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Rome and its Ukrainian Soul:

Fragments of Ukraine in Gogol's *Rim*

Gogol's persona remains at the center of a debate, which aims to place him either within the Russian or Ukrainian borders. His Russian contemporary scholars – such as Belinsky – while building a national literature, placed Gogol' into their literary canon. Today, instead, scholars such as Bojanowska are trying to deconstruct the Russian imperialist discourse, in order to affirm a new awareness on Gogol's writings and personal inclinations. Although the two main currents appear to exclude one another, they both trace a moment in Gogol's production when the author seems to detach himself from his *Ukrainianness*, his cultural background. While on the one hand Belinsky's appropriation of the author as exclusively Russian diminishes and almost denies his Ukrainian heritage, on the other hand Bojanowska's postcolonial interpretation implies Gogol's intention of replacing his Ukrainian identity with a Russian one, therefore betraying his roots. In so doing, both schools of thought limit their analysis of the issue in order to serve the purposes of their imperialist or postcolonial discourses.

Nevertheless, the debate on Gogol's *persona* does not end in the Russian, Ukrainian, and North American context. Further studies, perhaps less concerned about nationalistic discourses or postcolonial theories, provide other interpretations of the matter. For instance, in her preface to the Italian translation of *Rome*, Giuliani traces a topographic triangle in the Gogolian literature. The summits represent three main places and their correspondent literary works: Ukraine (*Mirgorod*, 1835), Saint Petersburg (*Nevsky Prospekt*, 1835), and Rome (*Rim*, 1842). At the same time, these three places outline Gogol's literary growth. Ukraine is seen as his beloved homeland, Saint Petersburg/Russia as the scene where he started his career, and Rome/Italy as the place where his spirit finally found peace (Giuliani, "Introduzione" 10).

The adoption of Giuliani's "topographic triangle" reveals the limitations of the binary opposition Ukraine/Russia promoted by both imperialist and postcolonial discourses, allowing to undermine them by proving that Gogol' never erased his Ukrainian self – nor he could have. This is particularly evident in the comparison of the late fragment *Rome* to the collection *Vechera na khutore bliz Dikan'ki*, 1831-1832 (*Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*). Their textual analysis highlights that both contain elements reminiscent of Ukraine, ultimately showing that Gogol' did not neglect his Ukrainian roots; hence, the study of his *persona* cannot be simplified by nationalistic discourses or postcolonial theories that exclude complex identities. Indeed, in *Rome*, the author's literary production comes full circle, underlining the connection between the Ukrainian and Italian lands in Gogol's imaginary and providing a missing tile in the analysis of this enigmatic writer. To better understand these

concepts, Gogol's attitude towards Rome/Italy and the role of the Eternal City in the author's life will be considered.

Historic Context and Premises

In 1835 the Russian literary critic Vissarion Belinsky writes:

Vechera na khutore! Arabeski i Mirgorod nosyat na sebe vse priznaki zreyushchego talanta. V nikh men'she etogo upoyeniya, etogo liricheskogo razgula, no bol'she glubiny i *vernosti* v izobrazhenii zhizni. Sverkh togo, [Gogol'] zdes' rasshiril svoyu stsenu deystviya i, ne ostavlyaya svoey lyubimoy, svoey prekrasnoy, svoey nenaglyadnoy Malorossii, *poshel iskat' poezii v npravakh srednego sosloviya v Rossii*.¹ I, bozhe moy, kakuyu glubokuyu i moguchuyu poeziyu nashel on tut!" ("O russkoy povesti" n. pag.).² [Emphasis is mine – S.S.]

In these few words lie the key concepts of Belinsky's early critique of Gogol', before his change of mind in his famous letter dated 1847, in which he attacks Gogol's book *Vybrannyye mesta iz perepiski s druž'yami – Selected Passages From Correspondence With Friends* ("Pis'mo Gogolyu" n. pag.).

Belinsky celebrates Gogol's talent in his works set both in Ukraine and Russia; in so doing, he ensures the novelist a privileged position in the pantheon of writers. However, in his attempt of building an Imperial Russian literary

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all quotes are translated from Russian by the author.

² "*Evenings on a Farm! Arabesques and Mirgorod* bear all the signs of a maturing talent. In them, there is less of that rapture, of that lyrical revelry, but more depth and *truth* in the representation of life. Furthermore, here [Gogol'] broadened his own scene of action and - without leaving his dear, his beautiful, his beloved Little Russia – *went looking for poetry in the customs of the middle class in Russia*. And, my goodness, what a deep and powerful poetry he found here!"

canon, Belinsky's appropriation of Gogol's work confines the author's Ukrainian background to a lower status, which appears to be merely instrumental to the further development of Gogol's talent. Ukraine is the beloved land that gave him birth, but only after moving to Russia, the author finally finds poetry. In these lines, Belinsky seems to suggest that, by abandoning his *Ukrainianness* and embracing his *Russianness*, Gogol' is blessed with the gift of authentic poetry. He therefore deserves a place of honour in Russian literature.

In his critique, Belinsky also draws attention to the theme of realism in literature. This represents one of his dearest ideas, which is coherent with "his awareness of his role as a propagator of truth" and the importance given to "moral and intellectual improvement" (Walker 4). A quick study of lexical frequency in "O russkoy povesti" shows that the base word **real'n** occurs seventeen times in a relatively short text, while the base word **idea** occurs twenty-eight times. These two terms are, in fact, at the centre of Belinsky's beliefs on literature. While "real" literature consists in the portrayal of tangible manifestations of life, "ideal" literature mainly deals with abstract concepts. Given Belinsky's inclination as advocate of truth, Gogol's work deserves high respect due to its truthful representation of "poeziya real'naya, poeziya zhizni deystvitel'noy" ("real poetry, the poetry of real life. "O russkoy povesti" n. pag.)

It is important to notice that at this stage, in Belinsky's view, Gogol's *Russianness* is not necessarily accompanied by a thematic change, as the Polish-American critic Edyta Bojanowska seems to suggest in her conclusion (370-373). In fact, Belinsky incorporates into the Russian canon each of Gogol's

writings prior to 1836, the year that Bojanowska identifies as the author's nationalistic turning point, followed by the reworking of *Taras Bul'ba* in 1842, when – according to Bojanowska – Gogol' sacrifices “his Ukrainian nationalism [...] on the altar of the Russian one” (371).

Although the thematic switch cannot be considered as a mile stone in Gogol's nationalistic attitude – assuming that it is possible to use such a definition – it must be noted that such a change was suggested.³ It is logical to hypothesize that Gogol's desire to maintain his position had promoted a thematic shift. However, this does not necessarily imply a rejection or a betrayal of his own identity.

Finally, Belinsky – in order to ascribe Gogol' in the Russian literary canon – astutely seizes the trademark of the writer: “Komizm ili gumor g. Gogolya imeyet svoy, osobennyi kharakter: eto gumor *chisto russkiy*, gumor spokoinny, prostodushnyy, v kotorom avtor kak by prikidyvayetsya prostachkom (“O russkoy povesti” n. pag.). [Emphasis is mine – S.S.] (“Gogol's comedy or humor has its own special character: it is a *purely Russian* humor, a quiet, simple-hearted humor, in which the author pretends to be a simpleton”). Such interpretation is also supported by Bojanowska, who underlines the transformation of a typically Ukrainian humor into a “purely Russian” one (84-85).

³ The Russian literary critic, literary historian, and poet Stepan Shevyrev's review of *Mirgorod* (1835) expresses his curiosity towards the application of the same humour to the educated Russian environment. As such a society is alien to the Ukrainian countryside (or to whatever countryside, for that matter), it is difficult for Shevyrev to imagine characters like Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich. Hence, he suggests that Gogol' should use his talent to portray the society where he lives (“O Mirgorode Gogolya” n. pag.).

Given their different approaches, the positions of Belinsky and Bojanowska on the matter seem to exclude one another. However, they both ground their beliefs in the binary opposition Ukrainian/Russian. Whereas Belinsky seizes Gogol's entire production and devotes it to the creation of a national Russian literature, Bojanowska identifies two milestones (1836 and 1842) that mark the fall of Gogol's *Ukrainianness* and his rebirth as a Russian writer (370-371). Although for different purposes, they both seem to deny him a multi-faceted personality that includes two cultural identities, or even more. Such mindset is understandable considering Belinsky's ultimate goals, but becomes rather surprising in Bojanowska's postcolonial analysis. In fact, the reader would expect that a harmonic coexistence of the two identities would be proven. Although Bojanowska demonstrates how the Russian empire had constructed Gogol's image as a Russian writer, the latter appears to be "guilty" of being part of the "conspiracy." Nevertheless, she seems to make peace with the idea of imperial culture, stating that Gogol' "had to mitigate his Ukrainianness" in order to function within a Russocentric empire (375).

In response to both Belinsky's view of Gogol' as "purely Russian" and to Bojanowska's complaint regarding Western scholars' lack of interest in the nationalistic issue (372), a third pole is represented by Giuliani's topographic triangle "Ukraine-Russia-Italy." First of all, by restoring the equal value of the milestones in the author's life, such an approach undermines the belief of Gogol's binary attitude towards his supposedly national identity. In second place, it adds a third dimension that allows for a broader understanding of Gogol's life and writings, without excluding any components of his personality.

Pogovorim o Rime⁴

In her article dedicated to both Gogol's Rome city and literary work, Lucy Vogel offers a precise depiction of the environment that the author found at his arrival: a city full of contradictions, where the papal spies opposed the revolutionary *Carbonari*, and the dissolute, insensitive aristocracy took advantage of the naive Rome's *populus*. Above all, reigned the conservative Papal government, indifferent to progress and attached to its medieval censorship, bureaucracy, and solemn ceremonies (152). This image captures the essence of the situation of the Eternal City right before the definitive unification of the Kingdom of Italy with Rome as its capital in 1871 (Torelli 227-228). "The Rome of the 1830-1840's was known as the Rome of the six P's: *papa, preti, principi, puttane, pulci e poveri*" (Clark 267 qtd. in Vogel 152),⁵ where the ideology of an independent land led by the Eternal City was not yet mature.

For this reason, the attitude of the foreign visitors towards the city was mainly connected to the "cult of ruins," paying homage to its glorious past and enjoying its suggestive landscapes, without paying attention to the social context (Vogel 153). Unlike them, Gogol' appreciated – and even preferred – the modern, living Rome, thus arousing indignation in his friends, who were scandalized by the Roman backwardness (Giuliani, "Introduzione" 25).

⁴ "Let's talk about Rome." This title is intended as a tribute to Rita Giuliani's article "Pogovorim o Rime: Nikolay Gogol' i Iosif Brodskiy."

⁵ Pope, priests, princes, whores, fleas, and poor.

Nevertheless, the writer considered Rome his “rodina dushi,” the “birthplace of his soul,”⁶ and went there nine times between 1837 and 1847, seeking peace and inspiration (Giuliani, “Introduzione” 10).

As Giuliani recognizes, “O privyazannosti Gogolya k Italii i osobenno k Rimu khorosho izvestno, net nuzhdy privodit’ tomu dokazatel’sтва i iskat’ novyye podtverzhdeniya. *On lyubil i uvekovechil v svoikh proizvedeniyakh tri zemli: Ukrainu, Rossiyu i Italiyu*” (“Pogovorim o Rime” n. pag.). [Emphasis is mine – S.S.] (“Gogol’s attachment to Italy and especially to Rome is well known, there is no need to provide evidence and to seek new confirmations. *He loved and immortalized in his works three lands: Ukraine, Russia, and Italy.*”). In fact, the connection between Rome/Italy and Ukraine is not new. As Ilya Kutik – poet and a founder of Russian Materialism in poetry – reminds us, Gogol’ was not the first Ukrainian to equate the two countries: “The first displacement of this kind was performed by Ivan Kotliarevsky in his . . . version of *The Aeneid* of 1798. There, the Romans wear the wide red trousers of Ukrainian Cossacks and speak with a Poltava accent” (89). Kutik also highlights Gogol’s prophetic attitude in trying “to predict, that is, to magnetize his Italian period when writing works set in Ukraine” (84). An example consists in the poem *Italy (Italiya)* published on March 23, 1829 in the magazine *Son of the Fatherland (Syn Otechestva)*:

⁶ Gogol’s letter to Balabina, Rome, April 1838 (*PSB* 11: 141).

Italiya — roskoshnaya strana!
 Po ney dusha i stonet i toskuyet.
 Ona vsya ray, vsya radosti polna,
 I v ney lyubov' roskoshnaya vesnuet.
 Bezhit, shumit zadumchivo volna
 I berega chudesnyye tseluyet;
 V ney nebesa prekrasnyye blestyat;
 Limon gorit i veyet aromat.
 [...]

Uzryu l' tebya ya, polnyy ozhidaniy?
 Dusha v luchakh, i dumy govoryat,
 Menya vlechet i zhzheth tvoye dykhan'ye, —
 Ya v nebesakh, ves' zvuk i trepetan'ye! . . .⁷
 (qtd. in Kutik 85).

⁷ "Italy — voluptuous country!
 The soul pines for it and moans.
 It is all a paradise, a full joy.
 And voluptuous love springtimes in it.
 Waves run and roll dreamily
 And kiss the marvelous shores;
 In it, the beautiful firmament glows;
 Lemons shine and scent the air
 [. . .]
 Full of expectation, shall I see you?
 My soul is in the rays, and thoughts speak,
 Your breath draws and burns me, —
 I am in heaven, I am all sound and quivering!"

For Gogol', Italy stands for a land with a "glowing firmament," a country of the soul, an ideal that must be reached (Kutik 86). This idealized description of a country that he had yet to see echoes the representation of the landscapes in *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* and *Rome*. In the poem *Italy*, it is already possible to see the concept of "soul" applied to Italy, some eighteen years before the author moved to the country. When finally Gogol' moved to Italy in 1837, in a letter to the poet and friend Vasily Zhukovsky we read: "Yesli by vy znali, s kakoyu radost'yu ya brosil Shveytsariyu i poletel v moyu dushen'ku, v moyu krasavitsu Italiyu. Ona moyu! Nikto v mire yeye ne otnimet u menya! Ya rodilsya zdes'. — Rossiya, Peterburg, snega, podletsy, departament, kafedra, teatr — vso eto mne snilos'. Ya prosnulsya opyat' na rodine . . ." (*PSB* 11: 111). ("If you just imagined with what a great pleasure I left Switzerland and flew to my sweetheart, to my beautiful Italy! She is mine! Nobody in the world will take her from me! I was born here. Russia, Petersburg, snow, scoundrels, department, university, theatre, — I have just dreamed it all. Once more, I woke up in my motherland . . ." Kutik 89).

Since Gogol' "adopts" Italy as his second motherland, it is legitimate to hypothesize that his original motherland – Ukraine – merged into it. Once again, Kutik offers a brilliant explanation of the matter. He refers to the platonic myth of the separation of the primordial androgynous beings. According to Plato, Zeus punished these creatures for their pride by splitting them in two and thereby creating human bodies as we know them today. Since then, humans have been looking for their respective half and, once they find it, "eros" occurs (92). The manner in which Gogol' addresses Italy is that of a lover. "Ukraine and

its ‘voluptuous nights’ (‘Taras Bulba’), and ‘beautiful Italy’ seem to be compatible in Gogol’s perception with himself, so as to offer completion into a platonic androgynous being” (92). Moreover, Italy and Ukraine are both feminine nouns in Russian (*Italya* and *Ukraina* or *Malorossia*), which is why they are called *rodina* (motherland, birthplace, homeland), also a feminine noun. Linguistically and theoretically, their male counterpart is the masculine noun *Rim* (Rome), which metonymically represents the entire Italian peninsula. In adopting *Rim/Italya* (masculine/feminine) as his fatherland/motherland, Gogol’ seems to be striving to regain his momentarily lost androgynous unity (92).

As an homage to the Eternal City, which accepted him as a parent/lover, Gogol’ writes *Rome*. The work is the evolution of a tale entitled *Annunziata*, which the author must have created in the spring 1838 or in the autumn 1839 (Giuliani, “Introduzione” 13). The fragment finally appears in the magazine *The Muscovite* (*Moskvityanin*) in 1842, the same year in which were published *The Overcoat* (*Shinel’*) and *Dead Souls* (*Mortvyye dushi*). It is the story of a Roman Prince who, after having spent four years in Paris, is recalled to Rome following the death of his father. Here, during the carnival, for the first time he sees and falls in love with the beautiful Annunziata, desperately trying to chase her. Most importantly, *Rim* represents the story of two cities, “in which a fragmented and superficial Paris (seen almost as a French Petersburg, secular and wholly soulless) is contrasted with a movingly faded Rome, blessed by art and nature and so representing a value for the ‘dweller of the north’” (Fanger 193). Although Gogol’s friends were amused by it (Fanger 193), the work remained

unnoticed, also because of Belinsky's criticism. The critic appreciated the vivid and accurate portrayal of reality (he still considered Gogol' a realist), but was disappointed by his view of Paris, which was a symbol of social change and political reform (Vogel 145-149).

In order to understand the centrality of the fragment *Rome* in Gogol's production – also highlighted by Giuliani's "topographic triangle" –, one must first consider the impact of the city of Rome on the author's personal development. In fact, for him it did not represent merely a place, but it was a *spiritual state* (Vogel 146). As mentioned above, Gogol' in Rome found the "motherland of his soul," the accomplishment of his ideal conception of beauty consisting in a harmonious wholeness. Rome had the power to reconcile him with himself and with the world. Here, he conceived a different view of art and the role of the artist. According to this vision, the artist was supposed to carry out a spiritual and moral mission. Art did not exist for its own sake, but had to facilitate the rebirth of humanity over the world's pettiness and fragmentation (Vogel 157), over its moral ugliness. In the same way, the artist was supposed to embody a model of virtue, especially in Christian terms. This interpretation was particularly influenced by the Nazarenes, German Romantic painters who promoted artistic purism and the necessity to combine art and religion (Giuliani, ("Introduzione" 26). Such a vision aligned perfectly with the moral principles that Gogol' was trying to pursue and his desire to "educate the

Russian man”⁸ (Giuliani, “Introduzione” 28), in order to overcome what he perceived as a cultural crisis. In Rome, Christian morality and the promotion of Christian values assumed a central importance in Gogol’s view of the artist, conferring him with a messianic function (Vogel 157).

Although Rome was an incessant source of inspiration for Gogol’, its impact on his life seemed to accelerate his creative decline. Rome in the life of the artist, indeed, stands for a unique period of balance that unfortunately was replaced by a creative sterility (Giuliani, “Introduzione” 25-28). As Giuliani puts it, his new vision of art was irreconcilable with his mannerist and prone to grotesque genius (“Introduzione” 27). Such a theory is supported by the depiction of the Prince in *Rome*. This character is structurally different from other Gogolian heroes, as he does not have a name and his physical description is a mere sketch: black, fiery eyes, regular nose, and ivory complexion (*Rim n. pag.*). Gogol’, who usually provides almost maniacally detailed descriptions of his characters’ clothing, this time does not reveal many details (Giuliani, “Introduzione” 28). We only know that during the carnival “. . . on ne vzyal s soboy ni maski, ni zheleznoy setki na litso i, zabrosivshis’ plashchom, khotel tol’ko probrat’sya cherez Korso na druguyu polovinu goroda” (“. . . he did not bring with himself any masks or metal meshes for his face and, throwing a cloak over himself, only wanted to get through the Corso to reach the other half of the city”) (*Rim n. pag.*).

⁸ The term “man” – *chelovek* in Russian – here means “person,” “human being,” rather than strictly “male.”

In the midst of the Gogolian production, the Prince is an unusual character. He is young and able to change, unlike the majority of Gogol's characters – which Vladimir Nabokov called “homunculi” (45-46; 77) or “spermatozoids of the brain” (50). The Prince develops his own thoughts and personal sensibility; due to his travel experience, he goes through a rebirth, becoming the only character who is allowed to evolve (Giuliani, “Introduzione” 29). The Prince can be considered as a prototype of those “living souls” of which Gogol' intended to write about in the second part of *Dead Souls*; his physical description, although minimal, together with his qualities suggest that he could be the expression of the Gogolian ideal *prekrasnyy chelovek*, the beautiful man inside and out, the man who - being endowed with sensibility, pride, nobility, and love of beauty - is able to personify the magnificence of the body and that of the soul (Giuliani, “Introduzione” 30). Such a vision explains on the one hand the messianic role that Gogol' confers to Italy (and to himself). In fact, the Italian land is supposed to regenerate the northern (Russian) man, so that he may switch his attention from occupations that harden the soul to the wonders of the South “. . . chtoby khot' raz v zhizni byl on prekrasnym chelovekom . . .” (“. . . so that once in his life would he be a beautiful man . . .”) (*Rim* n. pag.).

On the other hand, in light of the Prince being such an unusual type of character for Gogol', it unavoidably represents a challenge. Although striving for beauty in life, in fiction the author is not familiar with positive characters or beautiful souls. For this reason, the Prince seems to be cold and distant (Giuliani, “Introduzione” 30). At the same time, “in his hymn to Rome, Gogol' is only interested in the esthetic reactions of his hero” (Vogel 154). This justifies

the lack of emotion and deepness in the Prince, while reinforcing the theory of *Rome* as an exclusive tribute to the city. Once the hero has completed his regeneration, the author does not know what to make of this “living soul;” hence, the action ends as it started: in contemplation (Giuliani, “Introduzione” 30). In the final moment, when the Prince is overwhelmed by the picturesque view of the city, he reaches the peak of his happiness by becoming one with the surrounding environment. For this reason, it can be argued that the fragment is not incomplete. As the Prince’s pursuit of happiness is accomplished by his symbiosis with Rome (his Platonic respective half), he has no need to find Annunziata to obtain his happy ending. This justifies the sudden interruption of the story, as Annunziata could become a trigger for further, undesired change in the already blessed life of the hero (Giuliani, “Introduzione” 29). In this respect, *Rome* is a complete work in itself.

Finally, the production of this new type of character explains to a certain extent Gogol’s creative crisis. As previously stated, the author is not familiar with the “beautiful souls” in his narrative; however, in his pedagogical plan to educate the northern man, he attempts to write in a moral style that does not belong to him. The Eternal City offers him a period of peace, in which he reshapes and strengthens his moral principles and his idea of the role of the artist, especially due to the influence of the Nazarenes. His desire to spread his “gospel” in the Russian Empire unfortunately does not coincide with his artistic skills. Gogol’ is an intelligent satirist; a writer of the grotesque, who is able to

depict with surgical precision the *poshlost*⁹ that afflicted the society of his time. He is simply incapable of producing positive characters with the same brilliant features with which he shapes his grotesque creatures. In light of this, it is possible to assume that this contradiction has torn him from the inside, generating a profound crisis, which will later lead to his creative sterility. In this regard, one can identify an obsession with moral rather than nationalist principles, which contradicts Bojanowska's argument. In her conclusion, she attributes a political nature to Gogol's crisis (369). The author could not force himself to assume a Russian national identity sacrificing his Ukrainian one (although she states that he had sacrificed it to become fully Russian, 371), which made him incapable of accomplishing his function as an artist. The struggle here is between two national identities, rather than due to the incapability of accomplishing a moral mission. However, not taking into account the relevance of moral and spiritual principles in Gogol's existence, such interpretation does not seem to have solid grounds.

Textual Analysis

The stories in *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* and *Rome* share some characteristic traits, which mirror the author's feelings towards the two lands. The similarities between the two works suggest that Gogol' indeed did not neglect his Ukrainian self, but transferred it and merged it into his newly

⁹ Petty evil, vulgarity, obscenity, bad taste, kitsch, etc. Note that a single translation of the term in English does not exist due to its cultural significance in Russian.

acquired motherland, hence reconciling with his androgynous being. As Kutik puts it, “Gogol’s conception of Ukraine as a kind of sleeping beauty who was separated (and preserved!) from the outer world ‘as if by some impenetrable curtain’ is quite original. But what is more surprising, his concept of Rome almost duplicates it exactly . . . He praises Rome, exactly as Ukraine, for its isolated survival” (97). In Gogol’s view, both countries are elevated to a mythical dimension, bucolic and peaceful. This is evident if one considers the description of the landscapes in both works. For example, “The Fair at Sorochyntsi” (“Sorochinskaya yarmarka,” 1831) opens with a verse from an old ballad – praising the beauty of Little Russia – followed by the description of the scenery:

Kak upoitelen, kak roskoshen letniy den’ v Malorossii! Kak tomitel’no-zharki te chasy, kogda polden’ bleshchet v tishine i znoye, i goluboy, neizmerimyy okean, sladostrastnym kupolom nagnuvshiysya nad zemleyu, kazhetsya, zasnul, ves’ potonuvshi v nege, obnimaya i szhimaya prekrasnuyu v vozdushnykh ob'yatiyakh svoikh! Na nem ni oblaka. V pole ni rechi. Vso kak-budto umerlo; vverkhu tol’ko, v *nebesnoy glubine* drozhit zhavoronok, i serebryanyye pesni letyat po *vozdushnym stupenyam* na vlyublennuyu zemlyu, da izredka krik chayki ili zvonkiy golos perepela otdayetsya v stepi. Lenivo i bezdumno, budto gulyayushchiye bez tseli, stoyat podoblachnyye duby, i oslepitel’nyye udary *solnechnykh luchey* zazhigayut tselyye *zhivopisnyye* massy list’yev, nakidyvaya na drugiye temnyuyu, kak noch’, ten’, po kotoroy tol’ko pri sil’nom vetre pryshchet zoloto. (*PSB* 1: 111). [Emphasis is mine – S.S.]¹⁰

¹⁰ How intoxicating, how magnificent is a summer day in Little Russia! How luxuriously warm the hours when midday glitters in stillness and sultry heat and the blue fathomless ocean arching like a voluptuous cupola over the plain seems to be slumbering, bathed in languor, clasping the fair earth and holding it close in its ethereal embrace! Upon it, not a cloud; in the plain not a sound. Everything might be dead; only above in the *heavenly depths* a lark is trilling and from the *airy heights* the silvery notes drop down upon adoring earth, and from time to

The depiction of the Ukrainian land echoes in the conclusion of *Rome*. The Prince, lost in his thoughts for Annunziata, walks around the city and suddenly realizes he is already in the proximity of the church of S. Pietro in Montorio. Thus, he decides to reach a little square, from which he can enjoy the view of the entire capital:

No zdes' knyaz' vzglyanul na Rim i ostanovilsya: pred nim v *chudnoy siyayushchey panorame* predstal vechnyy gorod. Vsyaya *svetlaya* gruda domov, tserkvey, kupolov, *ostrokonechiy sil'no osveshchena byla bleskom ponizivshegosya solntsa* . . . Solntse opuskalos' nizhe k zemle; rumyaneye i zharche stal *blesk* yego na *vsey arkhitekturnoy masse*; yeshche zhivey i blizhe sdelalsya gorod; yeshche temney zacherneli pinny; yeshche golubeye i fosforneye stali gory; yeshche torzhestvenney i luchshe gotovyy pogasnut' *nebesnyy vozdukh* . . . Bozhe, kakoy vid!
(*Rim* n. pag.). [Emphasis is mine – S.S.]¹¹

Both representations are reminiscent of the rural scenes masterly portrayed by the leaders of the Barbizon school of painters, such as Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (see fig. 1) as well as Théodore Rousseau, or the genre paintings by Franz Ludwig Catel (see fig. 2).

time the cry of a gull or the ringing note of a quail sounds in the steppe. The towering oaks stand, idle and apathetic, like aimless wayfarers, and the *dazzling gleams of sunshine* light up *picturesque* masses of leaves, casting onto others a shadow black as night, only flecked with gold when the wind blows. *Evenings on a Farm* 11.

¹¹ “But here the Prince turned his gaze to Rome and stopped: before him in a *prodigious, shining landscape* appeared the Eternal City. All the *shiny* cluster of houses, churches, domes, and steeples *was intensely illuminated by the glow of the setting sun*. . . . The sun descended closer to the earth; redder and warmer it flooded the whole *architectural mass* with *light*; the city appeared even closer and more vivid; the pines loomed darker; the mountains seemed bluer and more phosphorous; and the *heavenly air*, more solemn, looked more than ever as if it were ready to dim. . . . God! What a view!”



Fig. 1. Corot, Jean-Baptiste-Camille; *The Forum Seen from the Farnese Garden*; 1826; Oil on canvas; Musée du Louvre, Paris; *Web Gallery of Art*; wga.hu, n.d.; Web; 10 Feb. 2014.



Fig. 2. Catel, Franz Ludwig; *Garden of the Villa Doria Pamphili in Rome*; 1837-38; Oil on canvas; Private collection; *Web Gallery of Art*; wga.hu, n.d.; Web; 10 Feb. 2014.

The scenes are embedded in a mythic and timeless atmosphere, surrounded by heavenly air, brilliant colors, picturesque landscapes, and characterized by estrangement from reality. In fact, as Rudy Panko tells the reader in the introduction of *Evenings on a Farm*, Dikanka – and, metonymically speaking, the whole Ukraine – is the land of milk and honey; here, even melons and pies taste better, in a way that is beyond the imagination of the reader (*PSB* 1: 103-109). Indeed, the readers will never taste such delicacies, as they will never be able to reach the imaginary Dikanka portrayed by Gogol’.

Interestingly, *Evenings on a Farm* opens with a picturesque description, while *Rome* concludes with a similar one. It could be said that the two works are connected in a never-ending circle, which makes them timeless, therefore, immortal. Such a circularity elevates the geographical correlation between Ukraine and Italy to a metaphysical level in Gogol’s life and literary production, as the two lands leave the realm of the real to become part of the eternal and heavenly realm of the fantastic.

The overlapping of Ukraine and Italy in Gogol’s life and literary works may be further explained by the author’s taste for baroque. The Russian critic and dissident prose writer Andrey Sinyavsky, also known as Abram Terts, traces a parallel between Ukrainian and Italian baroque and Gogol’s texts (349-350), especially regarding the author’s writing style and baroque art. As Gogol’ was born and raised in Ukraine, he was highly exposed to baroque culture, which flourished there between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, influencing the major forms of art, such as painting and architecture (Shapiro 96). A bright

example of baroque influence is the Church of Transfiguration (Preobrazhens'ka tserkva) built by Hetman Danilo Apostol at the beginning of the eighteenth century in Sorochyntsi, the village that Gogol' later depicts in his "The Fair at Sorochyntsi" and where he was born and baptized (Shapiro 96). "Gogol' was not immune to the grandeur of the baroque art forms that surrounded him" (Shapiro 96). In fact, baroque traditions had an important place also in his family, "who believed that they were descendants of Ostap Hohol', the seventeenth-century colonel. The golden age of Ukrainian Cossackdom occurred . . . when baroque culture permeated Ukrainian life, and many of Gogol's ancestors were well-known Cossack figures of that age. Among them . . . the hetmans Mikhail and Petr Doroshenko and Ivan Skoropadskii" (Shapiro 97). Furthermore, Gogol' was deeply interested in Ukrainian-Russian ecclesiastical baroque literature throughout his life, also thanks to Dmitry Troshchinsky's library, to which he had access (Shapiro 100-101).

When Gogol' arrived in Rome, he "responded powerfully to the purely sensuous attractions of Italy – the luxurious scenery, the blinding skies, the grandeur of Antiquity, the dazzling richness of renaissance painting and sculpture, the lushness of the Roman baroque" (Erich 161 qtd. in Shapiro 103). Here, he had the chance to further develop his previously established interest for baroque literature, architecture, and art (Shapiro 103), which is mirrored in *Rome*. "In his fragment 'Rome' (1842), he writes of such Italian baroque architects as Giacomo de Vignola, Giacomo della Porta, Giovanni Bernini, and Francesco Borromini" (Shapiro 103). This interest is reflected in the tourist routes that the author planned for his close friends, such as Alexandra

Smirnova. Their itinerary included some of the most significant baroque churches of the city, such as the Church of S. Giovanni in Laterano, the Church of S. Maria in Campitelli, and the Church of S. Andrea della Valle (Shapiro 103-104).

Certainly, Gogol's interest for baroque includes painting. For instance, in *Rome* he mentions Carracci and Il Guercino (Shapiro 104). In addition, he is fascinated by painters from other countries. It is significant that in the second edition of *Taras Bul'ba* (1842), a reference appears to the Dutch painter Gerard van Honthorst, which is absent in the first edition (1835). The first edition was published a year before Gogol's arrival in Rome, so it is safe to assume that he added the passage about the Dutch painter after seeing his works in Italy (Shapiro 104). Finally, in a letter to Maria Petrovna Balabina dated 17 February 1842, Gogol' expresses his admiration for the French painter Claude Lorrain, praising his decorative-mythological depiction of landscapes (*PSB* 12: 38). Remarkably, Gogol's use of sunlight in both his Ukrainian stories and *Rome* appears to be identical to Lorrain's: overwhelming and intense, sunlight unifies the elements in both artists' portraits, conferring a poetic dimension to the landscapes. Gogol's taste for baroque is adequately satisfied in Italy, particularly in Rome, where the appreciation for such a tradition reaches its peak. This constitutes a further element of connection between the Ukrainian and Italian lands in Gogol's life and literary works, along with representing an additional reason for considering Rome his "rodina dushi."

Another element that deserves attention for the purpose of this article is the description of women in both literary works. Also in this case, it is possible to trace a parallel between the Ukrainian stories and *Rome*. In “St. John’s Eve” (“Vecher Nakanune Ivana Kupala,” 1831), the female character of Pidorka is portrayed as follows:

... a vot beda: u starogo Korzha byla dochka krasavitsa, kakuyu, ya dumayu, vryad li dostavalos' vam vidyvat'. Tetka pokoyного deda rasskazyvala, — a zhenshchine, sami znayete, legche potselovat'sya s chortom, ne vo gnev bud' skazano, nezheli nazvat' kogo krasavitseyu, — chto polnen'kiye shcheki kozachki byli svezhi i yarki, kak mak samogo tonkogo rozovogo tsveta, kogda, umyvshis' bozh'yeyu rosoyu, gorit on, raspriamlyayet listiki i okhorashivayetsya pered tol'ko chto podnyavshimsya solnyshkom; chto brovi . . . rovno nagnuvshis', kak budto glyadelis' v yasnyye ochi; chto rotik, na kotoryy glyadya oblizyvalas' togdashnyaya molodezh', kazhis', na to i sozdan byl, chtoby vyvodit' solov'inye pesni . . . (PSB 1: 141).¹²

A similar transcendental beauty is portrayed in *Rome*:

Eto byla krasota polnaya, sozdannaya dlya togo, chtoby vsekh ravno oslepit'! Tut ne nuzhno bylo imet' kakoy-nibud' osobennyi vkus: tut vse vkusy dolzhny byli soytit'sya, vse dolzhny byli povergnut'sya nits: i veruyushchiy i neveruyushchiy upali by pred ney, kak pred vnezapnym poyavlen'yem bozhestva. On videl, kak ves' narod, skol'ko yego tam ni bylo, zaglyadelsya na neye, kak zhenshchiny - vyrazili nevol'noye

¹² “. . . what did matter was that old Korzh had a daughter, a beauty — such as I imagine you have never seen. My grandfather’s aunt used to say — and women, you know, would rather kiss the devil, saving your presence, than call any girl a beauty — that the girl’s plump cheeks were as fresh and bright as a poppy of the most delicate shade of pink when it glows, washed by God’s dew, unfolds its leaves and preens itself in the rising sun; that her brows . . . were evenly arched and seemed to gaze into her clear eyes; that her little mouth at which the young men stared greedily as though it had been created to utter the notes of a nightingale . . .” (*Evenings on a Farm* 57)

izumlen'ye na svoikh litsakh, smeshannoye s naslazhden'yem, i povtoryali: "O bella!" – kak vse, chto ni bylo, kazalos', prevratilos' v khudozhnika i smotrelo pristol'no na odnu yeye (*Rim* n. pag.).¹³

The second passage describes the character of Annunziata, in real life Vittoria Caldoni Lapchenko (wife of the Russian painter Grigory Lapchenko), the girl of Albano – a town close to Rome (*Vittoria Caldoni Lapchenko* 17-38). Vittoria was a model considered the most beautiful woman during the Grand Tour era. She was portrayed in some fifty works, including drawings, paintings, and sculptures from Friedrich Overbeck to Bertel Thorvaldsen. Her beauty was such that several artists were obsessed with their inability to capture it on canvas. For example, it took the painter August Kestner eight years to produce a portrait of Vittoria that only partially satisfied him. Ironically, the painting burned down during the war in 1943, although a lithograph remains.

In *Rome*, Annunziata – literally, "the one who is announced," with a rather obvious reference to the Virgin Mary, following the Italian religious tradition regarding first names – not only is a magnificent beauty, but she also personifies "the power, the glory, and the beauty of Rome" (Vogel 147). In fact, in the final scene the woman and the city merge into a unicum of mesmerizing beauty. "Significantly, *Rim* begins with a description of Annunziata and ends with a description of the sun setting over Rome. Both Annunziata and Rome are

¹³ "This was absolute beauty, created to dazzle everyone equally. It was not necessary here to have any particular taste for beauty; all tastes here had to coincide; all had to prostrate themselves; both the believer and the unbeliever would have fallen before her as before the sudden appearance of a deity. He saw how all the people, however many there were, stared longingly at her; how the women, with expressions on their faces of involuntary astonishment mixed with delight, repeated: "O, bella"; how everything, it seemed, was transformed into an artist and looked intently at her alone." (Kelly, 33).

suffused with a vivid light – an effect which Gogol’ achieves by the use of luminous images and colors” (Vogel 148). Such a fusion works on multiple levels. On the one hand, it proves once again that the literary piece is not incomplete, as the actual protagonist is not the woman, but the city. As Giuliani reminds us, the formal finiteness of the work is attested by the transformations of the title, from *Annunziata* to *Madonna dei Fiori* (*Madonna of Flowers*), ending up becoming *Rome*. The change of the title indicates the abandonment of the original plan of a plot centered on a love story, in favor of the intention to write a reflection on the beloved city (“Introduzione” 19). On the other hand, *Annunziata* as an earthly creature is characterized by a “radiance [that] does not divide people by evoking feelings of jealousy, but unites them as they contemplate her beauty” (Kelly, 33). Gogol’ proposes a female model, which could be identified as the “*Annunziata* model,” that transforms the woman into an artistic object universally capable of arousing an aesthetic pleasure in the observer, almost causing Stendhal syndrome. As the spectators agree on *Annunziata*’s beauty, so they do on *Pidorka*’s. In both *Rome* and *Evenings on a Farm*, women are either amazingly beautiful or unbelievably ugly. However, as in this case, when they are beautiful, they have the power to reconcile humanity with the world. Indeed, by becoming an allegory of the Eternal City, *Annunziata* can be considered as an evolution of the Ukrainian universal beauty described in the *Evenings on a Farm*. While both women embody an ideal of sublime beauty, *Pidorka*’s is still anchored to the ground. Although deriving from the same aesthetic canon, *Annunziata*’s mortal appearance is elevated to that of a supreme being, as it is intended to be “neither for the individual nor for the

present, but for man-kind of all ages At the close of *Rim*, Annunciata the woman disappears and we are left with Annunciata the symbol of Rome, the divine and eternal idea of beauty” (Vogel 149), a beauty that is deeply rooted in the Ukrainian feminine ideal. On a final note, it can be said that *Evening on a Farm* performs the same function of *Rome* to the extent that it celebrates the Ukrainian land and its magnificence. In this regard, although Pidorka is given a certain degree of agency in the story, by embodying an ethereal Ukrainian beauty, her figure appears to be instrumental to Gogol’s final celebrative goal.

One last unifying element between the Ukrainian stories and *Rome* that is worth considering is the topic of the carnival. As it is known, not only does the carnival assume a religious connotation by preceding Lent, but it also implies subversion and disguise. Gogol’ personally takes part in the Roman carnival, and in a letter to Danilevsky dated 2 February 1838, he describes it as follows:

Udivitel’noye yavleniye v Italii karnaval, a osobenno v Rime, — vso, chto ni yest’, vso na ulitse, vso v maskakh. U kotorogo zhe net nikakoy vozmozhnosti naryadit’sya, tot vyvorotit tulup ili vymazhet rozhu sazheyu. . . . Na Corso sovershennyi sneg ot brosayemoy muki. Ya slyshal o konfetti, nikak ne dumal, chtoby eto bylo tak khorosho. Voobrazi, chtoty mozhes’ vysypat’ v litso samoy khoroshen’koy tselyy meshok muki, khot’ bud’ eto Borgezi, i ona ne rasserditsya, a otplatit tebe tem zhe . . . Slugi, kuchera — vse v maskaradnom plat’ye. V drugikh mestakh odin tol’ko narod kutit i maskiruyetsya. Zdes’ vso meshayetsya vmeste. Vol’nost’ udivitel’naya (*PSB* 11: 122).¹⁴

¹⁴ “A remarkable phenomenon in Italy is the carnival, and especially in Rome- it encompasses everything, everyone is on the street, everyone is in masks. Those who do not have an opportunity to dress up turn their sheepskin coat inside out or smear their mug with soot. . . . On the Corso the throwing of flour has produced perfect snow. I had heard about the confetti

In *Rome*, Gogol' describes the carnival in a very similar manner. Although the Prince at first refuses to participate, while crossing the city he is overwhelmed by the carnival and "his social status dissolves into insignificance as he merges with the people and is regaled with flour and confetti" (Kelly 32). The "Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. . . . It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part" (Bakhtin qtd. in Kelly 32). The carnival, then, enhances the sense of collectivity among the people. Such an element is of vital importance in Gogol's *Evenings on a Farm*. The author portrays the Ukrainian society of Dikanka as a strong entity, where the sense of community and the values of friendship and brotherhood are highly regarded. The theme of collectivity is further highlighted by Rudy Panko's description of the "evening parties," where music and dance are performed, stories are told, and carnival-type pranks that cannot be mentioned are played (*PSB* 1: 104).

Although we cannot talk of a "formal" carnival, *Evenings on a Farm* presents its most peculiar traits, such as the masquerade and the element of subversion. The entire collection portrays the Ukrainian subversion, which is carried out mainly by means of the masquerade. In fact, the stories are full of characters who are in disguise, such as gypsies who pretend to be demons, devils who

but in no way thought it could be so good. Just imagine, you can pour out a whole sack of flour into the face of the prettiest girl, even if she is a Borg[h]jesi, and she will not get angry, but will pay you back with the same. . . . Servants, coachmen - all are dressed in masquerade. In other places only the common people go on a binge and disguise themselves. Here everything gets mixed together. A remarkable freedom" (Kelly, 32).

pretend to be strangers, witches who blend in as villagers, women who dress up as demons, and so forth. Such a constant masquerade produces a subversive atmosphere, which is also a characteristic of the pagan heritage surviving in the periods preceding a religious festivity. The role reversal produced by this carnival-like atmosphere gives a certain degree of freedom to the characters. This explains Gogol's fascination for the Roman carnival; he is fascinated by the joyful anarchy and the reversal of social roles, which must have delighted him considering the lack of personal freedom in the regime of Nicholas I (Giuliani, "Introduzione" 11). In brief, the theme of the carnival in its multifaceted forms seems to be dear to Gogol', so that it is present at the beginning and at the end of his career, coming full circle.

Conclusion

From examining Nikolay Gogol's stories in the collection *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* (1831-1832) and the fragment *Rome* (1842), not only is it evident that the writer has never detached himself from his *Ukrainianness*, as Giuliani and Kutik underline, but he has enhanced his feelings for his homeland, extending them to Rome/Italy. The native land of his human body and the birthplace of his soul become one. This is mirrored in his description of landscapes, women, and carnival/fair celebrations - not to mention the presence of baroque elements - in both *Evenings on a Farm* and *Rome*. Although the Italian theme appears to be unique in Gogol's production, the present discussion proves that its existence provides a more comprehensive

understanding of the author's work and thought; at the same time, it is a logical consequence of his cultural background and has the platonic function of metaphysically reuniting him to his native land. Consequently, this also highlights the limitations of both imperialist and postcolonial discourses that see Gogol' neglecting his cultural heritage. Indeed, in Rome not only does Gogol' remember his Ukrainian self, but he also merges it into an Italian/Roman one to create an androgynous, self-sufficient Ukrainian/Italian soul.

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