

Title: Toward The Problem of Narrative Performance in Nikolai Gogol's *Vechera na khutore bliz Dikanki* (*Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka*)

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In recent studies of Gogol, the narrative structure of *Vechera* (1831-1832) has been analyzed in terms of the opposition between its two main narrators, Makar Nazarovich, the gentleman (“*panich*”) who represents a Russified Ukrainian, and Foma Grigorievich, the local Dikan’ka sexton who has been described as the personification of “unadulterated and self-confident Ukrainianness” (Bojanowska 47). The persona of Rudy Panko has been interpreted within this scheme as a kind of superstructure that cements the heterogeneous stories and mediates between the two conflicting viewpoints. However, this interpretation cannot be applied to Book Two because neither this opposition nor Panko’s narrative voice appears there. The fact that Panko had announced that he himself would become a “thing of the past” in the preface to Book Two has been taken as Gogol’s pronouncement of the unviability of the Ukrainian culture and, consequently, as marking the author’s own ritual “Russianization” (Grabovych, Koropecyj & Romanchuk).

In contrast, this paper considers the narrative act in Gogol’s *Vechera* as being culturally performative, that is, as one that does not presuppose a subject, but rather constitutes it through the very act of narrating. In particular, I will focus on the narrative performance in “The Terrible Vengeance,” (1832) in which the emergence of the blind bandura player, the narrator of the tale within the tale, creates a *mis-en-abîme* reflective of the overarching narrative performance in *Vechera*. The textual history of the tale indicates that it was originally included in the cycle of stories written by Panko (it had Panko’s introduction and bore the subtitle “*starinnaia byl*” (an old true story)), which later lost the identification with the narrator. The figure of the bandura player functions not as a mere story-teller, but as a form of action, and therefore his voice substitutes for the missing voice of Rudy Panko and doubles its power. Moreover, his collective folk voice represents Gogol’s ideal narrating subject, for it appeals to the universal truth associated with Christian Orthodox values and thereby provides an alternative to the opposition between the Russified *panich* and local Ukrainian Foma Grigorievich, as reaching beyond any ethnic identification. Within this conceptual framework, the accepted interpretation of Gogol’s “Russianizing” tendency in *Vechera* becomes problematic, and this study seeks to reconceptualize Gogol’s self-fashioning in the 1830s using a more subtle and effective approach.

References

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