NIKOLAI GOGOL'S COMMEDIA DEL DEMONIO

by

ANN ELIZABETH BORDA

B.A., University of British Columbia, 1986

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
Department of Slavonic Studies

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 1987

© Ann Elizabeth Borda, 1987
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of  Slavonic Studies

The University of British Columbia
1956 Main Mall
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1Y3

Date  30 04 87
Though it is not certain to what extent Gogol was familiar with Dante, it appears he may have regarded *Dead Souls* I (1842) as the first part of a tripartite scheme in light of *La Divina Commedia*. Interestingly, the foundations for such a scheme can be found in Gogol's first major publication, *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* (1831-1832) and, in the prose fiction and plays of 1835-1836, a definite pattern is revealed. The pattern that evolved in the works of this period involves the emergence of a demonic element which shatters any illusion of a Paradise which may have been established previously. Consequently, one is then drawn down through the awakenings of conscience - Purgatory and, finally, to realization in the Inferno.

The inversion of the Dante scheme which takes place, results in a "commedia del demonio". This "commedia" is particularly significant for both interpreting Gogol's works and for understanding the author himself. It forms a bridge between Gogol's early comic-gothic tales in *Evenings* and the mature style and humour of *Dead Souls*. Equally important is the fact that correlations with the literary devices and the religious thought of Dante's time can also be seen.

Such works as "Old World Landowners" (*Mirgorod*, 1835), "Viy" (*Mirgorod*, 1835), "Nevsky Prospekt" (*Arabesques*, 1835) and the play *The Government Inspector* (performed in 1836) are especially representative of Nikolai Gogol's "commedia del demonio", and therefore form an integral part to this study. In connection with these and other works, certain links concerning the literary and historical heritage, and personal spirituality which exist between Gogol and Dante as reflected in both their own life and works will be examined as well. Thus the "commedia" scheme, and ultimately, Gogol as a writer of the human "soul" may be better understood.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. GOGOL AND DANTE: CORRELATIONS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. PARADISE, PURGATORY, INFERNO</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE TRANSITION FROM EVENINGS ON A FARM NEAR DIKANKA</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. GOGOL'S COMMEDIA DEL DEMONIO.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. OLD WORLD LANDOWNERS</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. VIY</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. NEVSKY PROSPEKT</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOTES</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Professor M. Futrell, for his professional advice and counselling, I wish to express my sincere thanks.

To Dr. C. Turner for his kind assistance for which I am very grateful.

To the faculty and staff of the Department of Slavonic Studies, I would like to take this opportunity to convey recognition of their support throughout my undergraduate and graduate years.

To the staff of the Main Library, for their extensive courtesy, thank you.

To Dr. D. Stone and staff, a special acknowledgement for the printing of this thesis.
INTRODUCTION

When Gogol completed the first part of *Dead Souls* in 1842, he may have begun to regard it as the start of a tripartite scheme based on Dante Alighieri's *La Divina Commedia*: *L'Inferno*, *Il Purgatorio*, *Il Paradiso*. The fact that he called *Dead Souls* a "poema" could lead one to believe that he had the work of this Italian poet in mind.\(^1\)

Indeed, Gogol's great interest in the Middle Ages and his re-reading of Dante in Rome while working on the novel must have influenced him, for in the seventh chapter of the first part Gogol directly alludes to the *Commedia*.\(^2\) A ministrant is beheld as a modern-day Virgil as he directs Chichikov to the office of Purchase-Deeds:

\[\ldots\text{(he) now attached himself to our heroes just as Virgil had once offered his services to Dante, and led them to the inner sanctum which was furnished only with spacious armchairs.}\]\(^3\)

Critics, too, have linked *Dead Souls I* and the fragmentary second part with the Dante poem in light of similar social nuances and Gogol's pronounced religious outlook which he wove into the text and which only gained real attention after the criticized publication of *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* (1847).\(^4\)

It is not certain to what extent Gogol was aware of Dante's work before this time,\(^5\) but if one assumes that Gogol's views never altered, merely intensified --

\[\ldots\text{I have never changed my main positions. From perhaps the time I was twelve years of age I have been going along the same road I am on today, without ever hesitating or vacillating in my main beliefs.}\]\(^6\)

a Christian message, not unlike Dante's, can be seen to thread its way discreetly from his earliest stories onward. This message is strongest in Gogol's later works, though it has also been misunderstood and quite overlooked in the published fiction and plays of his most prolific period 1835-1836.

The works from this time, specifically "Old-World Landowners" (*Mirgorod*, 1935), "Viy" (*Mirgorod*, 1835), "Nevsky Prospekt" (*Arabesques*, 1835), and the play *The Government*
Inspector (completed in 1835, performed in 1836), are particularly representative of both
the Dantesque tripartite scheme -- unfinished in Dead Souls -- and the religious
convictions of a troubled individual.

Infused into these works is a definite pattern which forms a bridge between the
comic-gothic vision in Gogol's first volume of Ukrainian tales, Evenings on a Farm near
Dikanka (1831-1832), and the very human one in his "poema". This pattern involves the
emergence of a "demonic" reality with whose appearance any illusion of a Paradise which
may have been established previously, is shattered, and consequently, both the characters
and the reader are drawn down to the awakenings of conscience in Purgatory and then,
ultimately, to a state of realization in the Inferno.

Significantly, the order, in typical Gogolian fashion,\(^7\) is a reversal of the progression
found in the Commedia, thus resulting in the creation of an "Undivine Comedy", or in view
of the constant intrusion of the demonic element -- a "commedia del demonio".

To further understand Gogol's work in terms of Dante and the Commedia scheme, it is
necessary to realize Gogol's intense spirituality and, above all, to compare Gogol's life and
works with the poet himself.
I. GOGOL AND DANTE: CORRELATIONS

Gogol lived during the reign of Nicholas I, the "Gendarme of Europe", who feared popular opposition in light of the Decembrist Revolt of 1825 and the revolutionary activity in the West. His fear prompted such measures as uncompromising censorship, control of the universities, police spying, and the demand for "autocracy, orthodoxy, nationality". No doubt these measures made an impression on Russia and led to the spread of revolutionary doctrine among the educated classes, including the literati.

Although Gogol was in the midst of a changing Russia, his works do not often reflect this position. "Of all major Russian writers, Gogol alone stands apart from the mainstream of political ferment which gives continuity to Russian literature."¹

Instead, Gogol followed the aesthetics of a romanticism largely embodied in the cult of the Middle Ages and its intrinsic spiritual values. However, when Gogol did present recognizable Russian "types" and pictures of social corruption in his work, the political conscience inherent in the public's view of the writer regarded him as an opponent of the established order. This was to be a great disappointment for Gogol, as he saw himself as a prophet of the human "soul" and not of the social hierarchy.

I was not at all born to produce an epoch in the sphere of literature. My business is simpler and lower: My business is above all what every man must think about, not just myself. My business is the soul and the durable things in life."²

He expressed these concerns in Selected Passages which outraged Belinsky, who, in his famous letter to Gogol dated July 15, 1847, called the writer a false Christian.³ The letter itself became a powerful manifesto against the Tsarist government.

Dante was also in the midst of a changing political and social world. He was among those who were witnesses to the decay of the two most important institutions in the medieval world -- the Papacy and the Empire. Dante believed it was "papal politics and cupidity"⁴ that prevented the essential Christian message from flourishing. Such a message
appeared to Dante as a necessity for peace, unity, and socio-spiritual development. If only the Church could fulfill its true mission, his native Florence and the whole of Italy would be strengthened and become the upholders of European Christendom once more. Not unlike Gogol, Dante expressed the view that his nation could be the envy of the world if all would repent and serve her well.

*Italy, hitherto an object of pity, shall become the envy of the world... Let the peoples of Italy bethink them of their descent... Let them that are oppressed lift up their hearts, and prepare themselves to receive the grace of God...* \(^5\)

Compare with Gogol:

*If only the Russian loves Russia and everything there is in Russia! It is to love that God himself now directs us...* \(^6\)

Dante Alighieri, however, was very active in politics as councilman, elector and prior in Florence, but his opposition to Pope Boniface VIII caused him to be exiled and to lose his Florentine citizenship. In exile, Dante would complete his greatest and final work, *Divina Commedia*. (Similarly, Gogol wrote *Dead Souls* away from his native homeland.) Dante filled the *Commedia* with the many people he had known and portrayed them with an observant eye - no less observant than Gogol's with his vivid caricatures.

Yet Dante, too, failed as a prophet who could bring on the changes that a new Empire required and a new society demanded. Nonetheless, his poem survives because of its many other ideals, and this is all the more true of Gogol's writings.

As briefly mentioned before, it is not known how well acquainted Gogol was with Dante's works; yet we are aware of Gogol's enthusiasm for the Middle Ages and the gothic. For example, his essay entitled "On the Middle Ages", published in *Arabesques* (1835), was his prime lecture at the St. Petersburg University and a success with the students there. In the *Enigma of Gogol*, Richard Peace shows how much of Gogol's works seem to correlate with the thought and works of the Russian Middle Ages, and how for a writer in the nineteenth century "the Middle Ages were part of a fashionable romantic cult". \(^7\)

*Homilies and vitae of early Christian and Byzantine saints may not have been just*
influential for Gogol, but for Dante as well. It has been suggested that Dante was knowledgeable on the Eastern Orthodox Church and a friend to migrant preachers travelling from the East and West. As a result, he may have been introduced to such Eastern apocrypha as The Descent of the Virgin into Hell which could have inspired parts of L’Inferno, as the concepts of "visits to hell" and of "divine mercy" were inherent in old Russian and Roman Catholic eschatology. The Last Judgment, in particular, was a popular eschatological subject. It was a rendition of the Judgment by Gogol's mother which appears to have evoked in him fear and dread, and which was responsible for the awakenings of a religious mind.

I asked you to tell me about the last judgment; and so well, so comprehensively, so touchingly did you tell me, a child, about the blessings which await people for a virtuous life -- and so strikingly, so terrifyingly did you describe the eternal torments of the sinful -- that this shook and awakened all sensitivity within me. That sparked and subsequently produced the most elevated thoughts in me.

Yet, despite the stress placed by the Roman Catholic and early Orthodox Churches on the Last Judgment, both believed equally fervently in the potential salvation for all, although this is not attainable without discipline and risk. The fact is that the whole Christian scheme of salvation requires belief in the Devil. In the Middle Ages, especially, the Devil was most prominent in influencing the minds and wills of man, and Dante among others saw him as the controlling power in the world's affairs. The Devil was considered master of human chaos and his intrusion into life could be considered analogous to the grotesque: "incomprehensible, inexplicable, impersonal". One had to beware of tedium, the absurd, overzealous imagination, boastful pride, despair, or falling prey to one's own fears. These were all attributes of the demonic element and are alluded to in the works of Gogol and Dante. Only a person who places himself under the Church's protection and follows the essential dogma of "primacy of love" for God and His creations can be saved. In Dante's Commedia, those who sin by perverting this love without heed for the consequences are
destined for the Inferno, but those who repent in time are accepted into Purgatory where their spirits will be renewed and reborn. They will become what they were made to be.

In Orthodox theology there is no developed concept of Purgatory, and the presence of an Inferno is only generally found in medieval writings as The Descent of the Virgin into Hell and Adam's Address to Lazarus in Hell. These early chronicles were considered noncanonical by the Church, though they were popular among the people of Old Russia and their influence is reflected in spiritual songs, medieval vitae, and icons. The Orthodox conception of sin, however, is not much different from Dante's in that it is defined as a "diminution of essence, a loss of substance, a wound or infection of the original image of God". Similarly, it is through redemption as symbolized by the all important Resurrection of Christ that one finds renewal -- "a deification of one's being". In other words, falling into temptation by the demonic results in a distortion of "real" reality. This refers back to the concept of "deification of being" in which God's image is reflected back to him in man's free ascent to true self-hood by allowing his desire and will to revolve around that centre of reality (God) from which "Heaven and all Nature hang". The fall of the angels and the fall of man were refusals to ascend to this reality, and therefore resulted in a fall into illusion -- Inferno. Dante himself had fallen into illusion and only through the love of his departed Beatrice was he able to go through the three realms of the after-life and, upon seeing reality for himself, could he turn from his sinfulness and live.

Thus, it is important to note at this point the nature of Dante's Divina Commedia as he outlined in Epistle X -- A Letter to Can Grande della Scala (1319). Dante states that the Commedia is an allegory which operates on four levels -- literal, political, moral, mystical. Literally, it is the state of souls after death, but allegorically, it is the state of man in this earthly life:

... the subject is man according as by his merits or demerits in the exercise of his free will he is deserving of reward or punishment by justice.
Gogol's works, too, can be considered as having allegorical qualities, particularly in light of the fact that he wished the public to see *The Government Inspector* as a version of the Last Judgment --

Nothing will remain hidden from this (the real) inspector, for he is sent by command of the Almighty. There will be no turning back when his coming is heralded.\(^{17}\)

and *Dead Souls* as a Christian epic:

Vastly great is my creation . . . Still new classes and many people of all kinds will rise up against me . . . Patience! Someone invisible writes before me with a mighty rod.\(^{18}\)

Allegory is not only the presentation of a truth or moral, but a mode of expression "so natural to the human mind that it is universal".\(^{19}\) Its origins are religious and encompass myth, classical literature, homilies, and morality plays. Universal facts and forces are at play in these works and they may be interpreted allegorically in Gogol's writing and without question in Dante's.

Gogol's use of the folktale device in his early stories -- *Evenings* and *Mirgorod* -- invites allegorical signification in view of its ancient tradition and of the subject matter involved. Folktales include fairy tales, tales of saints, devils, and spirits, and "rhozzums" (humorous tales) and are particularly old in Russia, revealing pre-Christian concepts, beliefs, and modes of symbolic thought.\(^{20}\) Equally important in the folk-tale tradition is the "close interrelationship between the personality of the teller and his creation".\(^{21}\) This interrelationship is a significant one in Gogol because of his pronounced subjectivity which enables one to interpret his works and to understand the writer himself. Gogol's apparent subjectivity in his writing has been noted by most critics. For example:

There is abundant evidence that Gogol, because of his marked neuroses, projected his own needs into his works more consistently and clearly than most authors.\(^{22}\)

Similarly,

This method of projecting his own personality into the story, of superimposing his own emotional life upon it . . . can
already be seen in its rudimentary form in his earliest stories.23

In Selected Passages, Gogol himself states:

Now I say everything directly: My heroes are close to the soul because they come from the soul; all my last works are the story of my own soul.24

Indeed, this assertion would become clearer as a greater share of reflection in Gogol's art was accompanied by his increasing need for justification as an artist devoted to God. To free himself from vices as he depicted them in his works, and to become chastened as a result was a major spiritual undertaking for him in his last years. This form of subjectivity was equally difficult for Dante. In Divina Commedia, the poet-traveller must justify his own unhappy life and reconcile it with the universal order alongside those whom he portrays in the eternal realms. He too, like Gogol, acted with the authority of a witness who tries to see what is important in man, namely his true self and ultimate fate.

Thus, it can be noted, both authors became engaged in a spiritual journey of a mind searching for God which would be dramatized in their writing. However, Dante seems more successful in making the reader aware of his intended message. Perhaps this failure on Gogol's part may explain why his prose fiction, and plays often appear to end with the message of the "Inferno" rather than with the desired "Paradise".

To ensure a fuller understanding, it is important to acquaint ourselves, if we are able, with the "purpose" behind Gogol's and Dante's writings, as well as to take note in what "environment" they posit this purpose.

In Epistle X -- A letter to Can Grande della Scala, Dante defines "comedy" as beginning with "sundry adverse conditions" but ending "happily".25 Interestingly, Dante did not name the comedy "Divine"; this was added in the sixteenth century.26 The extra word merely complements what is already there -- the vision of God without which man cannot attain truthful reality; and likewise, without man, this vision becomes abstraction. Dante's happy ending is the result of the final awareness of this truth which is the love and joy
of the universe. Therefore, it can be said that the spiritual purpose underlying the *Divina Commedia* is to show how one can attain final awareness. Also woven into the poem, as hinted before, is the simultaneous conversion of the poet himself in allegorical terms which recall a fall and subsequent redemption as made possible by Christ's death and resurrection. (Of note, Dante began his journey on Good Friday and completed it in Paradise on Ascension Day.) Thus, there is a highly personal purpose involved as well. Similarly, other levels of purpose are equally important within the text, namely those suggesting that the chaos in Dante's time was the result of confused socio-political roles and the consequent loss of true direction. Basically, everything in Dante has a didactic intent, the seeds of which may be found in his earlier works: *Convivio*, *De Monarchia*, *De Vulgare Eloquentia*.

Gogol, likewise, has didactic intentions infused into his works. In *An Author's Confession* (published after his death), he claims that the writer creates his creation for the instruction of the people.\(^{27}\) And theatre, as well, is to be a "rostrum from which a living lesson" should be spoken.\(^{28}\) Yet despite these statements, Gogol's audience did not decipher his purpose as well as did the readers of the *Commedia*, although Gogol appears to have been religiously committed from the very beginning.

\[\text{I am testing my strength for beginning an important, noble task: For the good of the fatherland, for the happiness of its citizens, for the good of the life of my fellowmen . . .}^{29}\]

Here lies a major difference between Gogol and Dante. Dante in his works leaves no room for doubt about the conclusions at which his readers should arrive. Throughout the *Commedia*, Dante, the poet, speaks with rigorous directness and gives the impression that one is witness to personal testimony and a true experience.

Though Dante's personae have all their individual destinies already determined (therefore, there is no development as such), Dante himself and the reader are in a state of uncertainty. As Dante is being guided by Virgil, so are we being guided by Dante.
When the poet has reached *Il Paradiso*, we have been led to experience faithfully all that Dante has shown and felt. There is a simultaneous discovery manifested in his love for the divine Beatrice and God's universe. Through similes, the medium of poetry, and the vernacular language which is integral to the definition of comedy, Dante makes comprehensible to us something which by a lesser artist would seem completely unreal and senseless.

Like Dante, Gogol took most of his characters from a common world and placed them in an unearthly one, showing something universally human which should not be taken for granted. He, as well, in the footsteps of the Italian poet, wrote in a language characteristic of Everyman and, similarly, attempted to establish an experience for his readers. Gogol placed ordinary individuals, he himself had observed, in hyperbolic situations whereby they are unable to discern any pattern in their world. They become alienated in an absurd universe and their failure to orient themselves links them directly with the grotesque. The grotesque is invariably coupled with the demonic aspects of life which "are evoked so they may be subdued".30 These incomprehensible forces, therefore, are to be challenged, but in Gogol this is often unsuccessful because his characters are left in the Inferno of reality. The experience Gogol reveals is noticeably less optimistic than Dante's which may be due to his maturity as a writer.

For example, Gogol's life underwent change as his experience as a writer changed, and because more often than not, he was a subjective author, those personal changes marked with fear, doubts, and self-lacerations were consequently reflected in many of his works. Dante, on the other hand, appears to be more formulative in dealing with his experiences, more able to direct himself positively. Needless to say that is why the message in *Divina Commedia* is more effectively Christian.

Reality as Dante reflected it in his writing was also less complex. Everything revolves around truth, beauty, peace, love -- the attributes of the divine. Reality in
Gogol's work is never fulfilling and almost always threatening. The familiar and ever banal devil eternally tempts both the characters and even the writer himself. (Gogol blamed the devil when he burned his manuscript of the second part of *Dead Souls.*) As a result, emotional and spiritual gratification in the Gogolian world can only be obtained temporarily and under illusory conditions. It may well be that all his life Gogol was trying to find (through his characters and by other means -- e.g. his trip to Jerusalem) the reality which Dante was able to attain. This explains to some extent his "commedia del demonio", so representative of his published fiction and plays of 1835–1836.

Gogol and his characters have the potential to aspire to the Dantesque vision of God but ultimately fall back to earth with the realization of their own despair which is the true Inferno.
II. PARADISE, PURGATORY, INFERNO

The very nature of Gogol's works with "its fusion of serious and comic either with the narrative voice or within the plot creates a general movement from 'merriment to sadness'.\(^1\) This is further emphasized by Gogol's allegorical folk-tale quality which allows the writer to become subjective and project his thoughts and fears. As a result, Gogol's "commedia" takes on certain dramatic proportions whereby "elements of aberration, grotesque and fateful accidents are emphasized".\(^2\) These elements prepare the stage for the "comic victim" who, at first, sees no apparent purpose at work in the world, then arrives at the perception of an all-embracing suffering or passion as the dominant and pervasive quality of life until the end when he becomes alienated, defeated and victimized because his actions are meaningless.\(^3\) This view of man, taken to apply to the "Theatre of the Absurd", fits well with the scheme Gogol presents. Dante, too, employs the absurd to show human foibles in others and in himself. (He employs much "humour" in this regard.)\(^4\) But more importantly, Dante structures his scheme around the absurd to show that it only exists along with the banal and grotesque precisely because one fails to reconcile finite limitations with the infinite and, in turn, fails to attain fullness. Gogol's absurd heroes, on the other hand, never find what it means to be reconciled with the finite, and in this struggle, we laugh at the human submissiveness in their descent. Likewise, they do not attain fullness, as is clearly shown in the works in question, "Old-World Landowners", "Viy", "Nevsky Prospekt", The Government Inspector.

These works begin with an absurd description where the smallest, most insignificant feature or action of a character is expanded upon. Consequently, we know little of Gogol's characters "unless we interpret them within a symbolic frame of reference, unless facets of the externalization are taken to symbolize internal conditions".\(^5\) The resulting comicality
in the externalization of a character is, at the same time, a grotesque distortion of reality. It removes both the character and setting from wholeness. From such an illusionary state Gogol's "Paradise" is created. Paradise can be equated "with a child-like divorcement from the everyday -- an escape from reality because it is not involved with it."\textsuperscript{6}

In Dante's \textit{Il Paradiso}, his characters are also vague when they appear as saints and martyrs in their highly idealized states. Their extreme spiritualization almost neglects the human element, but not the unconditioned reality they have found.

In Gogol's world, the illusion, which seems to be established reality, provides an atmosphere that resists the notion that anything serious will develop from it. So, the reader and the characters themselves are often unaware of the nuances underlying the "Paradise". The way is then prepared for the surfacing of the demonic which shatters the illusion and a new reality is introduced -- Purgatory.

Purgatory is analogous to the awakenings of conscience in providing a medium by which characterization slowly unfolds to reveal the "real" person. In a world in which man is free to act, every act must be viewed as a risk. This is so in Dante as well as in Gogol. But whereas there is hope in the \textit{Divina Commedia} for those who have reached \textit{Il Purgatorio}, there is little hope for those in Gogol. Although a step in the direction of maturity begins at this stage, it does not encompass happiness and usually is accompanied by incomprehension. Nevertheless, the middle state in Gogol's "commedia" and in Dante's is only a temporary process and has a quality comparable to tangible human experience in the world; an experience which inevitably involves a struggle, whereby one is faced with one's own vulnerabilities and fears:

\begin{quote}
I love the good, and I search for it and burn with it; but I do not love my abominations and I do not hold their hands, as my heroes do; I do not love those meannesses of mine which separate me from the good. I struggle with them and with the help of God I will expel them.\textsuperscript{7}
\end{quote}

The struggle itself can be equated with the demonic or earthly element in life.
Deliberate inattention to this element may result in its expanding to hyperbolic proportions and may cause one to experience a supernatural anguish. In such a way, one enters the "Inferno". The Inferno is the most real in the consciousness of man because its material is taken from earth. Yet as a state it is the most illusionary of all, for the reality it reveals is the one which will not allow ascension to the "real" divine vision and therefore to the real dignity of man. Man has taken the wrong path by placing all his faith in himself; thus the Inferno is often characterized by despair. Its physical aspect is pain because that is also real and forms an appropriate opposite to the joy of Paradise. Gogol, toward the end of his life, felt despair in his search for a genuine religious experience. He undertook a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1848, but he found himself further from the divine:

... I have no faith. I want to believe. And in spite of all this I now dare to go and worship at the Holy Sepulchre...  

Ironically, the Inferno in the Divina Commedia is located beneath Jerusalem.
III. THE TRANSITION FROM EVENINGS ON A FARM NEAR DIKANKA

Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka (1831-1832) are redolent of the Kunstmärchen romanticism of Ludwig Tieck and E.T.A. Hoffmann, as well as of the Ukrainian puppet theatre and shrovetide plays of Gogol's father. Recognizable "types" appear in the stories such as the young Cossack, the shrewish wife, the naive peasant, and the cunning gypsy. These types are particularly abundant in the first volume -- "The Fair at Sorochintsy", "St. John's Eve", "A May Night", "The Lost Letter". Equally abundant in the first volume are devil and witch characters who permeate the texts in a mischievous and often gay manner. They are portrayed as they were in Byzantine and Old Russian literature, whereby every facet of life was vulnerable to them. All these elements are combined skillfully into the folktale heritage as allegorical qualities take form in the clashes between the beautiful good and the deceptive evil. Such clashes are evident in both volumes and are posited in an environment of subjectivity. All the tales have been collected by a beekeeper called Rudy Panko and are narrated with asides and digressions. This literary device is well illustrated in "The Fair at Sorochintsy", where the ending is expected to be a "happy" one, but instead falls into grotesque melancholy and moralizing.

Is it not thus that joy, lovely and fleeting guest, flies from us? In vain the last solitary note tries to express gaiety. In its own echo it hears melancholy and emptiness and listens to it, bewildered. Is it not thus that those who have been playful friends in free and stormy youth, one by one stray, lost, about the world and leave their old comrade lonely and forlorn at last? Sad is the last one left behind! Heavy and sorrowful is his heart and nothing can help him!

Similarly, "A Bewitched Place" ends with the comic hero's turning into an unwitting victim who, as a result, becomes convinced that nothing is what it appears to be.

Whatever the foe of our Lord Christ says, he is always lying . . . There isn't a kopek's worth of truth in him!

Such words of caution about the illusions of life would echo throughout Gogol's late
prose and plays, for example, in "Nevsky Prospekt", The Government Inspector, "Viy", and "The Nose". Other messages can be discovered in the texts; ones which prepare the way for those in Gogol's works after the early 1830's. "Acquisition is the sin behind everything" as the narrator states in Dead Souls I and indeed this "sin" plays an important role in the corrupt town of The Government Inspector and is also treated in the Evenings tales "The Bewitched Spot" and "St. John's Eve". Similarly, the theme of emptiness in a humdrum life so prominent in "Old-World Landowners", "The Overcoat", "The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich", has its roots in "Ivan Fiodorovich Shponka and His Aunt". Also significant in the Shponka tale is the use of dreams to psychoanalyze the hero's fears (in this case the fear of taking on a wife -- such a theme would echo in the play Marriage). Another important element common to the Evenings stories and later works is the ability of Gogol to transport his readers into a world which seems very real while life itself becomes an illusion, and thus the unity of reality and geographical remoteness is a source of psychological power -- for instance, the village in "Viy", the town in The Government Inspector, the town in Dead Souls I, and the estate in "Old-World Landowners" are mature examples of this play of power that had been experimented with in Gogol's first prose writings. Dante would also use such power when he led his readers to the eternal realms in the Commedia. Furthermore, Gogol's ability to make stereotypical subjects like the witch in "Christmas Eve" more penetrating links him with Dante's skill in bringing abstract figures (such as Ulysses and Jason) into the realm of the everyday.

In Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka Gogol uses extensively devices which would shape other stories and plays to come. As a result, the origins of his "commedia del demonio" are not remote, but close at hand. In fact, this is not surprising, for Gogol's intentions to use his art as a vehicle in fulfilling a mission would appear to be present even at this stage. Indeed, Evenings were a testing ground for what was to be more
clearly manifested in *Dead Souls*.

When I wrote my immature and unpublished experiments -- which I call stories only because it was necessary to call them something -- I wrote them only to test my powers and discover whether my quill was sharpened the way I needed it in order to take up the real task.
1. **Old-World Landowners**

**Paradise**

"Old-World Landowners" begins with the external description of a serene, idyllic, and geographically remote setting (Mirgorod - "Peaceville") where the life of the landowners... is so quiet, so quiet, that for a moment one is lost in forgetfulness and imagines that those passions, desires and restless promptings of the evil spirit that trouble the world have no real existence, and that you have only beheld them in some lurid dazzling dream.¹

Several passages further and the narrator intimately introduces the reader to the childless couple, Afanasy Ivanovich and Pulkheria Ivanovna Tovstogub who, like their Garden of Eden, appear as the embodiment of the idyll -- a "Philemon and Baucis". Everything on their estate seems to be self-sufficient. The couple themselves "needed so little". Indeed, they remain innocent of any higher significance in life than their self-imposed comforts. These comforts include habitual cycles of sleeping, chatting and, above all, eating. Consuming the fruits of an abundant harvest in their lush world is the only occupation in which they have become heartily involved. It is a warm, cheerful, even convivial task, but one that reaches the Dantian dimension of "gluttony" -- a sin of misguided love, an incontinence. Self-indulgence, weakness of will, easy yielding to appetite are characteristic of gluttony and it is treated as sightless, cold sensuality in the *Commedia*.² Significantly, one of the doors of their house moans as if it were saying "Holy Saints! I am freezing!"³ Such an aberration in this illusionary paradise is further underlined by nuances of promptings of the demonic, which the landowners do not seem to acknowledge and which the narrator does not dwell upon. Hints of a false Eden are manifested in the servant girl
whose waist was growing much larger than usual, the pilfering of the steward, the terrible number of flies, the unnatural warmth of the house, the decaying trees in the forest. Thus, this Paradise is far from being invulnerable and secure from temptation.

**Purgatory**

In a life based on routine, the unexpected changes the rhythm, thereby stirring the individual into corresponding action. Afanasy's senseless teasing, for example, can be interpreted as an unconscious attempt to excite Pulkheria in order to break away from the monotony and vain repetition in their lives. Similarly, Afanasy is eager to question and listen to the news of the outside world from guests who visit them. And so, in moments such as these, he substitutes his incontinence for other "food". Likewise, Pulkheria, who was "rather grave" and more markedly restrained, busies herself more than ever before in the role of the ideal hostess and eager to please, and equally eager to feed her guests. In light of this subtle metamorphosis, the Paradise which they inhabit becomes less perfect when a more tangible reality intrudes upon their passive, insubstantial lives. This is especially emphasized in the episode with Pulkheria's spoiled grey tabby cat. Pulkheria's cat, which would always lie quietly at her feet, is lured away by some wild tomcats. The importance of such an act is deliberately understated by the narrator-friend of the couple who compares the event to "a company of soldiers enticing a silly peasant girl". Instead, the whole scene recalls Eve being tempted in the Garden of Eden. Eve, in the midst of a vegetative life, was offered an opportunity to discover another world beyond their Paradise; one which could not be obtained without risk, but one which ultimately opened up another "reality". The cat chooses this other reality over the paradisical, even though it is revealed that the cat suffers for it physically. It willingly forsakes the past comforts and food of its mistress. In the biblical text, Eve's acceptance of the new knowledge shook Paradise to its foundations. The cat's disappearance does no less for the old-world
Inferno

As Pulkheria prepares for her death, she undergoes a change which only a violent intrusion of reality could bring about. Like her grey cat, she forsakes former comforts and refuses to eat. In her last moments, she also stops busying herself. Pulkheria, whose serious self-control found an outlet in her great passion for constantly stewing and preserving food and stacking boxes and bags of seeds, simply lies down on her bed to await fate. She, who appeared most blind and suited to the ways of their life, has arrived at some realization. She does not communicate this to her husband, but the words in which she treats him as a child with "pity" and severity may be contrasted with their former habitual bouts of childish chatter and teasing. Afanasy remains uncomprehending. He can only weep and slowly deteriorates into an apathetic old man after his wife's death. At this point the narrator poses the important question of which is stronger in us, "passion or habit"? The fact is that Afanasy lost both a wife-mother and a soul-dominating routine. And when the narrator visits him five years from the time of the funeral, he cannot eat, and even the narrator is unsuccessful in humoring him.

I tried to entertain him and told him various items of news; he listened with the same smile, but from time to time his eyes were completely vacant, and his thoughts did not stray, they vanished.

Indeed, in combination with his wasting physical condition and pronounced inability to feed himself, it would appear Afanasy is undergoing punishment. It is not till he hears his name called, which he believes comes from Pulkheria in the other world, that he dies. The strange call appears to come from nowhere in the death-like stillness of the garden, and here the narrator interjects to quote a similar incident which he has experienced. This experience was characterized by a "terrible spiritual loneliness" for the narrator. No doubt such was the condition from which Afanasy suffered in his last moments.
Several times he struggled to utter his wife's name, but, halfway through the word, his quiet and ordinary face worked convulsively and his childish weeping cut me to the very heart . . . They were tears which brimmed over uninvited, from the accumulated rankling pain of a heart already turning cold.  

Loneliness is "real" and provides the environment for Afanasy's awareness of his blindness; the reality of Hell and death must precede any hope of rebirth. Significantly, the estate the couple owned is managed for a brief while after their passing away; then it, too, deteriorates miserably and the myth of Paradise becomes forever irrevocable.

2. VIY

Paradise

"Viy" begins with comic external descriptions of various seminarian students. The satirical characterization of these students and their banal concerns and quirks are soon narrowed down to focus upon three individuals: Khoma Brut, philosopher, theologian Khaliava and rhetorician Tibery Gorobets.  

Life takes on pleasant proportions for them as the reader learns it is vacation time. The young men in fraternal friendship thus proceed to wander the countryside in search of food (not always in a Christian manner, as they pilfer from gardens) and lodging in villages along the way. With carefree thoughts, they set forth singing and enjoying themselves till they decide to go off the main road. It quickly becomes dark and their Paradise gives way to something ominous. "What the hell does it mean?" Khoma can be heard to mutter. In fact, the darkness is so infernal and blinding they must feel for the road, and on all sides of them appears a steppe "which it seemed no one had ever crossed." However, before fear claims their soul, they find lodgings at the farmhouse of an old woman.
Purgatory

The old woman is in reality a witch and she approaches Khoma Brut during the night to jump on his back for a midnight ride. Khoma is powerless over her, but, as he flies through the night sky, fear is mingled with strange delight as an incomprehensible reality intrudes upon him.

Though the witch is a prominent figure in folktale, Gogol utilizes her presence as Dante was doing when he placed Ulysses and Virgil in the realm of concrete earthly life. The witch is raised from a "two-dimensional unreality" of ancient folklore and spun into the fabric of a man's destiny. She alone is responsible for his awakening of conscience by challenging his paganly indifferent words — "there is no escaping what has to be". Khoma is, ultimately, confronted by what his philosophy cannot teach him and from what it cannot shield him. As Hamlet correctly states:

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Khoma's irreverence in taking the world for granted is mocked by a "rusalka" — a water nymph who, interestingly, is most often a young girl who has met an unnatural death. (Another rusalka plays an important role in "A May Night" from the Evenings tales.) Consequently, this symbolic figure along with the eerie wolf howls heard throughout the story will portend Khoma's own death. The philosopher, however, is only vaguely aware of the implications underlying this experience for him. By chanting a few ritualistic prayers (such a ritual is once again analogous to those in Evenings where characters frequently make the sign of the cross over devils and their associates), he gains control of the witch and beats her mercilessly. This violent action on Khoma's part can be compared with an early Christian chronicle where the devil in the guise of a woman tries to tempt a holy monk -- Nikodim Kozeozersk. The monk resists the allurements and hits the woman till the devil comes out. In "Viy" the witch is transformed into a beautiful young woman whom Khoma, with uneasy feelings, leaves dying. But this is far from the
end of his trials, for a Cossack captain sends for Khoma to keep a three night vigil over his daughter's coffin in the church. Khoma shudders, and not without reason, because the daughter is none other than the dead witch. The reaction of the philosopher is to escape, yet he is powerless to do so when his physical and mental faculties fail to become united in performing such a task. This abortive attempt would be repeated three times before Khoma's untimely demise. His purgatory also takes on another perspective as a reference to "riding" pricks subconscious feelings he cannot explain. For example, when Khoma watches the servants play a game called "kragli" where the winner has the right to ride on the loser's back:

\[
\ldots \text{Khoma tried in vain to give himself up to this game; some gloomy thought stuck in his head like a nail.}^9
\]

In the church, Khoma, filled with fear, draws a circle about himself in which to stand so as to protect himself from any evil spirits the witch may evoke. In this way he manages to withstand the first night. However, he still does not confront the reality troubling him. As soon as he is out of the church, he displays confidence and a lack of concern by making merry in the village. The second night proves to be more terrifying and Khoma's hair turns grey as a result. He appears half-alive and his role of comic victim intensifies in the alienation and hollowness he experiences.

\textit{Inferno}

Khoma does not survive the third night when the most terrifying evocations are brought forth and when, consequently, his inner spirituality becomes frightfully externalized. The seminarian student's refusal to reconcile his finite limitations with a vision of the infinite is tested to the extreme as Viy -- a horrific earth monster whose eyelids reach the floor -- comes forward. All Khoma's fear becomes manifested in this supernatural creature. He is faced with the fact that sin and evil are real, and blindness in their presence is to fall into illusion -- the Inferno. Khoma had always been indifferent
to the workings of these universal forces, belief in which is integral to Christian doctrine. Interestingly, Viy is physically blind (in a symbolic contrast to Khoma's spiritual shortsightedness), and the other spirits must lift his eyelids so that he may gaze at Khoma. This gaze is deadly and kills the philosopher when he cannot help but exchange glances with the earth monster.

Khoma's death is akin to suicide because, in effect, he has seen into himself and what is revealed is so potent it takes his life away. In Dante's *Commedia*, suicide is an anti-natural sin by which the God-willed connection between body and soul has been broken. Indeed, this connection is broken for Khoma as "his soul fled from his body in terror". Furthermore, suicides in the *Commedia* assume the shape of plants as they retain their soul but not the body; only the anguished workings of the mind continue on. In fact, the church in which Khoma dies becomes abandoned after the fateful incident and overrun with thorny plants, trees, and shrubs. Its existence becomes a myth and recalls the fate of the old-world landowners and their estate.

As for Khoma's two comrades, Tibery Gorobets and Khaliava, they perhaps rightly see Khoma's death as being caused by his fear. Yet, in a sense they also fail to understand life's demonic realities -- except for a brief moment when Khaliava finds his tongue mysteriously incapable of uttering a word as Tibery light-heartedly suggests that all the old market women in Kiev are witches. Nonetheless, they experience good fortune in their vocation and cautious approach to life. This is in obvious contrast to Khoma Brut whose actions such as pilfering, seeing the baker's wife on Holy Thursday, and overall indifference made him shortsighted in his implied attitude that he knew all there was to know. When Khoma's attitude was challenged, he feared its implications (and only temporarily at dusk and during the vigil) till it became too late. As one Cossack told Khoma, "...God knows what is wanted, God knows everything." In other words, it is not meant for those on earth to understand everything. The prime criterion is to have
faith. Therefore, even the Church could not help the philosopher, who had been instructed in the ways of the true reality, but ultimately denied its presence.

3. **NEVSKY PROSPEKT**

**Paradise**

"Nevsky Prospekt" is named after St. Petersburg's main avenue on which the story's action begins and ends and which evokes words of admiration from the author in the opening lines:

> There is nothing finer than Nevsky Prospekt... What splendour does it lack, the fairest of our city thoroughfares?¹

The author continues to relate to the reader the almost paradisical quality of this busy street:

> As soon as you step into Nevsky Prospekt you are in an atmosphere of gaiety. Though you may have some necessary and important business, yet as soon as you are there you forget all about it.²

When Gogol proceeds to describe the various people who walk the sidewalk from dawn to dusk, the whole scene becomes animated with the characterization of all levels of society. It is a parade of vanity, truth, and illusion. Snatches of vivid detail are presented as if one were hurrying by like the other pedestrians. Infused into these snapshot depictions is a banal sense of humour aimed at the subjects being portrayed. From out of the throng of people, who change considerably in profession and status as the dusk descends with all its ambiguity, the author singles out two individuals -- the idealistic artist Piskarev and the confident non-entity Lieutenant Pirogov. Two beautiful and elusive women have just passed them by. Pirogov follows the blonde and Piskarev the dark-haired replica of Perugino's "Bianca". Piskarev is allured by this beauty whom he sees instantly in terms of his art.
. . . (her) stunning figure and the lines of the face . . . exquisite!"\n
Though the woman appears almost angry at his impudence in following her, Piskarev blames everything on the deceptive light.

. . . it was the deceptive light of the street lamp which had thrown that trace of a smile upon her lips; no, his own imagination was mocking him.\n
Pirogov, on the other hand, is allured by the blonde woman for more egotistic reasons than the idealistic Piskarev:

"We know what you all are," Pirogov thought to himself, with a self-satisfied and confident smile, convinced that no beauty could withstand him.\n
Purgatory

Piskarev's purgatorial state begins when he learns that "Bianca" is a prostitute. However, this aberration only feeds his creative fire because her beauty haunts him and he cannot purge himself of its reality.

"Such a beauty, such divine features! And where? In such a place . . ."\n
He desperately tries to equate her physical beauty with inner spiritual goodness. In his passion to reconcile this ideal, he resorts to opium. As a consequence, his will and desire start to revolve around a false reality and he falls into illusion and alienation. Such was the force behind the fall of the angels.

Jung explains a similar condition which he believes to be common in artists, as consisting of two contrasting forces:

. . . the common human longing for happiness, satisfaction and security in life, and a ruthless passion for creativity, may go so far as to override every other desire . . .\n
Indeed, Piskarev's dream world would seem to illustrate this condition as the artist tries to create a perfect individual who embodies all his desires. The true disharmony of his
situation is evident when he awakens from his dream state.

The unwelcome dawn was peeping in at his window with its unpleasant, dingy light. The room was in such a gray, untidy muddle... Oh, how revolting was reality! What was it compared to dreams?8

Pirogov's adventure is a farcical one and does not reach the purgatorial dimensions of Piskarev's. Even after Pirogov learns the blonde is the rather dull wife of a German craftsman, even after this husband insults his status of lieutenant, Pirogov must continue his quest. His resilient buoyancy does not let him fall into despair, because he does not allow his limitations to become more than they are by indulging in "lofty" thoughts.

Inferno

After a particularly convincing dream in which the feverish Piskarev sees himself as a saviour redeeming the "fallen" woman, he returns to the prostitute offering himself to her as a respectable companion. His "Bianca's" jeering reaction is a breath of crass reality to Piskarev; one which he cannot face. In his great despair, Piskarev commits suicide.

Pirogov does not enter the "real" Inferno, as he did not enter into a Purgatory. Though he manages to kiss the blonde woman, he is caught by her husband who hits him. Pirogov is insulted by this "blow" to his rank and wants to lodge a complaint. Instead, he consumes some pastries then drops in on a rather enjoyable party.

In the closing lines, Gogol refers to the devil as placing everything and everybody in a false light and thus distorting the ambiguous line between illusion and reality, which is epitomized in the case of Piskarev. Pirogov is also deceived by this devil, but his banal qualities make him a better survivor of such a situation, because he emerges as a victor in deceiving the devil right back again. This is in direct contrast to the victim in Piskarev who, through his sensitivity and vulnerability, is led astray from the real light into darkness.
how frightening a sight it can be to a man when he is presented with shadows, and how much more threatening is the absence of light.

In Dante's *Commedia*, *L'Inferno* is characterized by terrible darkness and the inhabitants are only shades of their former being. *Il Paradiso*, on the other hand, is full of radiating light and the inhabitants glow from their spiritual illumination. This may be compared to the early morning light on Nevsky Prospekt which is enjoyed by the more industrious individuals of society... women selling baked goods, peasants, and other workers. Interestingly, these people do not use the avenue as "a goal... but simply as the means of reaching it". They have no illusions about the avenue as they occupy themselves with other concerns. However, as the day progresses towards dusk, the people traversing Nevsky Prospekt are more frivolous and vain. They walk about the avenue to see and be seen. And when the street lights are aglow, a false light illuminates everything, thereby creating a false reality. Policemen, painted young women, and gentlemen with certain objectionable inclinations stroll along the avenue and the disillusioned like Piskarev become even more so. As Dante implies in *Il Paradiso*, the angels fell because they could not wait for the true light of reality.

4. **THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR**

*The Government Inspector*, Gogol's best dramatic work, begins in a way familiar to so many other works of Gogol, where various groups of people are satirized; in this case they are the officials of a small, corrupt, geographically remote town. In contrast to Dante's *Il Paradiso* in which society is an ideal constitution in working order, the Paradise envisioned here is a heaven on earth precisely because it does not work. Officials with loose morals have created a Paradise for themselves by enjoying the comforts they attain through
cheating, swindling, and the like. It is a society based on absurd principles of justification.

MAYOR: As for what Chmykhov calls "our little weaknesses", that's not for me to talk about. No man is without sin, because that's the way the good Lord made us.¹

In "Advice to Those Who Would Play The Government Inspector as It Ought to Be Played" (1846), Gogol justifies the actions of the Mayor as being caused by his weakness for any gain. Gogol further stresses that the vices of the Judge, Postmaster, Zemlyanika, and so on are common to all mankind.² They are also aware of these vices; for example, the Mayor senses that he is a sinner and frequents the church.

MAYOR: ... I am firm in my faith, at least.³

Therefore, when the news arrives that a government inspector will pass through their town, this sense of guilt is manifested in fear which intrudes upon their Paradise. Their fear is especially heightened as two bunglers, Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky, believe the inspector is already in town at the hotel. The man mistaken for the inspector is none other than Ivan Khlestakov who, in reality, is only a clerk from the capital, St. Petersburg, and who has just lost all his money at cards. He is no doubt another Pirogov -- banal, pompous, and not endowed with lofty thoughts other than those concerned with food, clothes, and comfort. His mistaken identity is imposed upon him by the "terror clouding the eyes" of the townspeople.⁴ As a result, Khlestakov gains in comic stature as the townspeople are led into a purgatorial state.

Purgatory

In Dante's Il Purgatorio, society is to engage in the purging of corruption and return to an ideal working order which was God's intention when He created man as a social being. In The Government Inspector, awakenings of conscience are apparent as the officials act with irrationality in light of their misdeeds. It is more fear, however, that
propels them than acknowledgement of God's intent. Consequently, they see every naive move of Khlestakov as a diabolically clever plan to deceive them. The officials themselves think that they are deceiving him in turn.

For two acts Khlestakov is still ignorant of the reason behind his success with these people who treat him with godly reverence. Naturally, farcical deception and misinterpretation mount as the self-confident imposter plays up to their illusions by narrating tall tales of Petersburg's splendour and his intimate involvement with society there. His interlocutors are impressed and feed him more topics for conversation. Khlestakov, being the fellow he is, obliges willingly and unconsciously becomes the dignitary he wishes to be instead of a lowly clerk subjected to humiliation. (Ironically, Khlestakov's status is much lower in rank than any of the town officials'.) Indeed, Khlestakov becomes so carried away as his imagination is fueled by the imagination and expectations of the Mayor and his entourage, that the situation expands to hyperbolic dimensions -- a Paradise for Khlestakov and a Purgatory for the others. The false inspector only realizes that he has been mistaken for some other personage when his servant, Osip, advises him to leave; but not before he has taken guilt-laden bribes, and not before flirting openly with both the wife and the daughter of the Mayor.

In the fifth act, all believe that he will marry the Mayor's daughter, and consequently, the Mayor and his wife ascend to an illusion in which they envision themselves in all the glory of Petersburg society as the "in-laws" of the government inspector.

**Inferno**

The Inferno is a realization of corruption in terms of society as a whole and a judgment on those who refused to see their weaknesses. Such is the case when Khlestakov leaves and a letter that he has sent to a gossip columnist is intercepted by the local
postmaster. The townspeople are faced with the reality of their own shortcomings. The Mayor is thunderstruck and ceases to be a ridiculous figure as this new reality intrudes. It is a moment of revelation:

MAYOR: What are you laughing at . . .? You are laughing at yourselves.\(^5\)

But the descent into the Inferno has just begun as the arrival of the "real" government inspector is announced. The concluding dumb scene, in which all the characters stand on stage in silence facing the audience, recalls the epigraph that Gogol added later to his play in 1842.

Don't blame the mirror if your face is lopsided.

Dante, too, by holding up a mirror to his fellow creatures in the shape of examples, tried to labour for their reclamation. No doubt reclamation was also on Gogol's mind.

Gogol, in a letter to M.P. Pogodin of January 18, 1836, requested that the play be performed at Easter.\(^6\) The implications inherent in this request cannot be ignored and, indeed, would again be echoed in his "The Denouement of The Government Inspector" (1846).

FIRST COMIC ACTOR: . . . let us look, as well as we can, with the eyes of Him Who will call all men to account, before Whom the best of us -- mark it well -- will cast down their eyes in shame. Let us see who will then have enough courage to ask, "Is my face crooked?" Pray we are not alarmed by our own crookedness, just as we felt no fear upon seeing the crookedness of those officials . . .?\(^7\)
CONCLUSION

When Gogol wrote *Dead Souls*, he may have regarded his "poema" in light of the tripartite scheme of Dante Alighieri's *La Divina Commedia*. The fact that Gogol only completed the "Inferno" part to *Dead Souls*, being unable to write a satisfactory second part, Purgatory, or a third part, Paradise, is significant in showing the writer's own limitations as reflected in his characters and in the unsuccessful attempt itself.

While Gogol spent the last decade of his life working on the novel, he wished to infuse it with a grand Christian message no less divine than Dante's would be in his *Il Paradiso*. With past disappointments, in terms of an audience who had misinterpreted this message, Gogol confronted his friends in various letters.

Don't even be afraid of your first impression that the exaltation in many passages seemed to you to have reached the point of ridiculous excess. It is true, because the full meaning of the lyrical hints can only be elucidated when the last part is published . . .¹

Can't you see that to this time everyone still takes my book as satire and personalities, while there is not a shadow of satire or personalities in it -- which can be noted fully after several readings.²

But his mission as prophet of the human soul would not end here. He would emphasize his views further in other letters, *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*, *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy*, and in an *Author's Confession*.

Though Gogol's spirituality had become more intense toward the end of his life as manifested in his last works, it was always present in one form or another. Gogol himself admits to his early religious awakenings in a letter to his mother regarding the Last Judgment, and in a letter from school asserting his desire to participate in a mission for Russia. Gogol also admits that writing itself had religious dimensions (while completing *Dead Souls I*):

A holy trembling runs through me . . . I will experience divine moments . . .³
Interestingly, Gogol began pondering over his future epic in 1836 after having published *The Government Inspector*, *Mirgorod* and *Arabesques*. This important period from 1835 to 1836 can be seen as a bridge linking Gogol's early comic-gothic tales of *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* (1831–1832) with the mature style and humour of *Dead Souls* and, especially, as a bridge linking a discreet religious message with a more overt one.

The foregoing discussion has viewed "Old-World Landowners", "Viy", "Nevsky Prospekt", and *The Government Inspector* as particularly representative of this period in that they expose the workings of a definite pattern quite Dantesque in form. They illustrate a "commedia del demonio" whereby events and characters are led through Paradise-illusion, Purgatory-awakenings of conscience, and the Inferno-realization. The tripartite scheme recalls Dante's *La Divina Commedia* and, in fact, they are akin to each other in certain literary devices used and, ultimately, in the religious message they convey. However, a major difference occurs in the presentation of reality facing the characters. Gogol's brand of banal comicality forms an environment which, by its very nature, causes the characters to descend into realization rather than ascend to it; their convenient world of illusion crumbling before the intrusion of the demonic or earthly element in life. Such a difference is also inherent in the authors themselves, in their view of the nature of God and the Devil. For Dante, the reality of the divine and earthly was fundamentally a matter of faith and of illuminating individual experience. Gogol, on the other hand, seems to have felt the need to demonstrate what he could not experience and, as for his faith, it was often infused with more fear than illumination. (Nabokov suggests he believed more in the Devil than in God.) Consequently, the world portrayed by Gogol is an infernal and illusory one.

*It is a dreary world, gentlemen.*
NOTES TO INTRODUCTION


It should be further noted that Gogol's knowledge of Italian was satisfactory enough for him to read Dante in the original. Indeed, among his books was a selection containing the Italian poet. N.V. Gogol', *Materialy i issledovaniiia*, pod redaktsiei V.V. Gippiusa (Slavica Reprint Nr. 48., Vaduz, Liechtenstein: Europe Printing Establishment, 1970), Vol. I, p. 38.

There does not appear to have been a complete Russian translation of the *Commedia* at this time. (M.L. Lozinsky completed the Soviet edition of Dante's "Bozhestvennaia Kommedii" in 1946.) Nonetheless, many Russian scholars were acquainted with Dante's work, including some of Gogol's closest friends. For example, P.V. Annenkov attended a lecture on Dante at the Sorbonne in Paris (1842). P.V. Annenkov, *Parizhskie pis'ma* (Moskva: Izdatelstvo "Nauka", 1983), p. 61.


In fact Shevyrev began a translation of *The Divine Comedy* in Munich which he was unable to finish. Gogol comments on this task in his letter to "S.P. Shevyrev. September 10, 1839. Vienna." in *Letters*, pp. 83–84.

Furthermore, A.I. Herzen writes of Gogol's *Dead Souls I* in connection with Dante in his diary of July 29, 1842. An excerpt from this diary entry may be found in *Gogol' v vospominaniakh kh sovremennikov* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatelstvo-Khudozhestvennoi Literatury, 1952), pp. 389–390.


and


Interestingly, Gogol is quoted as having compared Pushkin's poetic tercet lines to Dante's. *Gogol'v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, p. 440.

Likewise, it is significant that Gogol first wrote to Pushkin about his plans for *Dead Souls*. Gogol, letter to "A.S. Pushkin. October 7, 1835, St. Petersburg." as translated in *Letters of Nikolay Gogol*, ed. Carl R. Proffer, p. 52.

As a final note, it may be pointed out that Driessen remarks on Gogol's use of imagery in "A Terrible Revenge" (*Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* (1831-1832) as being strikingly parallel to Dante's imagery in Cantos XXII-XXIII where sinners in the Inferno gnaw upon each other. F.C. Driessen, *Gogol as a Short Story Writer*, translated by Ian F. Finlay (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), p. 109.

---

5Refer to notes 1 and 2.


NOTES TO GOGOL AND DANTE: CORRELATIONS


6Gogol, Selected Passages, p. 111.


Nonetheless, some points are noteworthy if elucidated. For instance, Dante did include individuals in his Commedia who were in contact with Byzantium, and consequently he may have had personal contacts with individuals who introduced him to Eastern apocrypha. Such apocrypha and certain Eastern religious sects -- the Bogomils or Catharists (sometimes referred to as Albigensians) were acknowledged by many scholars. See: Paget Toynbee, A Dictionary of Proper Names and Notable Matters in the Works of Dante, revised by Charles Singleton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) and also Karl Vossler, Mediaeval Culture: An Introduction to Dante and His Times, translated by W.C. Lawton, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929).


13Benz, The Eastern Orthodox Church, p. 51.


15Dante, "Epistle X" in Epistolae, pp. 160-211.

16Ibid., p. 200.


24Gogol, Selected Passages, p. 103.

25Dante, Epistolae, p. 200.


28Gogol, "Petersburg Notes of 1836" in the Appendix of The Theatre of Nikolay Gogol, p. 167.


30Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, p. 188.

31The concept of "banal" is rendered in the Russian Word "poshlost" and is used frequently by Gogol in his works. For a definition of "poshlost", see: Vladimir Nabokov, Nikolai Gogol (New York: New Directions, 1961).

NOTES TO PARADISE, PURGATORY, INFERNO

1 Alexander Slonimsky, "The Technique of the Comic in Gogol" in Gogol from the Twentieth Century, p. 338.


3 Comic victim and victor are terms taken from the above-mentioned source -- Nelvin Vos. These terms well apply to many of the situations created by Gogol in his works.

4 For a discussion on Dante's humour, see: Dorothy Sayers, "The Comedy of the Comedy" in her study, Introductory Papers on Dante, pp. 151-178.

5 Leonard J. Kent, The Subconscious in Gogol and Dostoevskii and Its Antecedents, p. 53.


Perhaps only the rubbish of the customs of society and habits which are acquired can hide both you and your soul somewhat, but that is for near-sighted people who judge a man from a few external features. In the eyes of an expert on the human soul you are always the same.

6 L.J. Kent, The Subconscious, p. 57.

7 Gogol, Selected Passages, p. 107.

NOTES TO TRANSITION FROM "EVENINGS ON A FARM NEAR DIKANKA"

1Alexander N. Konrad, Old Russia and Byzantium, p. 227.


3Ibid., pp. 205–206.

4Gogol, Dead Souls, p. 298.


NOTES TO "OLD WORLD LANDOWNERS"


3 Gogol, The Complete Tales, II, p. 5.


5 Ibid., p. 20.

6 Ibid., p. 19.

7 Ibid., p. 21.

8 Ibid., p. 20.
NOTES TO "VIY"

1In The Complete Tales of Nikolai Gogol, Vol. II, (p. 132). Leonard J. Kent notes that "philosopher", "rhetorician", "theologian" refer to different classes of seminarian students. I.e. rhetoricians = sophomores; philosophers = juniors; theologians = seniors.


3Ibid., p. 137.


8A.N. Konrad, Old Russia and Byzantium, p. 219.


10See Canto XIII in Dante's Hell of The Comedy, I, pp. 149-155.


12Ibid., p. 145.
NOTES TO "NEVSKY PROSPEKT"

1 Gogol, The Complete Tales, I, p. 207.
2 Ibid., p. 207.
3 Ibid., p. 212.
5 Ibid., p. 213.
6 Ibid., p. 218.
8 Gogol, The Complete Tales, I, p. 222.
9 Gogol, Selected Passages, p. 105.
NOTES TO THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR


7Gogol, "The Denouement of The Government Inspector" in The Theatre of Nikolay Gogol, p. 188.
NOTES TO CONCLUSION


5 Vladimir Nabokov, Nikolay Gogol, p. 73.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


