

The Personality of the Great Russian Writer Gogol: Between Norm and Pathology

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Abstract

The article compares three different points of view on the personality of Gogol: sociologist Alexei Davydov, psychiatrist Vladimir Chizh and the author. In accordance with the first, Gogol was unable to resolve the socio-cultural contradiction in himself, in accordance with the second point of view - simply mentally ill, in accordance with the third - it was a peculiar, but completely normal evolution of the personality. Each point of view is presented and analyzed, which forms a dialogue of positions.

Keywords: *Personality; Creativity; Art; Realization; Culture*

To paraphrase Martin Heidegger, who repeated that “we still do not think,” we can say that we still do not understand Gogol well. I was once again convinced of this by reading Davydov’s book, published on the anniversary of the great Russian writer, and comparing it with another book, Gogol’s Disease, by the famous Russian psychiatrist and writer VF Chizh, which appeared at the very beginning of the 20th century. Alexey Davydov tries to understand Gogol using a sociocultural explanation, Vladimir Chizh based on psychiatry. The book «Gogol’s Soul» seems to be directly directed against the psychiatric understanding of the tragedy of our great writer. Davydov does not deny Gogol’s mental illness, but considers it secondary, a derivative of another deeper cause, which is purely social, more precisely sociocultural in nature. This reason is sociocultural contradictions (sociocultural split), which the writer could not overcome in himself.

“According to the testimony of many diagnosticians,” writes Davydov, “Gogol’s disease is a depressive neurosis. But the reason for this mental disorder, I am sure, is the only one - the inability to resolve the socio-cultural contradiction in oneself». “A writer or a preacher? The split in the soul of Gogol is the central problem of the analysis of his work”. «Gogol tossed between the divine and the human, because of these rushes and died”. “There is no dialogue between the archaic Gogol and the innovator Gogol. His soul, his whole essence is bifurcated, split between these poles». «Gogol failed to overcome the split in his soul between patriarchal values and the meaning of personality»¹. But what does Davydov mean by sociocultural contradiction and split?

¹Davydov A.P. Soul of Gogol. M., 2008.S. 115, 46, 44, 45, 146.

Here he relies on the studies of Russian sociologists and social philosophers studying Russia, N. Berdyaev, G. Fedotov, A. Akhiezer, I. Yakovenko, A. Pelipenko, I. Kondakov and others, and outlines such a scheme. Russian culture and society are initially contradictory and split. The content of contradictions and schism is that communal autocratic traditions and democratic reforms, understanding of God as Father and as Christ, traditional society and civil society, archaic community and personality collide and cannot get along. «In the era of modernization, in the XVIII - XIX-XX-XXI centuries, the logic of the split is the same - this is a contradiction between the traditional static conciliar-authoritarian, communal-autocratic culture and a dynamic, creative, self-critical personality striving for change”². Contradictions and schism do not remain only in the abstract sphere of ideas, they are realized, they live in the literature and the personality of individual individuals. As a result, the personality itself is split, split, tossed between contradictions (Davydov calls this «inversion»). «Not able to think innovatively, the inversion subject rushes between the poles, ignoring intermediate meanings»³.

The last link in explanation and reconstruction is mediation, the search for the middle as an antidote to schism. “Gogol carried an inversion, speaking in support of serfdom, autocracy, and the church. But he also carried a mediation principle, destroying inversion, demanding the democratization of the church, defending the individual path to God, interpreting the divine from the standpoint of the values of a creative person, sacralizing the pursuit of profit, essentially legalizing the spirit of Protestantism in Russia both in religion and in entrepreneurship»⁴.

The tragedy of Gogol, from the point of view of Davydov, is that the great writer «could not combine opposites and became the first and far from the last victim of the socio-cultural contradiction in the Russian writer’s environment, the split between inversion and mediation»⁵.

If it were only about confirming this scheme using the example of Gogol, then Davydov’s book would hardly be so interesting, but it is actually deep, making you think. Davydov, indeed, is trying to understand why Gogol betrayed his writing and began to preach things that are dubious from the point of view of the Russian intellectual, for example, he calls to understand the thief and the bribe-taker, to preserve the established order of unjust life, which is traditionally supported by the Orthodox Church, to completely abandon social changes. “The essence,” writes Davydov, “of the conflict that occurs between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian people, is the same for all centuries: a person wants to break out of tradition, and the church wants to return him to an archaic historical framework, in particular to God, to the church, to the House of the Most Holy Theotokos, into the arms of the imperial power, the Orthodox people, a single and indivisible land, etc. And Gogol, as it happened, with his book suggested that people voluntarily give up the right to free themselves from these stereotypes and restore in themselves deification, churching, nationalization, mythological way of thinking. In essence, he called on society to stop the process of personality formation in a Russian person, to stop development»⁶.

Davydov undertakes real «archaeological excavations» of Gogol’s personality, showing through an analysis of his works and three stages of creativity that Gogol sincerely tried to explain his position to the Russian public, in fact, he wanted good for Russia, but the

²In the same place. P. 33.

³In the same place. P. 27.

⁴In the same place. P. 28. By the way, Chizh very much doubts the sincerity of the ideas of Protestant ethics preached by Gogol.

⁵Davydov. Soul of Gogol. P. 28.

⁶In the same place. 170-171.

tragedy is that Gogol's good was perceived by Russian society or as a mockery of her aspirations, or just as evil. Why did it happen? But because the soul of Gogol, according to Davydov, was originally split between archaism and modernity, faith in God the Father and Christ, traditionalist and European values. It is Gogol, according to Davydov, who begins the path of Russian religious philosophy in Russia, with Gogol the opposition of society intensified, in his work, whether Gogol wanted it or not, the contradictions and split of Russian culture manifested themselves in a clear form. Here again, contradictions and divisions. In general, in my opinion, the concept of a split and a real empirical analysis of the work and personality of Gogol in Davydov's book do not converge, or rather they either correspond to each other or decisively diverge... Above, however, I said that when reading Davydov, I often recalled V.F. Chizha.

In 1903 and 1904. in the journal «Questions of Philosophy and Psychology» published a series of his articles devoted to explaining the illness and fate of Gogol. Chizh offered a purely psychiatric interpretation of the life of the great writer... Chizh ends his articles like this. "Studying Gogol's illness, without explaining to us the incomprehensible organization of our common teacher, nevertheless, still has its own significance; we learn to separate the healthy from the sick in the works and activities of the writer, of whom our Fatherland is proud. Thanks to such a study, we correctly explain the negative aspects of the works and activities of the brilliant author, we understand why our great satirist created so little, finished his work so necessary for Russia so early, why he lived the best, in terms of activity, period of life abroad, why he was completely alien to social activities»⁷.

Let's compare the two discourses. Chizh claims that the life and personality of Gogol in all its main manifestations is predetermined by his mental illness. Davydov denies this, saying that the main reason lies elsewhere - Gogol could not overcome the socio-cultural contradiction and split in his soul, and the latter killed him. But the question is how? A huge number of people live with contradictions that they cannot resolve, and nevertheless, suffering, they live out the time they have measured, sometimes to a ripe old age. How can socio-cultural contradictions by themselves kill a person? Isn't there an illegal reduction of a concrete person to abstract sociological categories? Davydov, and in my opinion correctly, emphasizes the role of the individual in the life of culture and society. However, what is personality?

According to Davydov, it turns out that personality is a direct projection of social relations and contradictions, it goes around (ignores) its unique morphology (corporeality, psyche). In about the same way as my teacher, G.P. Shchedrovitsky. «From all sides I hear: a person!.. personality!.. All this lies: I am a vessel with living, self-developing thinking, I am thinking thinking, its hypostasis and materialization, an organism of thought. And nothing more... I am all the time I mean one thing: I am a bollard, a servant of my thinking, and then there are actions of thinking, mine and others, who, in particular, communicate. At some point - I was then twenty years old - I felt an amazing transformation that happened to me: I understood that thinking has settled on me and that this is my value and my essence as a human being... All our behavior is only a reflection and imprint of the power of the sociocultural forms we use, but in no way is the creation of the individual mind. And in this sense I say: play is plays, and thinking - thinks»⁸.

True, such an understanding makes it possible to include the analysis of sociocultural factors and conditions in a theoretical explanation, which Davydov does. For example, he shows that in his development Gogol successively passes through three different cultures (traditional small-local Cossacks, imperial cold Petersburg, bourgeois Europe), knowingly or unknowingly borrowing from them. He was greatly influenced not only by the Orthodox Church; the poorly understood influence of Catholicism and Protestantism also

⁷In the same place.

⁸L.P. Shchedrovitsky Was there MMK? // Methodological issues. 1997, No. 1-2. S. 9, 12.

affected. Gogol listened to the “Pushkin circle” and to the opinions of priests and the authorities, but no less to the applause and hiss of the public. As if in response to this, Chizh tries to show on many pages that Gogol perceived in all these external situations only what was refracted through his painful consciousness. He did not see and was not interested in anything that was not part of his field of interest. According to Chizh, neither Petersburg, nor Pushkin and his entourage, nor abroad, nor Protestantism had a serious influence on Gogol.

Now let’s take a closer look at Davydov’s discourse itself. First, this discourse presupposes the idea of a whole, otherwise what is splitting? What is this whole? Russian culture, society, individual consciousness? Which were united, and then covered with cracks of contradictions and split? We do not see anything similar on the horizon. Russian culture has always been heterogeneous and contradictory and has never been integral. Russian society also, and besides, it was most often in a semi-faint state, only occasionally waking up during periods of social catastrophes. The consciousness of a Russian is an even more incomprehensible thing; moreover, one individual may have a holistic one, while another - the opposite is true.

Second, a split (in the discourse of sociologists), as it were, automatically presupposes a certain social action - the search for a middle ground, overcoming the split. Again, nothing like that is visible. According to my observations, culture and society can exist for decades and centuries in the same contradictory state. Moreover, Davydov’s chapter on Gogol’s search for a middle ground, as mediation against a split, is unconvincing. As the quotes cited by Davydov show, Gogol is talking about something completely different, namely, that extremes should be avoided.

I don’t mean to say that the split concept does not work at all. On its basis, Davydov analyzes the sociocultural factors and conditions that, as he suggests, influenced the life of Gogol. In addition, this concept makes it possible to present both Gogol’s and Russian life in such a way that a certain type of social action suggests itself. Yes, you guessed it - the need to overcome contradictions, the need for synthesis. No one will object if our sociologists insist on this necessity. But the question is how realistic and realizable it is.

Third, the value position of the supporters of the schism theory is not very clear. On the one hand, they seem to be supporters of modernization and Westernizers, which is why a split is like that which is opposite to a united West (as if there are no contradictions in the West). But, on the other hand, the split is simultaneously understood as the natural state of Russian culture and society. If it’s natural, then why bother bridging the split? Moreover, as we can see, all attempts at modernization in Russia (with rare exceptions) fail. So in our time, reforms are stalled and stalled, mainly imitated in order to cover up something directly opposite, for example, illegal and non-democratic practices. How, in this case, to evaluate the position of Gogol, who called in many of his letters (in his second life) not to violate the traditional foundations - faith in God the Father, the Orthodox Church, the people. He convinced that every person, even a thief and a rogue, is not bad in his own way and can be understood. Maybe this position is not so retrograde, but simply realistic and culturally preserved?

If not a schism theory, then how can one understand the vicissitudes of Gogol’s life? I do not deny the importance of sociocultural analysis, but it is equally important to find out how the author’s personality works...

Gogol was an artist and was not an integral person. He did not at all rush between opposite meanings and ideas, as Davydov thinks. Gogol resolved his contradictions by creating works of art. And this means - the construction of aesthetic worlds, absolutely independent from each other. In one world (for example, «Evenings on a Farm”) there may be archaic realities, and in the other (Petersburg cycle) - modern urban subjects, a little man and criticism of a faceless city. The first volume of *Dead Souls* is a satire on Russian reality, in fact, from the point of view of the European outlook, and in the second, as Davydov shows, it is a justification of Russian reality with elements of an early capitalist utopia. The artist is not obliged to reconcile the artistic realities created in different works.

Chizh argues that Gogol's «artistic personality» had little in common with his «spiritual personality», that there were two autonomous personalities living in Gogol. The first was genius and free, and the second was “deformed” and insensitive to people⁹.

Is it so? Here I want to offer my own version of Gogol's tragedy. I am not completely satisfied with the analyzes of Davydov and Chizh, although I will use their reconstructions. They are not satisfied because they nevertheless let Gogol fit their theories, while the living Gogol became an illustration of the corresponding concepts. I want to follow M. Bakhtin, who wrote that other people's consciousness «cannot be contemplated, analyzed, defined as objects, as things - you can only communicate with them dialogically. Thinking about them means talking to them, otherwise they immediately turn around. to us with their object side: they fall silent, close and freeze into complete object images»¹⁰.

How can you persuade Gogol to talk? First of all, do not rush to conceptualizations, indeed, try to understand Gogol as an ordinary person, which does not mean an attempt to do without theoretical means at all. And the individual's illness probably needs to be taken into account, because it makes a contribution, and often significant, to human development. In this case, of course, both external factors and internal circumstances (states and processes) are subject to analysis and reconstruction. Peering and listening attentively to Gogol's life, I would note two incomprehensible moments for me: why he somehow perceived the success of his works in a strange way and soon left Russia, and also, what can still explain Gogol's transition from writing to Christian preaching. If your works have such a resounding success, then why not continue to write in the same spirit and, moreover, why then leave Russia? If you are a writer, why did you start preaching?

Yes, Gogol has tremendous success in society after «Evenings», «Petersburg Tales» and «The Inspector General». But let's take into account three important circumstances. As an artist, Gogol had an amazing ability to see, as if from the outside, what other people do not see, and also very convincingly to recreate the life of his characters. At the same time, he absolutely does not want to re-educate and alter someone. Even in *The Inspector General* and *Dead Souls*, Gogol was far from this. The Russian public, on the other hand, understood his works in a different way: as a sharp social criticism, as a call for a reorganization of Russian reality. All this was alien to Gogol.

Second. Gogol, which has been repeatedly noted, is secretive and cold towards people, suspicious, he thinks that they envy him and plot intrigues, finally, he lives in the closed space of his own individual world, a world of fantasy that is practically not connected with ordinary life (you should not discount the fact that Gogol never had his family, a guest first with those, then with others, or simply lived alone).

By the way, Gogol's peculiar marginality, which consists in the fact that he left the Ukrainian town, ended up in Petersburg, which he did not accept internally, lived for many years in Europe, which he criticized, returned to Russia, which he involuntarily compared with Europe, always lived mainly by his personal problems (he was lonely), but he communicated with Pushkin's circle and the writers of *raznochin* who were caring about Russia, was inclined not just to fantasy, but believed in the reality he himself created - all this, in part, helps explain Gogol's genius as a writer. Indeed, in his works, Gogol connects the incompatible, generates artistic reality, events that are based either on exaggeration or simply fantasy, but those that create a new vision of reality, new «artistic optics». Here are two examples. Bunin, writes Marietta Chudakova, once remarked: “Can you really say what life is? Everything is mixed in it. Life - that's when some kind

⁹Chizh. Cit. op.

¹⁰Bakhtin M. *Aesthetics of verbal creativity*. M., 1979.S. 116.

of dregs beyond the Arbat, it gets dark, the jackdaws have already settled down on the crosses, the fur coat is heavy, galoshes... But what! That would be how to write...». This has already been noticed in due time by Nekrasov. Reproaching Pisemsky for the fact that «he almost completely refuses Gogol's lyricism,» Nekrasov objected to him like this: «Yes, in Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich himself, in the wet jackdaws sitting on the fence, there is poetry, lyricism". Speech about the last lines of the story about two Ivans: "Again the same field, dug in places, black, green in places, wet jackdaws and crows, monotonous rain, teary sky without a gap" - almost Buninsk evening "turbidity beyond the Arbat"¹¹.

Or another fragment from *Taras Bulba*, which seems to be purely fantasy, not corresponding to reality, but so strong from an artistic point of view. "Taras pointed out to his sons a small, blackened point in the far grass", saying: "Look, children, there is a Tatar galloping!" A small head with a mustache fixed its narrow eyes on them, sniffed the air like a hound dog, and, like a chamois, disappeared when she saw that there were thirty Cossacks. Everything here is either an exaggeration or simply impossible, but how correctly he acts, since Gogol does not objectively describe what the eye can see, but recreates, expresses in an artistic form the experiences of the sons of Taras. They see not a small dot, but their fears and myths about the Tatars.

Third circumstance. Gogol undoubtedly strove for fame and recognition, he is extremely ambitious. Even if temporarily, he retreats, pretends that he does not need public recognition, that he is satisfied with the life of a common man in the street. But all this, of course, is not so, temporarily, sooner or later the desire for fame and recognition wins and forces Gogol to act. Should we not, in this case, assume the following scenario.

Gogol did not believe in the sincerity of the praise addressed to him, suspected intrigue, did not want to understand the controversy over his works, and was even frightened of it. And most importantly, he could not accept the attitude of society to his works. Then he simply fled abroad, that is, in fact, he could not cope with the situation. In Gogol's letters of 1836, we read: "A modern writer, a comic writer, a writer of morals must be far from his homeland. There is no glory for the prophet in the fatherland"¹².

Unable to cope with the situation, Gogol seeks, on the one hand, to justify his act, on the other, to deal with what happened. At first, Gogol justifies his behavior by the fact that he is seriously ill. In a letter to Belozersky dated 12 April 1840 we read: "My health and I myself are no longer fit for the local climate, and most importantly, my poor soul: she has no shelter here, or, better to say, there is no such shelter for her here, wherever the excitement reaches her. I am now more fit for a monastery than for a secular life"¹³. The topic of illness is constantly deepening and developing further, explaining the long days of creative downtime and much more.

Later, for the first reason, Gogol selects the second. He goes to the idea of early Christianity, likening himself to St. Paul, then Christ himself. Here Gogol's conviction of his highest mission and, as it seemed to him, the similarity of the Russian situation with the early Christian one (both there and there society does not understand and persecutes Christians, but they carry their cross to the end) worked. "Another Leviathan," writes Gogol, "is under way. A sacred tremor grips me in advance, as I think about him: I hear something from him... I will taste divine minutes... but... now I am immersed in Dead souls. Immensely great is my creation, and it will not end soon. New estates and many different masters will still rise up against me; but what can I do! It is already my fate to be at enmity with my fellow countrymen. Patience! Someone invisible writes in front of me with a mighty rod"¹⁴.

¹¹Chudakova M. Gogol in the XX century. From observations and assumptions // Russian life. No. 6 (45), April 2009. Pp. 71.

¹²Chizh. Cit. op.

¹³In the same place.

¹⁴In the same place.

Gogol not only likens himself to Paul and Christ, as an artist he begins to create a kind of work of himself, he builds his life following the example of the saints¹⁵. It is here that Gogol comes up with the idea of transforming his soul. "Since I left Russia," he writes to Smirnova in 1844, "a great change has taken place in me. The soul occupied me in everything, and I saw too clearly that without my soul's striving for its best perfection, I was unable to move not one of my abilities, not one side of my mind for the good and benefit of my brothers, and without this upbringing of the soul, any work mine will be only temporarily brilliant, but vanity in my being»¹⁶. Accordingly, Gogol gets used to the disease, justifying his explanation of what is happening. In other words, I want to say that the transformation taking place with Gogol did not take place without his participation and creativity. He made himself both a saint and a sick person, he actually becomes sick, but not a saint.

We see that Gogol does not want to continue his previous literary work. And it's clear why. The public perceives his works in a completely different way from what Gogol expected, and takes him for someone else. Therefore, Gogol is forced to reflect on his values and attitude, and it turns out that they are not similar to those expected in Russian society. Gogol comes to another important thought: the reader needs to be prepared for the correct perception of his works, that is, he has to be re-educated to some extent. Moreover, the temporarily inhibited desire for fame has long been manifesting itself. And Gogol embarks on a difficult feat.

This was Gogol's solution to an equation with many unknowns (these included the circumstances pointed out by Chizh, and those problems and contradictions that Davydov discusses in his book). At first, these thoughts and decisions (I am terminally ill, I am like Paul and Christ) were just an essay on the current situation (being a genius writer, Gogol didn't have to put it all together in one bouquet), but gradually the great writer became convinced of the reality he had composed. she began to be perceived by him as what it really is. Further, he seeks to live, following the deformed reality he has built himself and is very successful in this. Artistic creativity played an important role in this process, which made it possible to build conceived worlds and live in them. It is also partly understandable why now there is a sermon and not works of art. First, preaching is close to a work of fiction; according to Schleiermacher, a sermon is an act of artistic verbal presentation or reproduction of the content of a preacher's personal worldview, which is close to the task of the poet. Secondly, the main force of preaching is in the grace given from above, and Gogol considers himself a conductor of sacred forces.

Gogol writes *Selected Places...*, conducts correspondence with readers, explains and preaches. The result is even more sad. Public scandal, complete rejection. Now he has nowhere to run, nowhere is Gogol able to realize himself. Spurred on and stimulated by these circumstances, the disease quickly devours the great writer of the Russian land.

Gogol's first life lasted until the disease, the second merges with the disease. His tragedy is not that Gogol did not respond to the expectations of Russian society and the public, but that as an artist he lived on himself various conceivable and inconceivable cultural scenarios, all actually relevant for Russia (here Davydov, of course, right), having failed to build his own personality. The latter is rather strange, given the lifestyle he has led in recent years. But perhaps Chizh is right when he says that Gogol's religiosity was purely external, that he was more imitating the transformation of his soul than actually working on it...

¹⁵Compare. "From the idea that I am not given to us, - writes M. Foucault, - there is only one practical consequence: we must create ourselves as works of art" (Quoted by Roger Alan Deacon Production of *Subjectivity // Logos. # 2 (65) 2008. p. 60*)

¹⁶Gogol N.V. Letter to A.O. Smirnova // Gogol N.V. Coll. op. In 9 t.M., 1994.T. 9.P. 288.

Plato, solving similar problems in the field of philosophy, living its plots on himself... could say, meaning himself. «Such a person, even having made up for the lot of his life with death, on his deathbed will not, as now have a multitude of sensations, but will achieve a single lot, from the multiplicity will become unity, will be happy, extremely wise and together blissful»¹⁷. Alas, Gogol was not a philosopher and follower of Plato. He was a writer whose fate in Russia is often tragic.

Conclusion

Each point of view is presented and analyzed, which forms a dialogue of positions.

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¹⁷Plato. Post-law. Coll. op. in 4 volumes. Vol. 4.M., 1994.S. 458.