox religion. By contrast, the behind-the-scenes Turks and Tatars neither directly malign Orthodoxy, nor seek to impose their creed on the Cossacks in the latter's own land. This fact permits the Zaporozhians to adopt Asiatic ways, such as styles of dress, or even, as in the case of Mosii Shilo, to apostatise temporarily while in Turkish captivity without compromising their fundamental national-religious identity. Conversely, those Cossacks who convert to Catholicism are referred to by their confreres in terms reserved for the infidel, that is, as *sobaki* (2: 77).

Of the various aggressors faced by the Zaporozhians, the Polish world poses the greatest threat to the survival of Orthodox Cossack traditions because of its socio-economic allure and its, theologically speaking, not strictly drawn confessional boundary. The narrator makes a point of emphasising such attractions in drawing a distinction between those Cossacks who succumb to Polish ways, even if still abjuring Catholicism, and those of Taras's uncompromising ilk:

At that time Poland's influence had already begun to make itself felt in the Russian nobility. Many had already adopted Polish ways and grown accustomed to luxury — magnificent servants, falcons, huntsmen, dinners, courts. This was not to Taras's liking. He liked the simple Cossack life and fell out with all of his friends who inclined towards Warsaw, calling them lackeys of Polish lords. (2: 48)

Opposition between a settled and nomadic life, fondness and contempt for material possessions, obligation and freedom, complexity and straightforwardness underlies the fundamental difference of the Zaporozhians' traditions from those underpinning European society. Even the modest domesticity of Taras's household annoys the old Cossack ('What's this house for? Why do we need all this? What are these pots for?' [2: 45]). His true homecoming is to the Zaporozhian *Sech'* which, as an institution 'so frequently changing its place of residence' (2: 61), is less defined as an actual place than proffered as a metaphor for the Cossacks' carefree, nomadic lifestyle. The imprecise, very broad timeframe of 'Taras Bul'ba' also serves to polarise the Cossacks and their European neighbours. While several references to historical events, institutions and figures suggest that the story's action takes place in the first half of the seventeenth century,<sup>9</sup> the narrator sets up a sense of continuity between the story's present and the 'hard fifteenth century' noted in his initial characterisation of Taras (2: 46). The immutable simplicity and static nature of the Cossacks' religion and martial way of life over this period contrast starkly with the diversity and ferment that

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<sup>9</sup> These include the Kyiv Academy (founded in 1632), the Union of Brest (1596), Adam Kisel (1600–53; governor of Kyiv from 1650), the anti-Polish Cossack leader Stefan Ostranitsa (executed in Warsaw in 1638) and Count Nikolai Pototskii [Potocki] (died 1651).

attended Europe's spiritual and cultural development during the Renaissance, Reformation and early Baroque.

Nevertheless, despite their condemnation of Polish-leaning compatriots, the Zaporozhians betray a selective susceptibility to the trappings of Western civilisation. Prominent in this regard is the curious esteem in which Taras and his peers hold education. They, we are told, 'regarded it as indispensable to provide their children with an education, although this was done only later to forget it entirely' (2: 53). Greeting his sons upon the completion of their schooling, Taras dismisses scholarly learning as 'rubbish' (*driian'*), proposing in its stead the instruction that Ostap and Andrii will receive at Zaporozh'e: 'That's where real learning is to be had! There's the school for you — the only place you'll get some brains' (2: 43). This, of course, begs the question why Taras so avidly foists a school education upon his sons — a question which the narrator concedes as 'curious' (2: 53) without himself venturing an explanation. Since education in seventeenth-century Ukraine, particularly in the Kyiv Academy to which Taras sends his sons, was closely modelled on Jesuit Latin-based curricula, two related explanations are possible. The first admits an imperative to demonstrate the Cossacks' ability, if not inclination, to master Western modes of learning, which include the 'fine points of scholasticism, grammar, rhetoric and logic' (2: 54). The successful exercise of such ability serves to offset the jingoistic barbarism of Taras and his cohorts, otherwise repeatedly defended by the narrator as the wages of a cruel age. For all his denigration of the worth of formal education, Taras himself surprises Ostap with a knowledge of Latin poetry, displayed through recourse to a traditional rhetorical topos of humility which his son tacitly recognises:

Now, what was his name, the fellow who wrote Latin verses? I'm not strong in grammar, so I can't say for sure — was it Horace?

'See what father's like!' thought the older son, Ostap, to himself.

'The old fox knows very well but still pretends he doesn't.' (2: 45)

Secondly, having procured Western learning, the Cossacks also acquire legitimate grounds for discarding its value and utility. More importantly, they are actively encouraged to do so, even to forget what they have learnt, owing to the threat to their ways that it carries. In

the historical context of 'Taras Bul'ba', the motto popularly attributed to the Jesuits — 'give me a child until the age of seven, and I'll show you the man' — provides implicit cause for alarm in light of the curricula then in vogue at the Kyiv Academy and in the Jesuit colleges to which Polonised Cossack nobles sent their sons.

It is from such considerations that the practical, supplementary aspects of the education provided at the Sech' are emphasised, while theoretical learning is consistently ridiculed. While Taras sends his own horses — a crucial Cossack appurtenance — for Ostap and Andrii, he neglects to dispatch a change of clothes, thus providing himself with an opportunity to mock his sons' academic attire before proceeding to cast aspersions upon scholarship. Similarly, Taras is able to pass himself off, in disguise, as a German noble in Warsaw, but his deception is broken by his valiant, if, under the circumstances, highly ingenuous outburst in defence of the Orthodox faith. Despite his willingness to appear as a European and his success in doing so, Taras's retort to the Polish guard draws the line at being mistaken for a Catholic: 'You yourself are the dog! How dare you say that our religion doesn't command respect? It is your heretical faith that isn't worthy of respect!' (2: 160). Thus, while emphasising their aptitude for the intellectually complex and sartorially pleasing conventions of the West, the narrator underlines, at the same time, the Cossacks' ultimate rejection of any instances of overlap between their ways and those of Europe.

Apart from Polonised Cossacks, the exception to the foreign influence-resistant Zaporozhian ideal is Andrii. His biography provides a sustained account of fascination with and eventual conversion to European ways, resulting in a betrayal of Cossackdom that is, significantly, the effect rather than the cause of his eventual transfer of allegiance to the Polish camp. From the outset, Andrii is described as having been a more willing and able student than Ostap, in addition to being more artful and inventive: 'Andrii had rather more lively and somehow more developed feelings. He studied more willingly and without effort. . . . He was more resourceful than his brother' (2: 55). It is while still a student and before encountering the Polish nobleman's daughter that Andrii begins to exhibit non-Cossack behaviour by submitting to the allure of the opposite sex and engaging in solitary brooding on the streets of Kyiv's aristocratic quarter. The central sixth chapter documents his step-by-step, if somewhat compressed immersion into the Polish world,

as the inevitable result of his ‘pliant’ (*podatliwa*) nature, exposure to scholarly and aristocratic ways in Kyiv and the fateful opportunity to vent his feelings for the Polish lady. While Andrii eventually renounces his father, the Cossacks and his homeland, he does so only after regarding sympathetically the trappings of the civilisation into which he has voluntarily entered. Even before he sets foot in Dubno, the catacombs of the underground passage remind Andrii of the monastery caves of Kyiv, prompting him to concede — heretically from the fundamentalist Cossack point of view — that ‘here also holy people resided’ (2: 95).<sup>10</sup> The narrator further observes that he ‘gazed in wonder from his dark corner at the miracle created by the light’ while listening to the ‘celestial music’ of the organ ‘with mouth agape’ (2: 96–97).

The decisive moment facilitating Andrii’s defection is his embarrassment over his coarse Cossack upbringing before the more civilised European manners of his beloved’s world. When he endeavours to express his emotions to her, he experiences feelings of inadequacy and shame:

He felt something sealing his lips, and his words were robbed of sound. He felt that it was not for him, brought up in a seminary and martial nomadic way of life, to reply to such speech, and he was filled with indignation over his Cossack nature. (2: 102)

When Andrii finally does find words, his speech betrays singularly non-Cossack stylistic features and ideological motivations. His entreaty to his beloved that she commission him with ‘the most impossible service imaginable in this world’ (2: 103) draws on a tradition absent in medieval Rus’ and foreign to the misogynist ways of Cossackhood, namely, that of courtly love poetry.<sup>11</sup> The hyperbolic figures of speech

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Dubno is not the stage for Andrii’s first encounter with Catholicism. He observes his beloved inside a Catholic church (‘v kostele’ [2: 58] rather than ‘u kostela’) while still in Kyiv.

<sup>11</sup> Gogol alludes to this tradition in his inaugural history lecture at St. Petersburg University, first published as ‘O srednikh vekakh’ (On the Middle Ages) in 1834 and subsequently included in *Arabeski*. In this essay, Gogol’ notes that ‘All nobility in the character of Europeans’ was the direct result of martial feats undertaken by warrior-knights to demonstrate their love for a

Andrii employs in addressing the Polish lady also subscribe entirely to Western rhetorical conventions:

But I know that I may well be speaking foolishly and out of place, that none of this is appropriate here and that it is not for me, having spent my entire life in a seminary and Zaporozhe, to speak in the way that is customary in the presence of kings, princes and the very best of noble knights. I see that you are a creation of God quite separate from all of us and that all other boyar women and daughter-maidens pale in comparison to you. We are not fit to be your slaves; only heavenly angels can serve you.' (2: 103)

Andrii's concession of the inferior nature of his heritage is thus made in what he perceives as the culturally superior terms of the Polish-European world that he wants to adopt as his own. It is, in effect, a sort of civilisation-envy that motivates his defection, for which his love for the Polish governor's daughter is the central but not sole catalyst: he is seduced in a cultural sense no less than in a sexual one.<sup>12</sup> Andrii recreates himself into an object worthy of his beloved's affections through his aptitude and desire for the ways of her world. The narrator's sympathetic tone in charting Andrii's Europeanisation could well

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lady, so that they might prove 'worthy to throw themselves at the feet of their divine being' (8: 21).

<sup>12</sup> Andrii's desire to evolve from his 'savage' child-like state into 'civilised' adulthood recalls Freud's analogy between individual development and the civilising process. In *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Freud contrasts instinct-driven 'primitive' society with the psychically repressive nature of Western civilisation. Andrii's yearnings and, at times, neurotic behaviour in the wake of his exposure to European ways are certainly at odds with the uncomplicated nature of his Cossack brethren. His reversion to a child-like state in heeding his father's commands just before being executed, the absence of any sense of taboo in relation to the filicide and frequent reference to the Zaporozhians as 'children' further mark the Cossacks as complex-free 'primitives'. To complete the Freudian parallel, it is worth noting also that the Zaporozhians are bound by a sense of brotherhood rather than patriarchy, the latter being one of the criteria Freud establishes for civilisation. Cossack brotherhood forms the keynote of Taras's pre-battle speech in the ninth chapter, in which the ties of 'comradship' (*tovarishchestvo*) and 'brotherhood' (*bratstvo*) are pointedly rated above those between parents and their children.

be read as drawing on the ambivalent enchantment with European civilisation that Gogol' himself experienced as a long-time resident in Rome. The fact that, after moving to Italy, he significantly expanded the Dubno passage into a separate chapter for the 1842 edition, endowing Andrii's actions with greater psychological motivation, suggests an empathy with his character's situation, if not, ultimately, with his deeds. It is only at the very end of this sixth chapter, for instance, that the narrator abruptly re-asserts his own, or the implied author's, allegiance to the Cossacks in exclaiming, 'And so perished the Cossack!' (2: 107). From this point on, the narrator no longer permits Andrii to speak with an independent voice, nor does he explore psychological factors that mitigate Andrii's betrayal.

The only character to voice understanding and active support for Andrii's defection is the Jew Iankel'. He cannot see beyond the primary motivation for Andrii's action, namely, submission to the enticements of a society more 'civilised' than the young Cossack's own. Among these enticements is the opportunity to legitimise his courtship of the Polish governor's daughter. As a result, Iankel' explains Andrii's defection to Taras as an act of expediency for which he deserves no blame: 'He crossed over willingly. Why blame him? He's better off there, so over he went' (2: 113). Iankel's opinion is, however, worth little in the ideological framework of 'Taras Bul'ba' which makes any judgement by a Jew automatically suspect. Taras's initial reaction to Iankel's report of Andrii's betrayal is to reject it outright by discrediting its source and shifting attention to the Jews as the perpetrators of the most heinous — from the Orthodox fundamentalist point of view — act of betrayal ever committed: 'You're lying, you cur [*sobaka*!] You crucified Christ, you God-cursed weasel! I will kill you, Satan!' (2: 114).

Even so, Taras is himself not averse to later turning to Iankel' for assistance in gaining entry into Warsaw. His request is made in the belief that Jews know 'all the tricks' (2: 151) and typically act from motives of dishonourable pragmatism — a pragmatism which underlies Iankel's view of Andrii's defection. As an intermediary between the Poles and the Cossacks and lacking a geographical homeland of their own, the Jews constantly blur the boundaries with which the Cossacks operate, permitting them to move between the two warring sides while belonging to neither. Iankel', for instance, has a highly expedient, shifting conception of Self, alternately encompassing his fellow Jews, 'Our

Zaporozhians' and the Poles, as witnessed by his choice of words to gain entry into the Polish prison ('we're your people' [*eto svoi*]). In requesting news of captive Zaporozhians from Iankel', Taras, therefore, first reinforces the exclusion of Jews from what he means by 'our own' (*nashikh*). It is only after qualifying his own migratory sense of allegiance to accommodate the Zaporozhians' mindset that Iankel' admits that Andrii is 'already entirely theirs [*uzh teper' sovsem ikhni*]' (2: 112). In this way, Andrii's willing inclusion into the Polish world is roundly confirmed as automatically displacing his Cossackhood. The subtext here is that there can ultimately be no hybridisation of, or co-existence between, the Cossack Self and European Other, this being a situation which Andrii himself recognises in demonstratively abrogating his Cossack parentage. The fact that the two civilisations are at loggerheads with each other necessitates Andrii's execution in order to maintain the purity of Cossackhood as an independent civilisation, entirely separate from and no less meritorious than that of the Poles.

In the face of the dangers that European influences pose for Cossack identity, the narrator demonstratively notes foreigners' approbation of the Zaporozhians' unique abilities and way of life as a means of fortifying the Self/Other boundary. There are two allusions along such lines in 'Taras Bul'ba'. The first occurs in the description of the Cossacks' diverse talents as tradesmen: 'Contemporary foreigners marvelled at his, in all fairness, extraordinary skills. There was not a trade with which the Cossack was not familiar' (2: 47). Just as Western learning partially offsets the Cossacks' barbarism, their occasional industry functions as a counterweight to the indolent, vodka-imbibing disposition they display elsewhere in the narrative. More importantly, however, foreign approbation ensures that the Cossacks do not come off second best in any comparison with their European foes. The source for such approbation, moreover, has a basis in historical fact. The 'contemporary foreigners' could well be an allusion to contemporary European chroniclers of Cossack Ukraine, such as Guillaume Le Vasseur (Sieur de Beauplan, *Description d'Ukraine*, 1660) and Pierre Chevalier (*Histoire de la guerre des Cosaques contre la Pologne*, 1663), whose works were popular among Russian and Ukrainian historians in Gogol's time. Indeed, Gogol' draws directly in several places on Beauplan's work, whose Russian translation appeared in 1832. The trades which are listed in

'Taras Bul'ba' correspond in large measure with those that figure in the Frenchman's observations (Beauplan 11).

The second reference to foreign recognition is to be found in a sustained appreciation of the Zaporozhians' military prowess at Dubno by an unnamed French engineer in the service of the Polish crown.<sup>13</sup> Upon admiring in his adversaries, 'tactics he had never previously observed,' the Frenchman exclaims, 'What gallant, fine fellows these Zaporozhians are! That's how others in other lands should fight!' (2: 135), while, in the *Mirgorod* edition, he goes so far as openly to applaud the Zaporozhians. His presence amongst the besieged Poles attests, on the one hand, to Poland's inclusion in Europe, however dependent such inclusion may be on the greater technical expertise of the co-religionist French. The praise and unrestrained enthusiasm for the Cossacks on the part of a European with no stake in the battle beyond personal profit suggests, on the other hand, objective admiration for the Zaporozhians' competitive difference and their capacity to thwart conventional European tactics.

In both references to foreign approbation of the Zaporozhians, however, an unintentional irony creeps into the text's efforts to maintain a boundary between Self and Other. The narrator's invocation of European praise for the Cossacks does not sit convincingly alongside wholesale condemnation and ridicule of the foreign Other that is otherwise in evidence throughout the work, thus exposing, in part, a degree of ambiguity as to the status of Cossack culture and civilisation *vis-à-vis* those of Europe. Foreign commendation functions as the imprimatur of a superior civilisation desired by the narrator on behalf of a less advanced civilisation whose interests he seeks to promote. Further, Gogol', like most early nineteenth-century Russian and Ukrainian historians writing about the Cossack period, betrays a dependence on foreign sources in charting his own nation's history, whether in a factual or fictional narrative vein. Indeed, interest in history among Russian men of letters of the early nineteenth century was spurred largely by admiration of, or reaction to, the fact that Europeans had already turned their

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<sup>13</sup> Some commentators have identified him with Beauplan. According to the foreword of the 1832 Russian translation of his *Description d'Ukraine*, Beauplan was in the service of the Polish kings Sigismund III and Wladislaw IV as an artillery captain and engineer (see commentary in Gogol' 2: 720).

pens to Russian and, particularly, Ukrainian Cossack history.<sup>14</sup> Gogol', as we have seen and as has been amply noted by other commentators on 'Taras Bul'ba', drew on Beauplan no less than on the home-grown *Istoriia rusov*.

It is the particular type of epic-historical fiction that Gogol' endeavours to write, however, which most clearly reveals ambivalent respect for the West and its cultural and literary institutions. In striving to endow the Cossacks with universal respectability as a literary and historical subject, 'Taras Bul'ba' seeks to emulate authoritative Western modes of writing, notably Homeric epic and recent historical fiction. Reviewers, including Belinskii (Mashinskii 58, 64) and Pushkin (6: 141), promptly compared the work upon its appearance in the *Mirgorod* cycle in flattering terms with *The Iliad* and Sir Walter Scott's historical novels. Such comparisons have since been elaborated by Gogol' scholars (see, for example, Bahrii). In their study of generic links between classical epic and the nineteenth-century Russian novel, Griffiths and Rabinowitz even suggest that Gogol' 'out-Homers Homer' (44) by seeking to revive heroic literature in his chosen form of historical narrative. Worth noting also is that Homer and Scott are among the few authors Gogol' claims to have been avidly re-reading and actively encouraged others to read in the mid-1830s.<sup>15</sup>

Similarities between 'Taras Bul'ba' and *The Iliad* become strikingly evident from the viewpoint of how each manifests the features of epic. According to Mikhail Bakhtin in his 'Epic and the Novel', epic has as its subject the 'national epic past' (or 'absolute past', as formulated by Goethe and Schiller), draws on national legends (*natsional'noe predanie*) for its source material and relates events which are temporally distant from both author and readers (401). In highlighting the characteristics of the novel as resisting genre categorisation, Bakhtin

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<sup>14</sup> Among influential works appearing in Western Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Saunders lists the following (309–10 n): J. B. Scherer, *Annales de la Petite-Russie* (1788); J. C. von Engel, *Geschichte der Ukraine und der Cosaken: Geschichte von Galizien und Lodomerien* (1796); C. von Plotho, *Die Kosaken* (1811); C.-L. Lesur, *Histoire des Cosaques* (1813).

<sup>15</sup> See his letters to Pogodin (11: 60), Zhukovskii (11: 73) and Danilevskii (10: 260). Nikolai Gnedich's verse translation of the *The Iliad*, of which Gogol' was an enthusiastic admirer, appeared in complete form in 1829.

further defines epic, among other classical genres, as a ready-made genre which has a strong historical presence in a firmly established literary canon (392). In East Slavic literature, however, such a canon is almost entirely absent in any home-grown form. The only native lyric-epic tradition comprises some forms of the northern Russian *bylina* and, more relevantly with regard to Cossack themes, the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Ukrainian *duma*, both of which stem from medieval oral traditions and were transcribed only from the end of the eighteenth century (on the difference between the two, see Kirdan 22–29). The *duma* is a poetic song relating such themes as the heroic exploits of the Cossacks and the tragic circumstances of their captivity in Turkey. *Dumy* were chanted by itinerant blind minstrels to the accompaniment of traditional string instruments, such as the *bandura*, *kobza* or *lira*. Gogol' differentiates the *duma* from epic while emphasising its uniquely Slavic origins in his 'Uchebnaia kniga slovesnosti dlia russkogo iunoshestva' (Primer on Literature for Russian Youth [8: 476]).

Given the limited representation of epic in East Slavic literature as a written canon, Gogol's readiness to tap into the Homeric tradition can, therefore, be partially explained by absence. The narrator of 'Taras Bul'ba' makes a direct reference to such an absence in noting that the *duma* represents an extinct oral tradition: a sense of the Cossack past remained 'only in songs and in folk *dumy* no longer sung in Ukraine by bearded old blind men accompanied by the quiet strumming of a *bandura*' (2: 43). It is this absence that Gogol' endeavours to fill with his own epic-historical mode of writing, blending Ukrainian oral traditions with easily recognisable Western genres, to secure a place in the history of human progress for the separate but no less distinguished civilisation of Rus'. 'Taras Bul'ba' meets Bakhtin's three criteria for epic: he events take place in the closed past, insofar as they occur before Ukraine's absorption into the Russian Empire; the narrative makes use of *dumy* as oral source material;<sup>16</sup> and the narrator is at a temporal distance from the events he relates. It is interesting to note that Gogol' defines epic in his 'Primer on Literature' in terms of the universality of its themes, he-

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<sup>16</sup> There have been a few attempts to identify particular *dumy* in 'Taras Bul'ba', the most persuasive being Kirdan's suggestion that Gogol drew on 'Samiilo Kishka' and its Turkicised hero Buturlak in his description of Moisiil Shilo (155).

roes and appeal across time. These features serve to distinguish it from what he calls minor epic, whose qualities are more pointedly national. Gogol's extensive rewriting and expansion of the *Mirgorod* edition of 'Taras Bul'ba', especially the chapter dealing with Andrii's apostasy and the insertion of more detail about the world beyond Cossack lands, was perhaps aimed at widening the epic sweep of his tale to endow it with a more universal and durable acceptability.

A related genre, that of the medieval tale of chivalry, has thus far attracted little comment in relation to 'Taras Bul'ba'. Despite emphasis on the differences between them, Cossacks and Poles alike are referred to as 'knights' — *rytsari* and *vitiazi* — throughout the work. Significantly, both terms are linguistic borrowings, stemming from Polish and Common Germanic, respectively (see entries in Fasmer). Neither term has a place in medieval East Slavic literature, where the warrior and noble are called *bylia*, *voin*" and *boiarin*", while the heroes of byliny are usually referred to as *bogatyri*. It is curious that, rather than use a native and not necessarily noble designation, such as *voin*, Gogol' chooses terms with unmistakably foreign verbal, social and cultural connotations. One reason for doing so may have been to make at least a partial association between his nomadic Cossacks and the chivalrous knight-errant engaged on a semi-saintly quest.<sup>17</sup> This association is particularly apt, given parallels between the missions of defending the Orthodox faith against Catholic incursions and of wresting the Holy Land from Saracen invaders. Further, the role of sexual indiscretion in disqualifying individual luminaries from continued participation in such quests is pointed: Andrii betrays the 'assemblage of wifeless [*bezzhenykh*] knights' (2: 37) by submitting to his desire, much as Lancelot jeopardises the quest for the Holy Grail through his adulterous liaison with Queen Guinevere in Arthurian legend. It is the sexless Ostap and virgin knight Sir Galahad that represent the ideal Christian warrior-knight.

The final scene of 'Taras Bul'ba', in which the fleeing Cossacks ford the River Dnestr, closes the work on a decidedly patriotic and nativist literary note. The image of the 'proud golden-eye' (*gordyi gogol'*)

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<sup>17</sup> In his somewhat picturesque historical survey, Longworth fancifully and without elaboration lists the 'chivalrous knight' as a possible characterisation of the Cossack, along with 'noble savage, the pioneer adventurer, the freedom-fighter' (2).

swiftly traversing the waterway not only autographically inscribes the author-narrator's own ultimate faithfulness to the Cossack ideal:<sup>18</sup> it also resonates against a literary predecessor in the most celebrated and original work of medieval East Slavic literature, *Slovo o pl'ku Igoreve* (The Tale of Igor's Campaign). Prince Igor, we read, makes good his escape from the Polovtsian camp 'like a white golden-eye over the water' (50). His apostrophe to the Donets River towards the end of this ornithologically rich work also features a golden-eye which, as in 'Taras Bul'ba', attends consideration of the virtues of a charismatic military leader:<sup>19</sup>

'Oh, Donets!  
 No little grandeur is yours,  
 Having borne a prince on your waves  
 And spread a verdant meadow for him on your silver banks,  
 Covered him with a warm mist in the green tree's shade  
 And watched over him as the golden-eye on the water [*Strezhashe è gogolem'' na vode*],  
 As gulls on the waves  
 And ducks in the air.' (53–54)

The closure of Gogol's epic thus seeks to correct, if somewhat belatedly, the narrator's not entirely unsympathetic treatment of Andrii's defection to the West, as well as the author's incorporation of literary traditions that are alien to those of Russia and Ukraine. As a finishing touch however, the final scene of Taras's crucifixion goes beyond national literary traditions to appropriate the most influential scene in the most universally owned of narratives, that of the New Testament gospels. In doing so, Gogol's tale creates a very particular association: just as Christ inaugurates salvation history through his expiatory death, so Taras's (and, for that matter, Ostap's) death sanctifies the Cossack's

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<sup>18</sup> Perhaps, as Stilman has argued, as a means of assuaging residual guilt associated with the complicity of Gogol's claimed ancestor, Ostap Gogol', with Poland.

<sup>19</sup> Curiously, this parallel has eluded critics, including those who have undertaken specific comparative readings, such as Priima.

resistance to foreign influence and its role in securing the separate historical development of the Orthodox Slavs.

Whether or not 'Taras Bul'ba' persuasively carves out a key role for the Zaporozhian Cossacks in the history of the formation of a distinct East Slavic civilisation is not an overriding concern for an appreciation of the tale's encounter between East and West (a small mercy, in the opinion of this author, given that such a judgement might at least partially depend on favourable reception of Gogol's rambunctious, rarely likeable Cossacks). Far more central to the narrative's argumentation than Taras's worldview and final apotheosis is the dynamic which underpins and defines the Cossacks' genesis, purpose and ultimate demise, namely, that of opposition to, and seduction by, the encroachments of European ways of life. Their *Kulturkampf*, together with its successes and failures, had a particular resonance with Gogol's contemporaries and continues to engage present-day readers in Russia, insofar as it directly addresses the civilisation-envy and xenophobia that have alternately played such a formative role in the development of Russian culture from the Time of Troubles through to present post-Soviet realities. The sympathy and reaction to European manners registered by the author of 'Taras Bul'ba' — both real and implied — tracks Russia's own susceptibility and aversion to the inexorable influence of Europe: it is as both recalcitrant foreigner and ambivalent resident that Gogol's Russia, like its Italian-sojourning author, participates in European civilisation.

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