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## The Problem of Human Identity in Gogol's Works

*Andreas Larson's monograph «Gogol and The Problem of Human Identity» emphasizes that the problem of human identity runs through all of Gogol's work as a red thread. It also highlights that Gogol's views on life in his literary works are veiled and can only be identified in a broad context.*

*A. Larson underlines, that from his earliest years Gogol was looking for an occupation that could benefit people and managed to show his comic talent with the success of «Evenings on a farm near Dikanka». Since then, he was considered a comic author. However, at that time, Gogol still thought that his fantastic worlds had to seem comical to readers for the same reasons they appeared so to him. Only after the audience's reaction to the comedy «The Government Inspector» showed that even the way his friends reacted to this piece differed a lot from what he had predicted, Gogol began to doubt the power of laughter. From that moment, he was becoming more and more didactic.*

*Gogol hoped that «The Government Inspector» would have a greater impact on people than the stories he wrote, as he considered the theatre as a means of mass influence. In the bizarre world of comedy based on the incorrect identification of actors, Gogol clearly defines laughter as the only positive character in the play. Therein lies his theory of the didactic effect of the comic grotesque. Only with the help of laughter readers can free themselves from the grotesque, step aside and break its bonds. Gogol endowed his characters with such features that, despite the total absence of positive qualities, they were similar to real people. In this way, he hoped that the audience would be able to identify with these characters and by breaking the shackles of the grotesque they would get rid of their shortcomings,*

vices, and inferiority. According to A. Larson, his mistake consisted in the fact that the vast majority of the public had a completely different starting point of view in world perception than Gogol.

Gogol defined the plot of his work as the «soul of man». At the same time, the German researcher claims, he knew for sure neither his own personality nor, even more so, the ideal personality of a person. He consistently strengthened realistic didactic elements in his works to force the reader to accept the author's point of view. Thus, according to A. Larson, Gogol raped himself.

**Key words:** Gogol, creativity, humour, laughter, grotesque, comedy, realistic elements, worldview, search, identity.

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Despite the big number of works already written about Gogol, he still receives increased attention from researchers. Not only the originality and mystery of Gogol's personality causes this interest, but also the necessity to find new aspects of the analysis and interpretation of the writer's worldview and creativity, as well as the need to outline new perspectives for the study of his works.

The modern stage of Gogol studies development is characterized by the existence of Russian and Ukrainian views on Gogol's life and work (cf. Yu. O. Lutskyi. The Martyrdom of Mykola Gogol, also known as Nikolai Gogol. - K.: Znannia Ukrainy, 2002). The «German» view which we propose in the book «Mykola Gogol in German Scientific and Fiction» (Nizhyn, 2020) allows us to expand the available Ukrainian- and Russian-language sources, in particular, by paying special attention to Gogol's inclination towards religiosity. In this aspect, it will be interesting to compare Rolf-Dietrich Kiel's fundamental researches and the part of Sigrid Richter's dissertation research on Gogol's attitude to Catholicism with Elizabeth von Erdman's article on the relationship between the Divine Liturgy and food in «Dead Souls», which seems far from the issue at least judging from the title.

A large amount of information is also contained in the works written by other German researchers of Gogol's creativity, who highlight Gogol's place in Russian and world literature and analyze the original features of his style. In particular, we would like to dwell in more detail on the paper «GOGOL AND THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN IDENTITY» by Andreas Larson. The author emphasizes that only recently the focus of the studies connected with Gogol and his creativity has been shifted to the problem of human identity as a fundamental one in the writer's work. However, even modern researches are mostly limited to the analysis of only individual works. Thus, we get no answer to the question, of whether the

theme is arbitrary or it may be considered crucial for the poet and thinker Gogol when there is a problematization of human identity in a particular story.

This paper aims at revealing the problem of identity in Gogol's works as a constant and to combine this issue with the poetic identity of the author of the texts as well as with the existential identity of the writer Gogol. Andreas Larson's brief overview of the actual state of research on Gogol's creativity should, in his opinion, illustrate how far all previous papers were from the problem of human identity in Gogol's works.

In particular, he notes that the first reviews of Gogol's literary creativity concerned «Evenings on a farm near Dikanka» and emphasized two facts – Gogol's humour and realism. The concept of «realism» in these early analyses meant only that Gogol wrote prose and that he depicted folk life in Ukraine, which was mostly perceived as naturalistic depictions of life in Ukraine.

Later, based on these early views three main approaches to perceive Gogol developed. The destructive one tried to consolidate for Gogol the image of the author of unpretentious folk humoresques. It constantly accused him of not knowing the Russian language and violating the rules of good taste. The second approach, started by Pushkin, has a positive character. It emphasized primarily humour, artistic talent, and literary significance in Gogol's works. The third approach focused on the study of realism in Gogol's works, which was introduced as something fundamentally new in Russian literature. Representatives of this approach highlighted the presence of tangible socio-critical features in his works. They proclaimed Gogol the founder of the natural school and in such a way determined the direction of Gogol studies in Russia and then in the Soviet Union for many years ahead.

In the 1840s, the fourth approach, called the Slavophile, emerged. It interpreted Gogol from a religious-nationalist perspective.

According to A. Larson, among these four approaches, Pushkin's is more focused on the issue of identity, as its key research point is the humour and fictionality of Gogol's stories.

As for those critics who evaluated both realistic and socio-critical aspects of Gogol's works, they didn't consider the grotesque elements of Gogol's texts. As a result, they perceived literary figures as portraits of real people.

The German researcher also notes, that the decisive factor for all modern Gogol studies still consists in taking into account his biographical

facts. In Russia, these were the works of S. T. Aksakov, P. V. Annenkov and P. A. Kulish, which appeared shortly after Gogol's death and enabled a systematic study of Gogol as a writer. Some essays on Gogol's biography were also printed in the magazine «Sovremennik» after his death.

At the turn of the 20th century, a second wave of biographical works on Gogol appeared. Priest Ioann Dobronravov (1901) wrote about Gogol's love for his neighbour, A. Ponomariov (1902) published, mainly, a biographical report timed to the 50th anniversary of the writer's death, A.I. Kirpichnikov (1900, 1902) studied some biographical data about Gogol, I. Zhytetskyi (1909) published Gogol's biography, which also interpreted his religiosity, H. P. Georgievskyi supplemented the contemporary publications about Gogol with materials that had not been published before, and D.M. Ovsianyko-Kulykovskyi (1909) wrote the first literary biography of the writer.

The first truly multifaceted modern biography of Gogol was the one written by V. V. Hippus (1924), who critically analyzed and systematized the known biographical materials in a new way.

Later, the image of Gogol in Soviet literature was defined by the works of Mashynskyi and Stepanov.

Outside of Russia, the facts of Gogol's biography didn't become known quickly. R. Turneva's (Raina Tyrneva) monograph (1901) remained almost unknown to the general public. So, in 1925, S.A. Menning could write about Gogol in the magazine «The Slavonic and East European Review» as if he was completely unknown, although at that time L. Leger's biography of the writer (1913) had already been published in France. Later, there appeared the biographies of Gogol, which presented very peculiar and ambiguous portraits of the writer. They were written by such authors as V. Nabokov (1944, 1984), H. Troia (1977), A. Sinyavsky (1975). Biographical works on Gogol also appeared in most Western European countries. In the English-speaking world, these were books by J. Lavrin (1951), V. Ehrlich (1969), T.S. Lindstrom (1974) and D. Fanger (1979). In France, in addition to those already mentioned, books by Pavlo Yevdokymov and Boris de Shlotzer were published. In Germany, some monographs were written by A. Brückner (1905), V. Sechkarev (1953), Rolf-Dieter Keil (1985) and Maximilian Braun (1973).

The socio-critical perception of Gogol, which became widespread in the Soviet Union, was picked up by V. I. Shenrok at the beginning of the 20th century. But it had undergone many transformations before it

became a canon of Soviet reception of the classic. This reception began in the 1920s with a critical judgment that recognized Gogol's early works as masterpieces. However, it noted that further Slavophile friends and conservatives were increasingly steering it towards a «false» direction. In the late 1920s, Gogol was already seen as a writer with two sides: reactionary and revolutionary. In the 1930s, the image of Gogol as a realist strengthened, and around 1938, he was reinforced with national and patriotic traits. After the Second World War, until the 1980s, the prevailing image of Gogol was based on the works of Belinsky and the revolutionary democrats.

Although in the mid-80s this direction continued to dominate, it was no longer the only one in the Soviet Union.

In the West, there is also a tendency to consider Gogol primarily as a realist, and partly as a social critic. A. Sainte-Beuve and P. Merimet considered him a realist who depicted Russian reality. This point of view was also supported by R. Turneva (Raina Tyrneva). However, she also added a socio-critical component to it. We find a similar view in Wolfgang Storch's works. R.H. Freeborn (Freeborn R.H.) published a commentary on the list of perspectives, the observance of which allowed considering Gogol as a realist writer.

Further in his work, A. Larson writes that even during Gogol's lifetime and immediately after his death, the humorous aspect of his creativity attracted the attention of Belinsky, as well as S. P. Shevryov, O. I. Zenkovsky and A. F. Pisemsky. Shevryov was the one who understood that laughter in Gogol's works was designed to create distance and was used as a kind of filter. This is exactly how Gogol described laughter in his comments to «The Government Inspector». Zenkovsky spoke about a purifying, triumphant, lyrical laughter. Belinsky believed that Gogol's laughter developed from the comic to the tragic and ended in tears. Pisemsky considered Gogol's humour as the most important component of his creativity. As soon as Gogol becomes serious, he immediately loses his persuasiveness. According to him, Gogol is a humorist, not a lyricist.

In the 20th century, humour continued to be viewed as an important aspect of his works. Although various researchers who have studied Gogol's humour and grotesque clearly indicate the complexity of Gogol's texts, they still don't extend beyond a simple statement of this fact. Anyway, all of them don't go beyond the technical level. They answer in one way or another the question «How?», but ignore the question «Why?». Often these interpretations move in circles. Although in their

definitions of the grotesque character of Gogol's humour, the researchers credit humour with a significant role in Gogol's creativity, they always conclude that Gogol's works are comic and sometimes grotesque, but the grotesque simultaneously serves as a stylistic device of the comic. Of course, this is true, but it does not lead anywhere further. The central question of why Gogol, who defined an artist's task mainly from an ethical and didactic standpoint, chose the comic grotesque as a fundamental stylistic tool, remains open. Actually, it is quite surprising that this question hasn't been raised even more radically, since Pushkin was one of the first to point out the comic and grotesque effect of Gogol's works. At the same time, there are more than enough reasons to pose such a question. Rozanov saw Gogol as the first Russian ironist; Annensky devoted an entire chapter of his two-volume book to Gogol's humour.

Larson also emphasizes, that for a long time in Soviet literature, Gogol was mainly viewed as the satirist, who blamed society with the help of his caricatures and wanted to change it. In addition, Gogol's humour had an allegedly folk character. Satire arises from this folk character for the benefit of the people, at the expense of the ruling class. In these studies, humour is subordinated to critical realism as a stylistic device. But since the complexity of Gogol's stories is not taken into account, and if we proceed from the fact that it is simply a reflection of reality as such, then it becomes obvious that these searches do not touch the core of the problem.

Shortly after Gogol's death, P. V. Annenkov wrote that the greatest thing which Gogol had was his free fantasy. If he had remained devoted to his imagination and stuck to the role of a pure artist, he would have been able to create a positive image of Russia. His mistake was that in the later years of his work, he began to charge art with ideology.

A. Larson points out, that at the beginning of the 20th century, several critics and literary scholars dealt with the aesthetic aspect of Gogol's work. The subjective, irrational approach of the Symbolists denied any connection between Gogol's work and reality. And yet some of them formulated several formal questions, which were further picked up in later works, in particular by Russian formalists.

In Western Gogol studies, Donald Fanger and Viktor Ehrlich have tended to view Gogol's works under the artefact aspect. Ehrlich considers nonsense to be the main feature of Gogol's works, while for Fanger the verbalization of characters is the most prominent peculiarity.

These approaches are also directed against the non-critical perception of Gogol's fictitious world, but they do not analyze the author's worldview, which prompts him to create these fictitious worlds.

S. A. Vengerov stylizes Gogol as a completely unaware artist who did not know Russia, the country which he was describing, and whose ideological works were to a greater or lesser extent an unreflective imprint of the mentality of that time. Some critics and researchers created the image of Gogol as a reactionist loyal to the tsarist regime.

E. S. Smirnova-Chikina tries to explain Gogol's position from a sociological point of view. As a nobleman, he, first of all, identified himself with the nobles, and because of that, his decisions were always conceived by him as a solution to the crisis of the nobility.

In the course of Soviet rehabilitation, Gogol's reactionary position was identified with the late stage of his work, see «Літературна критика» No. 4, 1938. Here, like in Belinsky's research papers, Gogol is portrayed as a liberal whose reactionary behaviour is triggered by the exploitative system. A. Brückner believes, for example, that in «Selected Passages» Gogol shows his real face as a «convinced representative of the official program».

Ideas about the cynical, misanthropic Gogol, who after all can be considered as an apologist for the existing system, are also found in works by Horst Jürgen Gerigke.

This perception, according to Andreas Larson, is caused by the overly simple, at first glance, picture of Gogol's works. The theses of socio-critical representatives only distort their content, leaving out of consideration the problematization of human identity, which arises precisely as a result of the texts' complexity.

As a reaction to the symbolists' works and the widespread ignoring of the formal aspects of Gogol's work, there appeared the interpretation of Gogol, proposed by the formal school.

However, the technical aspects of this interpretation are not of significant interest, since the extralinguistic aspects of Gogol's work remain out of sight.

Further, A. Larson indicates that Ermakov (1922, 1923) was the first who applied Freudian principles to the interpretation of Gogol's work. The nose in the story of the same name turns into a phallic symbol, and the story itself is viewed in the light of sadomasochistic symbolism. Mental illness and mental perversion are, in Yermakov's opinion, the subject of all other «Petersburg Tales». In addition, Ermakov also highlights the

nose-dream palindrome, which, according to the theory of dream interpretation, makes his explanation convincing and reminds us that in an early, unpublished edition, Gogol intended to reveal the mystery of «Nose» as a dream that was supposed to end together with Kovalev's awakening.

Of course, the Freudian interpretation has its supporters in the West as well. In 1932, B. D. Schlosser insisted on the necessity of using these very principles in further researches. However, according to Larson, he was, apparently, not familiar with Ermakov's work.

Then, the German researcher of Gogol's creativity analyzes the dissertation of Eigen Stephensen (1967), which is written as Gogol's biography, but from a psychological point of view, and the works of Leon Stilman, J. Lavrin and Hugh McLean, who look for neuroses in Gogol's works. He also mentions S. Karlinsky (1976), who devotes his whole book to the hypothesis of Gogol's alleged homosexuality.

Although Leonard J. Kant finds in Gogol's creativity the author's unconscious preoccupation with his own neuroses, he also indicates the fact that the school of subconscious in Russian literature was founded on the basis of Gogol's works. Further, the researcher traces this topic on the material of Dostoevsky's works.

A. Larson concludes, that in most psychological papers, the contradictions that arise between Gogol's fictitious worlds and reality are interpreted as subconscious disorders in his world perception. Since their interest is directed rather to the writer's biographical figure as a pathology, than to the intention of the texts, they proceed from the fact that Gogol aimed to create simple descriptions of reality, but, meanwhile, as a result of his neuroses, he got a distorted picture of this reality. At the same time, Gogol's statements about the tasks of literature are not taken into account.

Religious and ethical approaches to the interpretation of Gogol's work take Gogol's statements regarding his worldview seriously. Their representatives often examine in detail publicists' commentaries on literary works, as well as Gogol's letters. They help to shed some light on the motivations behind the problematization of human identity. However, they often fail to notice the grotesque and comic features of the texts. Like representatives of the social-realist approach or supporters of the thesis that Gogol is an apologist for the existing order, they also do not see the complexity of the storyline in the writer's works. For this reason, in the given studies, a contradiction always arises between Gogol's statements of religious character and his literary works. It happens because the



alienation of the narrative world is not recognized as an effective tool to put the human being under question.

When in the 1940s some Slavophiles managed to refer to Gogol's statements, a new approach emerged. It considered the writer mainly from an ethical or religious point of view. The first representatives of this movement were Gogol's contemporaries, in particular the Aksakovs. At the turn of the 20th century, when Gogol was, so to speak, rediscovered, he was commonly interpreted from a moral point of view.

In 1916, Zenkovsky wrote a series of articles about Gogol's religious search. He deeply studied Gogol's dualism between vulgarity, worthlessness and mundaneness, on the one hand, and the ideal, on the other. He emphasized that Gogol's realism was only a means of human research. It's also necessary to add that humour and grotesque always served only as a means to question the essence of a person. Nevertheless, Zenkovsky still considerably gravitated towards the realist image of Gogol.

After the revolution, Zenkovsky's interpretive approach was continued by Russian literary scholars (some of them were in exile). Dmytro Chyzhevskiyi interprets Gogol's intention as an attempt to show how petty passions can destroy a person. People should not cling to things, but find the core in themselves, and this core is God.

Western studies often emphasized the religious elements in Gogol's work. Boris de Schlosser highlighted them in his monograph. This also applies to the works by Gerhardt, Schulze, Yevdokimov and Nigge.

In addition, there is a large number of smaller works that deal with partial aspects of Gogol's religiosity, for example, Zeman's article on the influence of a religious legend on «The Overcoat», Feri von Lilienthal's work on Gogol's «Reflections on the Divine Liturgy», the article by R. D. Kyle about biblical quotations in Gogol's works and many others.

Among the scientists who emphasized the ethical aspect of Gogol's works, but didn't refer to the religious one, we find, first of all, L.D. Kent, T.S. Lindstrom, Maximilian Brown, and Yuri Mann.

Talking about modern scholars who have highlighted Gogol's religiosity, we should mention Hildegund Schreier and Lorenzo Amberta.

Andreas Larson underlines that even Gogol's contemporaries mentioned the peculiarities of Gogol's characters. At first, it was a question of their authenticity and realism. Some of the critics, such as, for example, M. Poleva, believed that the described people didn't exist in reality. She

argued they were unrealistic, one-dimensional and therefore unsuitable for the role of literary heroes.

Other critics, on the contrary, perceived Gogol's characters as realistic. In 1835, Shevryov perceived the characters of «Myrhorod» as drawn from nature and not as caricatures. According to him, the characters' comic personality is based on the fact that man is a rational being, so the irrational in him always has a humorous effect. This is precisely the kind of comedy that Gogol portrays. In 1842, Shevryov extended this approach and used it while analyzing «Dead Souls». He claims that Chichikov is a hero of his time as realistic and life-like as the images of landowners. Gogol wants to depict the disgusting objectively while subjectively he distances himself from it with the help of the comic. I. I. Davydov expressed a similar opinion in the obituary of Gogol: the readers recognize themselves again in Gogol's heroes. Gogol depicts the ideal of life in roundabout ways through repulsive characters. A. I. Vvedenskyi drew attention to the thesis advocated by Gogol (which he expressed in «The Government Inspector») that the reader or viewer achieves moral purification when he recognizes himself in the negatively portrayed heroes. Thus, when he asks about the influence of Gogol's characters on the recipient, he argues by resorting to receptive aesthetic concepts.

Much more often, Gogol's characters were characterized as one-dimensional, puppet-like, empty and unsustainable. Such a view was undoubtedly initiated by the symbolists' detailed image of man, which involved the division into «internal» and «external». Ihnatius Annenskyi wrote that Gogol always depicted only the outer side of his characters. Because of this, his humour was the latent humour of a creation that united the transcendental soul with the material body.

I. Zhytetskyi defined vulgarity as the theme of «Dead Souls». It arises as a result of the deficiency of the human in a person and leads to all the vices of this world.

V. F. Pereverziev described Gogol's characters as passive people who lead a meaningless existence. This is how Sypovskiy (1915) saw them. In his assessment of Gogol's characters, he speaks of «existential beings» who vegetate like plants or animals and who are pushed by insignificant trifles to actions with grave consequences, as happened with both Ivans, involved in an endless quarrel.

The artificial nature of the characters, and therefore the narrative perspective of the texts, was emphasized by Tynianov, who saw in them masks that fell apart («Nose») or uncomplicated phrases that could be

doubled (Dobchynskyi and Bobchynskyi). Donald Fanger even called the characters «verbal tissue»; their main feature was absolute artificiality.

According to Bichilli (1948), the grotesque form of Gogol's characters corresponded to the author's intention. From the beginning, he saw the imprints of empty, sinful people in the described characters. The fact that Gogol always anticipated ethical criticism of a person with their help could already be seen from the example of the famous statement in «The Government Inspector»: «What are you laughing at? You're laughing at yourself!»

Maximilian Brown pays more attention than others to the narrative perspective when he highlights the inversion of a thing and a person, i.e. the reification, in which reality dissolves and turns into appearance. Researchers of Gogol's work constantly emphasize Gogol's narrative world, where things rule, where there is no communication and where people turn into passive, soulless objects, dead souls devoid of compassion. However, many of them limit themselves to a simple statement of this fact without explaining how these figures are realized. Thus, Peace points to the story «The Portrait», in which Piskarov, who has a distorted image of a person, can see a young woman as a surface and wants, from a technical point of view, as an artist, to consider her as a two-dimensional object. Precisely because of this, he fails when trying to establish human relations with her. In this way, it becomes evident that they realize the grotesque characters through the distorted perspective of the other characters or the narrator himself.

Larson concludes, that researchers rarely paid attention to the narrative perspective. In particular, Dmytro Chyzhevskyi pointed out the narrator's «view from below». He described this view on the example of «The Overcoat» and recognized it in the narrator's «frenzy», in his constant illogical use of the word «even» (даже). In the Soviet Union, the role of the narrator in the attitude towards the characters was studied by P. A. Karabanov (1982). He showed that the whole fantastic dimension of stories was realized only through the narrator. Thus, in his opinion, Gogol distanced himself from the fictitious world of his heroes.

Maria N. Virolainen (1980) uses the example of «Myrhorod» to consider the function of the narrator in Gogol's works, which is not identical to Gogol as the writer but is a parodic part of «Myrhorod» and that fictitious world. She emphasizes that compared to the text itself the author's subtext always reveals a completely different picture of the characters. In the end, she demonstrates that the four stories in «Myrhorod» each time show different aspects of the world. Together, they

form, hyperbolically, a synthesis, namely Myrhorod. It is generally relevant to Gogol's method.

Ultimately, Ulrich Busch, in his work on Gogol's «The Overcoat» (1983), showed the role of the insufficient narrator as a figure with a false, entirely down-to-earth understanding of life. His work aims to test Gogol's narrator and all other characters for the aspect of human identity.

The German researcher notes that the technical aspect of alienation of characters and their world is the subject of Wolfgang Kazak's (1957) and V. V. Rowe's (1976) studies. Kazak reveals various types of Gogol's grotesquerie of characters in different aspects, starting with names (inserted through leitmotif descriptions of appearance) and ending with confusing biographies. Kazak believes an important subject of Gogol's works is also embedded in his characters. Like Brodianska, he considers Gogol's characters in their development from pure types in the early works to almost autonomous individuals in the later ones. Nevertheless, none of these characters acquires the status of a real personality.

Rove uses three concepts to describe the techniques which help Gogol to distort his fictional world. The first one is a reverse vision, which leads to a thing being seen as its opposite, regardless of whether it is a moral, temporal or natural sphere. The second concept is a false focus that prompts the narrator to speak of the dead as if he was alive or the imaginary as if it was real. The third one is precarious logic which unfolds mainly at the linguistic level in allegedly logical chains of arguments. A possible example is the word «even» (даже), analyzed by Chyzhevskiy in the «frenzy» of «The Overcoat».

Andreas Larson notes, that many researchers were concerned about the positive image of a person which could hide behind negative characters. Some of Gogol's early critics noted that negative characters were created to purify the reader. This point of view was also supported by Boris de Schlötser. He claimed that Gogol's laughter appealed to the human in man. Humility is the moral that the reader could take from Gogol's works. O. Smirnova also concluded that Gogol wanted to awaken the human in a person with the help of literature.

A. Veselovskiy showed that even Gogol's grotesque characters could improve since everyone should have a chance for salvation. Lorenzo Amberg points out the features of Chichikov that can help him become a good person. They include his latent asceticism, patience and ability to suffer, which were misused before.

Some researchers don't see any negative images in Gogol's characters. S. Mashinskyi appeals to Belinskyi when he says that Gogol

gave a human image to a poor official, who had been only ridiculed in Russian literature before. V. Nigg (1966) even recognizes Akakii Akakiyovych as the new Christ.

Maximilian Braun, Pavlo Yevdokimov and Hans Günther adhere to the completely different point of view. Brown blames the heroes for their disgraceful human existence. Evil is within ourselves, and the characters constantly get entangled in a web of deception and self-deception. Yevdokimov believes that when Akakii strives for something, it means he is dissatisfied with his position. However, his strivings are always aimed at something low and, therefore, he forgets his humanity. In the same way, Chichikov turned himself into a dead soul with his materialism, which relativized good and evil and blurred the boundaries between them. In his opinion, Chichikov is a positivist, a typical representative of modernity, and a very mediocre person, as if he was specially created for this world. Gunter also emphasizes the typicality and lack of individuality in Gogol's characters. He describes them as «attached to the normal», devoid of conscience, unaware of themselves and the world around them.

In 1912 B. Lukyanovskiy formulated Gogol's perception of what an ideal person was obliged to do in his/her existence. These obligations included meeting moral requirements, doing good things and being useful. Art is a particularly suitable way for good deeds. According to these criteria, N. N. Antonova (1961) found a positive character in the story «The Portrait». This is a monk-artist. He verbalizes Gogol's idea that it is a grave sin not to use one's talent for the good of others. As an artist, Gogol set himself the task to provide people with humanistic education. N. Antonova shows that this intention has a religious character and is connected with an inclination towards asceticism.

Dmytro Chyzhevskiy, G. Shreyer and R. D. Kyle point to the duty formulated by Gogol, which consists of the necessity for all people to distance themselves from things and the earthly world and make God their core. Nevertheless, due to the egoism and individualism of the era, people consider themselves to be God and constantly violate the commandments of love for God and neighbour.

In his research on the church and liturgy in Gogol's works, Lorenzo Amberg shows that all of Gogol's work can be united into a single ethical-religious whole. Although he does not directly explore the image of man and human identity, such aspects emerge indirectly in his papers.

Thus, after analyzing a wide array of works by Russian and foreign linguists who considered Gogol's works from different angles, it becomes evident to Andreas Larson that over time it was not Gogol's understanding

of being that changed, but rather his method, which was transformed over the years under the influence of ever-growing doubts about the power of laughter. In his opinion, Gogol can be seen as a person with forked nature who carries in his soul a conflict between ideal and reality. Even the humorous details and distortions of everyday life in his works show that Gogol did not perceive reality as it was. It is in these distortions his great talent lies. His weaknesses are revealed when it comes to depicting life as it is. The greatest weakness among these attempts is that Gogol failed to understand the gulf which existed between the way he and most of his contemporaries perceived being. The theocratic image of the world he formulated in his later years remains vague. When one tries to concretize it, it quickly turns into something overly specific. In the beginning, in the 1930s, this image was barely outlined and based on the traditions of the Ukrainian village and naive religion as a modern philosophy. Gogol no longer understood his contemporaries and his time and defended himself with the help of humour. The German researcher summarizes, that due to this, we find in Gogol's works a constant latently embedded search for his identity in the sense of his life purpose and task.

Gogol defined the plot of his work as the «soul of man». At the same time, the German researcher claims, he knew for sure neither his own personality nor, even more so, the ideal personality of a person. He consistently strengthened realistic didactic elements in his works to force the reader to accept the author's point of view. Thus, according to A. Larson, Gogol raped himself.

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### **Проблема людської ідентичності у творах М. Гоголя**

*У монографії Андреаса Ларсона «Гоголь і проблема людської ідентичності» акцентується, що проблема людської ідентичності червоною ниткою проходить через всю творчість Гоголя і що в художніх творах Гоголя його погляди на життя зауяльовані і можуть бути прочитані лише в широкому контексті.*

*Гоголь, підкреслює А. Ларсон, який з самих ранніх років шукав справу, що могла б принести користь людям, успіхом «Вечорів на хуторі біля Диканьки» проявив свій комічний талант. З тих пір він вважався комічним автором. У той час Гоголь ще думав, що його фантастичні світи повинні були здаватися читачам комічними з тих самих причин, через які вони здавалися такими йому самому.*

*Лише після того, як реакція публіки на комедію «Ревізор» показала, що навіть його друзі реагували на цей твір інакше, ніж він передбачав, Гоголь почав сумніватися в силі сміху. Від того моменту він ставав все більше і більше дидактичним.*

*Гоголь сподівався, що «Ревізор» здійснить на людей більший вплив, аніж написані ним повісті, оскільки розглядав театр засобом масового впливу. У чудернацькому світі комедії, який ґрунтується на неправильній ідентифікації дійових осіб, Гоголь чітко визначає сміх як єдиний позитивний персонаж в п'єсі. У цьому полягає його теорія дидактичного ефекту комічного гротеску. Лише за допомогою сміху читач може звільнитися від гротеску, відійти вбік і розірвати його пута. Гоголь наділив своїх персонажів такими рисами, що вони, всупереч тотальній відсутності позитивних якостей, були схожими на реальних людей. Тим самим він сподівався, що публіка зможе ідентифікувати себе з цими персонажами і, розриваючи пута гротеску, позбудеться своїх власних недоліків та пороків, своєї власної низькопробності. Його помилка, на думку А. Ларсона, полягала в тому, що переважна більшість публіки мала абсолютно іншу вихідну точку зору в питаннях світосприйняття, аніж Гоголь. Гоголь визначав сюжет своєї творчості як «душа людини», при цьому, стверджує німецький дослідник, він не знав достеменно ні своєї власної особистості, ні тим більше ідеальної особистості людини. Він почав послідовно підсилювати реалістичні дидактичні елементи в своїх творах, щоб таким чином примусити читача прийняти авторську точку зору. Таким чином, за словами А. Ларсона, він згвалтував сам себе.*

**Ключові слова:** Гоголь, творчість, гумор, сміх, гротеск, комедія, реалістичні елементи, світосприйняття, пошук, ідентичність.