

Ukraine in Blackface: Performance and Representation in Gogol's "Dikan'ka Tales," Book 1

Author(s): Roman Koropecyj and Robert Romanchuk

Source: *Slavic Review*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (Autumn, 2003), pp. 525-547

Published by: Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3185805>

Accessed: 06-09-2016 22:01 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>



*Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Slavic Review*

## Ukraine in Blackface: Performance and Representation in Gogol's *Dikan'ka Tales*, Book 1

Roman Koropec'kyj and Robert Romanchuk

If this entire people did not owe a debt to well-mannered landowners for their benevolence and respect for their humanity, the *khokhol* would be difficult to separate from the Negro in any way: one sweats over sugar, the other over grain. May the Lord give them both good health!

—Prince I. M. Dolgorukii

Three gestures connected with the publication of *Vechera na khutore bliz Dikan'ki* (Evenings on a farm near Dikan'ka, 1831) catch our eye, each one vying for a different audience for Nikolai Gogol's first collection of stories.

In his letter of 21 August 1831 to Aleksandr Pushkin, the Little Russian ingenue toasts the birth of what he refers to elsewhere as his "piglet" (*porosia*)<sup>1</sup> with an anecdote:

Most curious of all was my meeting with the printers. No sooner had I slipped into the door when the typesetters, catching sight of me, each lets loose snorting and giggling into his hands, having turned away to the wall. This somewhat surprised me. I went to the foreman, and he, after several clever evasions, finally said that "the little pieces [*shtuchki*] that you deigned to send from Pavlovsk for printing are funny in the extreme, and brought the typesetters great fun."<sup>2</sup>

This is a scene (credible or not) worth contemplating: a print shop in St. Petersburg, manned by workers, of necessity literate, but who as laborers nonetheless occupy the lower rungs of the capital's socioeconomic hierarchy; these urban proletarians are shown responding with physically manifested glee to Gogol's depiction of rustic bumpkins in the empire's Little Russian provinces: somewhat foreign, somewhat exotic, yet perhaps not all that different from the Great Russian countryside that the workers themselves probably still recalled. Interesting too that the workers "shy off," physically suppressing their glee in front of the littérateur and in the

The following colleagues read and commented on various drafts of this paper: Jean Graham-Jones, Oleh Ilnytskyj, W. T. (Rip) Lhamon, and Tomislav Longinović. To them, as well as to our two anonymous referees for *Slavic Review*, are due all of our thanks, but none of our errors. The epigraph is taken from *Slavny bubny za gorami ili putesthestvie moe koe-kuda v 1810 godu* (Moscow, 1870), 243.

1. "My piglet saw the light of day quite a while ago. I sent you a copy to Sorochintsy." Nikolai V. Gogol' to A. S. Danilevskii, 2 November 1831, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (hereafter PSS), 14 vols. (Moscow, 1937–1952), 10:213.

2. *Ibid.*, 10:203.

*Slavic Review* 62, no. 3 (Fall 2003)

presence of their foreman, who in turn is asked to speak *for them*—as if the foreman could be the only proper partner for dialogue in this situation—and explain *their* behavior to his distinguished visitor—as if their expression of enjoyment were somehow inappropriate.

Next, a letter written almost a year later (20 July 1832) from Vasylivka by the now all-Russian bona fide to Mikhail Pogodin. Here Gogol' complains that, try as they might, the local Little Russian gentry folk cannot buy a copy of *Dikan'ka*:

I'll burden you with one more request. If you'll be in town, let the booksellers know, mightn't people buy a second edition of *Evenings on a Farm*? Many of the local landowners [*zdeshnii pomeshchiki*] have sent away to Moscow or Petersburg but weren't able to find a single copy anywhere. What a stupid race, the booksellers! Really, can't they see universal demand? They turn down their own profits!<sup>3</sup>

Another scene, with another imagined audience, this time Ukrainians, or not quite yet—rather, the “old-world landowners” of *Mirgorod*, folks living a sort of prenatal existence (*zdeshnii*); as an ethnos, to be sure, unmarked but still distinguished from the stupid race (*narod*) of (Russian) booksellers—stupid because they do not perceive the demand for Gogol's wares, because they stay aloof from what he believes could be a potentially lucrative market.<sup>4</sup> If only the booksellers would intervene, Gogol' is intimating, the demand of the local landowners, universal and formless (like their own ethnicity), would be caught up in a rational economic network and assume at least a rudimentary shape, that of a reading public.<sup>5</sup>

The third moment must be left to Pushkin, not out of any deference on our part, but because Gogol' himself is responsible for this deferral. That is to say, it was left for Pushkin to introduce “good society” to the *Evenings*, which he obligingly did in his open letter of late 1831 to the literary supplement of the journal *Russkii invalid*:

I was told that when the editor [of *Dikan'ka*] walked into the print shop where the *Evenings* were being printed, the typesetters began to giggle and snort, covering their mouths with their hands. The foreman explained their merriment, admitting to [the editor] that the typesetters

3. *Ibid.*, 10:237–38.

4. For a satirical description of the Russian book merchant in Ukraine, peddling wares described as incomprehensible nonsense to a Little Russian landowner who, in the end, prefers “Kotliarev's'kyi's *Enei* and the tales of Hryts'ko Osnov'ianenko,” see IE. P. Hrebinka, “Tak sobi do zemliakiv” (1841), *Tvory u trókh tomakh* (Kiev, 1981), 3:488–90.

5. Gogol' would later (in the 1834 controversy around the *Biblioteka dlia chteniia*) abuse this provincial reader precisely for enriching the likes of Smirdin (cf. William Mills Todd III, *Fiction and Society in the Age of Pushkin: Ideology, Institutions, and Narrative* [Cambridge, Mass., 1986], 93–105), not to mention that he soon (February 1833) repudiated the idea of a second edition (see *PSS*, 10:256–57). Once it brought him the fame he desired, *Dikan'ka*'s gold turned to lead, at least for Gogol' himself. At this stage, however, he was being more pragmatic.

were dying of laughter while setting his book. Surely Molière and Fielding would have been happy to make their typesetters laugh.<sup>6</sup>

In toning down the exuberance with which Gogol' originally communicated the incident to him, Pushkin goes even further in silencing the typesetters: they do not merely laugh up their sleeves, they "cover their mouths with their hands." Pushkin's commentary, in turn, is no less telling than his decision to use Gogol's anecdote to articulate his own enthusiasm for, as he calls it, this "genuinely merry book." While on the one hand the reference to Molière and Henry Fielding suggests the superiority of the Russian product in its capacity to appeal to the tastes of a less than sophisticated reading public, it at the same time evinces an uncertainty as to the mode of the *Dikan'ka* tales, situated, seemingly, somewhere between performance and *lecture*. This uncertainty not only describes a reading public itself perhaps still uncertain about how to read but characterizes Gogol's very art—that is, the *skaz*—which guaranteed the work's success precisely because of its "performative" nature.<sup>7</sup> And, like the presence of the manager in the print shop (or the absence of an entrepreneurial bookseller in Vasylivka), Pushkin's mediation here, his gaze, is part and parcel of the performance; it allows the show to go on, but not without a certain prevarication.

If Gogol' could enthusiastically (even somewhat covetously) imagine his public to be located in the Russian print shop and at the Ukrainian homestead, then the literary elite played a different—structuring—role. To be sure, Gogol's concern for his audience of countrymen appears to be genuine (as it is avaricious). And at the end of his patronizing, unabashedly self-congratulatory recollection of the scene in the print shop, he notes, in his own hyperbolic way: "I concluded that I am a writer completely to the taste of the rabble [*chern'*]." <sup>8</sup> But there is no question that, as the remainder of this letter—a pretentious commentary on the state of Russian literature and criticism of the time—bears out, Gogol' is as concerned with, and tickled by, the reception of his work among the reading "rabble" as he is with the approval of "good society" and its representative, the aristocrat of Russian letters. Or rather, perhaps, with a view to the latter's patronage: after all, the ambitious Little Russian gentryman seemed to have grasped quickly enough (particularly after the fiasco of *Gants*

6. V. Zelinskii, ed., *Russkaia kriticheskaia literatura o proizvedeniakh N. V. Gogolia: Khronologicheskii sbornik kritiko-bibliograficheskikh statei* (hereafter *RKL*), 3d ed., 2 vols. (Moscow, 1903), 1:37.

7. That is to say, *skaz* not only inscribes the transition from an "oral" culture, the object of an ethnographic gaze, to a "literate" one, structured by the market; as a figure of rhetoric, *skaz* calls the reader's attention to the acoustical conventions of narrative and makes the reader into the implicit or complicit subject of the prose, (retroactively) constituting the reader as the "proper" audience. On *skaz* as performative rhetoric, see Peter Hodgson, "The Paradox of *Skaz*: Vicious Circles in 'Notes of a Madman' and 'Notes from Underground,'" in Peter Rollberg, ed., *And Meaning for a Life Entire: Festschrift for Charles A. Moser on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday* (Columbus, Ohio, 1997), esp. 113–17.

8. *PSS*, 10:203.

*Kiukhel'garten*) that his entrée into the world of Russia's literary elite was at this juncture easiest through the back door, stained with both Russian printer's ink and Ukrainian fatback.<sup>9</sup>

There is no need to rehearse in detail yet again the circumstances surrounding the writing of the *Dikan'ka* tales nor the various traces of Ukrainian folklore, history, and literature to be found in them, although we will want to look more closely at the *function* of the latter shortly. With regard to the former, however, it should suffice to remember Gogol's 24 March 1827 letter to his mother, the first of several in which he asks her to provide him with what amounts to a mini-encyclopedia of Ukrainian culture, from customs and beliefs to the names of games and articles of clothing. "All this," he writes to her somewhat coyly, "will be extremely interesting for me." Well, more than just interesting, for in this same letter, Gogol' goes on to ask his mother to send him two of his father's comedies so that he can ostensibly try staging one of them in St. Petersburg, since—and now the real reason behind all these requests emerges—"everyone here is taken up with anything that is Little Russian."<sup>10</sup> Gogol', as we know from numerous studies of the phenomenon,<sup>11</sup> was not exaggerating all that much; things Ukrainian were indeed a fad in the Russian capital in the 1820s and 1830s, and he was quick to capitalize on this. Much of the information provided to him by his mother (scrupulously recorded in his "Kniga vsiakoi vsiachiny ili podruchnaia entsiklopediia" [The book of all sorts and sundries, or a handy encyclopedia])<sup>12</sup> as well as citations from his father's plays made it into the two volumes of *Dikan'ka* and then *Mirgorod*.

Notwithstanding information to be found primarily in the memoirs of his contemporaries—to wit, that Gogol' spoke Ukrainian and that he liked to sing Ukrainian folksongs—this and subsequent letters to his mother make clear that, at least at this stage of his career, Gogol' was in fact largely ignorant of the everyday life of the Little Russian peasants among whom he had spent his childhood.<sup>13</sup> Panteleimon Kulish was on the mark when he observed in this connection that "while writing the first

9. If one can take *Biblioteka dlia chteniia*'s 1836 review of the second edition of *Dikan'ka* at its word, then Gogol' succeeded in this respect: "Mr. Gogol's public 'wipes its nose with the hem of its overalls' and smells strongly of tar. . . . This . . . public is still one step lower than the celebrated public of Paul de Kock." *RKL*, 1: 142.

10. *PSS*, 10: 140–42.

11. See, for instance, Vasyl' Sypov's'kyi, *Ukraïna v rosiis'komu pys'menstvi*, pt. 1, 1801–1850 rr. (Kiev, 1928); V. V. Gippius, *Gogol*, ed. and trans. Robert Maguire, 2d ed. (Durham, 1989), 28–30; George S. N. Luckyj, *Between Gogol' and Ševčenko: Polarity in the Literary Ukraine: 1798–1847*, Harvard Series in Ukrainian Studies, vol. 8 (Munich, 1971), 68–87; and David Saunders, *The Ukrainian Impact on Russian Culture, 1750–1850* (Edmonton, 1985), 113–99.

12. *PSS*, 9: 495–538. Gogol' apparently began keeping this notebook as early as 1826, when still in Nizhyn, and continued adding material to it, in particular the information he received from his mother, until 1831–1832. See *PSS*, 9: 653–57. Iurii Barabash is being somewhat disingenuous when he implicitly backdates, among other things, Gogol's notes on "customs, rituals, games, clothing, national dishes, names" to the Nizhyn period. Barabash, *Pochva i sud'ba. Gogol' i ukrainskaia literatura: U istokov* (Moscow, 1995), 58.

13. Cf. Gippius, *Gogol*, 30.

tale of *Evenings on a Farm*, Gogol' did not know the peasant closely. He saw him only from the porch of the manor or from a carriage."<sup>14</sup>

Kulish wrote his assessment in the late 1850s, when the Little Russian identity of the author of *Dikan'ka* was known to everyone. But this was not the case when the first volume appeared, under the *nom de plume* of Rudyi Pan'ko. And indeed, one of its first Russian reviewers (Polevoi) suspected that its author was "a Russian [*moskal'*]" and even a city-dweller."<sup>15</sup> Already for Polevoi, then, social criteria appear no less important than ethnic considerations in determining the ostensibly counterfeit nature of Gogol's Ukrainian tales. Indeed, Gogol's anecdote about the print shop, and Pushkin's decision to use it in his own advertisement for *Dikan'ka*, indicate that Gogol's "singing and dancing tribe" of Little Russians (Pushkin's words again)<sup>16</sup> performed on a stage defined as much by class and the relationship between city and country as by ethnicity and the relationship between imperial center and periphery.

A stage? We prefer to call it a shingle, the originary space of American blackface minstrelsy.<sup>17</sup> It is this tradition that we believe can provide an invaluable prism through which to view the play of representations that Gogol' projects in *Evenings on a Farm near Dikan'ka*, his evocation of Ukraine for an imperial Russian audience.

As a form of popular entertainment in which white men, painted and dressed up as blacks, performed songs and skits meant to mimic the culture of the American Negro, blackface minstrelsy was not so much a caricature as a reimagination and appropriation of black culture—from the "dancers for eels" of New York in the 1820s to songs of slaves—for a largely white, working-class audience.<sup>18</sup> Emerging sometime in the 1830s in the urban areas of the manumissive North, this practice spanned the entire remainder of the nineteenth century and survived into the twentieth. It may be said to be with us to this day, albeit without the burnt cork and vermilion lips: Spike Lee's perceptive film, *Bamboozled* (2000), explores the seemingly permanent scar that minstrelsy has left on American black culture. At the same time, it reveals a complex game of representations and identifications that cannot be indignantly written off as yet

14. Panteleimon Kulish, "Obzor ukrainskoi slovesnosti. IV, Gogol'," *Osnova*, 1861, no. 4 (April): 79.

15. *RKL*, 1:27. In his own review of the first volume, Andrii Tsarynnyi (A. IA. Storozhenko), who identifies himself as a Little Russian, also came to the conclusion that its author was not from Ukraine on the basis of what Tsarynnyi claimed was his gross nescience regarding things Ukrainian. Tsarynnyi then spends some seventy-five pages proving this in pedantic detail. See his "Mysli malorossiianina, po prechtenii povestei pasichnika Rudogo-Pan'ka . . ." *Syn otechestva* 47 (1832): 41–49; 101–15; 159–64; 223–42; 288–312.

16. *RKL*, 1:139.

17. Cf. W. T. Lhamon, Jr., *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 9–18.

18. In addition to the theoretically informed studies by Lhamon and by Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York, 1995), overviews and descriptions of nineteenth-century American minstrelsy can be found in Hans Nathan, *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy* (Norman, 1962), and Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1974).

another egregious example of white America's racial benightedness, although to be sure this element was always present. As recent studies—above all Eric Lott's *Love and Theft* and W. T. Lhamon Jr.'s *Raising Cain*—have convincingly argued, blackface, with its inherent ambivalences, occupied a central place in America's economy, not only of race relations, but of class as well. In its celebration of miscegenation, blackface allowed the white working class to at once draw a distinction between itself and the black slave and identify with him against the upper classes, leading in the process to the “blackening” or blending of American popular culture that we see today.

At first glance, it may appear incongruous to view Gogol's Ukrainian tales through the prism of blackface performance. Incongruous because the “performative” nature of Gogol's skaz notwithstanding, *Dikan'ka* is not a live performance as such but a collection of consciously literary works, hence a purely textual representation; because these are two sets of quite disparate historical, socioeconomic, as well as ethnic (*vel* racial) experiences;<sup>19</sup> and, finally, because Gogol's nostalgic depictions of a by and large Ukrainian Cossack milieu set in the not-too-distant past are the product of a young, literarily ambitious member of relatively well-to-do Little Russian gentry, hence himself of Ukrainian origin, albeit like the overwhelming majority of his countrymen at the time, writing exclusively in Russian, the language of the empire.

Yet on closer inspection, the juxtaposition may not be so incongruous. Superficially, of course, both *Dikan'ka*—and here we have in mind first and foremost “Sorochinskaia iarmarka” (The fair at Sorochintsy)—and blackface performance derive their humor from a broad caricature of stereotyped behavior. This includes the use of comical names; coarseness and vulgarity; sexual innuendo that is as much homo- as it is heteroerotic; superstition; sentimentality; slapstick; exaggerated physical manifestations of such basic (that is, childlike) emotions as joy and fear; and, of course, singing and dancing. One need only look at Gennadij Spirin's illustrations to *Sorotchintzy Fair* for an iconographic reimagining of Gogol's peculiar depiction of the Ukrainian world.<sup>20</sup> Yet it is beyond these superficial similarities, on the level of what Lott calls the “social unconscious,”<sup>21</sup> with its complex mapping of linguistic, ethnic as well as socioeconomic representations, at a specific juncture in the history of Ukrainian-Russian relations, that one may draw the analogy between nineteenth-century American blackface and Gogol's own literary “performance” of Ukrainian culture.

A typical performance is played for many audiences, overlapping and, to borrow Lhamon's phrase, “kinetic in each other.”<sup>22</sup> Of those watching

19. For a Bakhtinian attempt to draw parallels between Russian (but not Ukrainian) and African American experiences and writing, see Dale E. Peterson, *Up from Bondage: The Literatures of Russian and African American Soul* (Durham, 2000).

20. Nikolai Gogol, *Sorotchintzy Fair*, adapt. Sybil Schönfeldt, trans. from the German by Daniel Reynolds (Boston, 1991).

21. Lott, *Love and Theft*, 39.

22. Lhamon, *Raising Cain*, 3.



Figure 1. "Dancing for Eels, 1820 Catharine Market." Photograph Courtesy of Sotheby's, Inc. © 2003.

the earliest minstrel shows (before the first white performers "corked up" in blackface), danced on the docks of port cities by free blacks and slaves in exchange for eels, some spectators were black, others white; some were watching, others paying; some were patrons, others patronizing. These relationships may be seen in the early American folk drawing of a black minstrel performance, "Dancing for Eels 1820 Catharine Market" (figure 1) and its successive reworkings in prints of the late 1840s (figure 2).<sup>23</sup> Lhamon shows us that points of view are shifting: if in the original drawing, we see the dancer and two coteries of admirers (one black, the other white) from a distanced and framed viewpoint in a market stall, in the prints we have been pushed out into the open, into the crowd; if the black and white viewers are balanced at first, by the end the whites, and, one assumes, the values that accompany their gazes, have come downstage.

23. For an analysis of these drawings and prints, see *ibid.*, 1–55 (the relevant illustrations can be found on 23, 26, and 27).



Figure 2. From W. T. Lhamon, Jr., *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 27.

Nets of identification are being stretched. If the viewer of the 1820 folk drawing may identify with the black dancer by virtue of his own “autonomous,” framed position, by the 1840s he may do so only through the watchful gaze of the white dandy.<sup>24</sup> Whose gaze structures our view? An early nineteenth-century popular reimagining of Mamai, the “paragon of Cossackdom” (figure 3), poses the same problem (figure 4).<sup>25</sup> Like the black dancer, Cossack Mamai looks back at the viewer from the center of the picture. Like the dancer, Mamai is observed from more than one quarter: off to the left of center is a *panych*, a dandy, watching the Cossack.<sup>26</sup> While we may track the foregrounding and centering of the fop-pish white “b’hoy,” who focuses our view in the American print *over time*, in the Ukrainian painting the same effect has been achieved *simultaneously*: the face of our *panych* is grotesquely lengthened, his eye, nose, and mouth displaced toward the center, so much so that his features take on coherence only as the viewer moves away from center. In the case of

24. It is interesting to note that this urban dandy, the prototypical “b’hoy” Mose who became the hero of his own repertoire on the New York popular stage, had metamorphosed into a performer in blackface by the 1850s, that is, into a caricature of an urbanized free black. Cf. Alexander Saxton, “Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology,” *American Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1975): 8–11.

25. See P. M. Zholtovs’kyi, *Ukrains’kyi zhyuopys XVII–XVIII st.* (Kiev, 1978), 298, 300. Cf. Gavriel Shapiro, *Nikolai Gogol and the Baroque Cultural Heritage* (University Park, Penn., 1993), 60, who briefly discusses the latter in the context of the ostensible influence of *luboks* on Gogol’s imagination.

26. This dandy is identified as a *liakh* (Pole) in Zholtovs’kyi, *Ukrains’kyi zhyuopys*, 300.



Figure 3. From P. M. Zholtovs'kyi, *Ukrains'kyi zhyvopys XVII–XVIII st.* (Kiev, 1978), 298.

both the American and the Ukrainian scene, the audience identifies with the minstrel performance—it legitimates its own view of it—through somebody else's, some patron's, gaze. Mamai (like the black dancer) remains the painting's ostensible subject matter; the panych (like the white b'hoy) occupies the place from where the picture communicates with us, against which our view of Ukrainian culture, at the turn of the nineteenth century, is unconsciously triangulated.

Such a triangulation of the gaze in fact marks the printed editions of the first works of modern Ukrainian literature. The earliest editions of, say, Ivan Kotliarevs'kyi's *Eneïda* (1798; 1809; 1842) or Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnov'ianenko's *Malorossiiskie povesti* (Little Russian tales, 1834–1837), published in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Kharkiv, are nearly indistinguishable from Russian editions of the age. Their titles, written in flawless Russian, are balanced with bucolic graphic emblems (rococo-sentimentalist harps, wreaths, and so on), and they almost always bear the ethnonym *mal-*



Figure 4. From P. M. Zholtovs'kyi, *Ukrains'kyi zhyvopys XVII–XVIII st.* (Kiev, 1978), 300.

*orossiiskii* (Little Russian, as in figures 5 and 6). These are all Great Russian signifiers for Ukrainian cultural production. Hence, the Ukrainian public's activity (and, despite the location of the Little Russian craze in Russia, we must assume that most readers of these works were in fact Ukrainians) is supported by the illusion—if not the reality—of Russian patronage, of another, Russian, audience. The latter gives structure to the former.<sup>27</sup>

The design of *Dikan'ka* betrays its author's keen awareness of this triangulation and his manipulation of it (figure 7). On the title page of this book of bucolic, Little Russian stories the usual Russian requisites of "malorossiiskii" and a bucolic emblem are altogether absent. What one does find are Ukrainian words (for example, *khutir* "farm," "homestead"), one even showing Ukrainian phonology (*pasichnik*, not *pasēchnik*, for "beekeeper"), as well as a *zdesnii*, that is, Ukrainian prenatal, identity: the *khutir* is identified as being "near Dikan'ka," suggesting confidence that anyone who might pick up the volume will know where *that* is. And it is edited by a Rudyi (Red) Pan'ko (whom an early Russian reviewer dutifully [mis]called *Panēk*).<sup>28</sup> The title page signifies a crude book, an impossible book-object, the kind of *nevidal'* made by one who knows nothing about books—in other words, a consummate Little Russian book! This illusion is maintained to the very end of *Dikan'ka*, its errata page, where the

27. In this respect, what we call the "triangulation" of minstrelsy is a special instance of the coincidence of our view and the Other's gaze operative in *nostalgia*: both the minstrel show and Gogol's *Dikan'ka* are nothing if not nostalgic. Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 111–16.

28. Cf. Tsarynyi, "Mysli malorossiianina," 41.

МАЛОРОССИЙСКАЯ

ЭНЕИДА

ВЪ ТРЕХЪ ЧАСТЯХЪ.

---

Съ приобщеніемъ  
значенія Малороссійскихъ словъ какъ со-  
держащихся въ оной, такъ и весьма  
многихъ другихъ.



---

ВЪ САНКТПЕТЕРБУРГѢ,

1798 года.

Figure 5. From *Istoriia ukraiïns'koi literatury*, vol. 2, *Stanovlennia novoi literatury (druha polovyna XVIII–trydtsiati roky XIX st.)* (Kiev, 1967), 202.

МАЛОРОССІЙСКІЯ  
**ПОВѢСТИ.**

РАЗСКАЗЫВАЕМЫЯ

*Грыцькомъ Основьяненко.*

КНИЖКА ВТОРАЯ.



**МОСКВА,**

ВЪ ТИПОГРАФИИ ЛАЗАРЕВЫХЪ

ИНСТИТУТА ВОСТОЧНЫХЪ ЯЗЫКОВЪ.

**1836.**

Figure 6. From *Istoriia ukraiïns'koi literatury*, vol. 2, *Stanovlennia novoï literatury (druha polovyna XVIII–trydtsiati roky XIX st.)* (Kiev, 1967), 432.

**В Е Ч Е Р А**  
**НА ХУТОРЪ**  
**БЛИЗЪ ДИКАНЬКИ.**

---

**ПОВЪСТИ,**

ИЗДАНЫЯ

*Пасичникомъ Рудымъ Панькомъ.*

---

ПЕРВАЯ КНИЖКА.

---

**САНКТПЕТЕРБУРГЪ.**

ВЪ ТИПОГРАФ. ДЕПАР. НАРОД. ПРОСВѢЩЕНІЯ.

1831.

Figure 7. From *Perepiska N. V. Gogolia v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow, 1988), 1: between 224 and 225.

“editor,” Pan’ko, abuses printing as he fumbles over his *is*, *ns*, and *ps*.<sup>29</sup> Gogol’, in fact, imagined the first modern Ukrainian book-object; his design of *Dikan’ka* was as carefully constructed as that of *Dead Souls* would be. His cover sets up a minstrel scenario without a patron, where the performance is, as it were, brought to its audience without the usual mediation, in spite of it. But what mediation in particular, what support, is here rendered conspicuous by its absence?

The “patron” impossibly absent on the paratextual level is, of course, the figure who makes himself so conspicuously present at the start of the text itself: the elite Russian reader, offended by the unseemly object in his hands. His words, which open the foreword to *Dikan’ka*, are so well known as to bear repeating:

What oddity [*nevidal’*] is this: *Evenings on a Farm near Dikan’ka*? What sort of *Evenings*? And thrust into the world by a beekeeper! Goodness! As though geese enough had not been plucked for pens and rags turned into paper! As though folks enough of all callings and types had not dirtied their fingers with inkstains! And now some whim’s possessed a beekeeper [*pasichnik*] to drag himself in their footsteps! Really, so much printed paper has proliferated nowadays that it takes some time to figure out what to wrap in it.<sup>30</sup>

This voice represents “good society’s” response to *Dikan’ka*. It belongs to those elite readers, the *liubeznye chitateli* from Petersburg who go to balls and put on airs.<sup>31</sup> We will return to the figure of the *chitateli*, the *vy* (“you”) opposed to Pan’ko’s *my* (“we”), in a moment. But already this tirade strikes us with a slip of the tongue: the elite Russian reader uses a Ukrainian pronunciation, *pasichnik*, as it stands on the cover. That we are stumbling across a kind of unconscious “knot” is apparent from the reader’s sudden amnesia: he cannot think of anything to wrap up in the printed matter in front of him. If we take into account that food is the sublime object (that is, the desired object that cannot be pinned down by language) in all of Gogol’s works,<sup>32</sup> but never more so than in *Dikan’ka*, then it becomes clear that this reader has been denied any and all access to pleasure—the plea-

29. “I’ve never had to bother with printed writing before. . . . You look, and it’s an *Izhe* for sure; but then you look closer, and it’s either *Nash* or *Pokoi*.” Gogol’, *PSS*, 1:317.

30. Gogol’, *PSS*, 1:103. All translations from the *Dikan’ka* tales are based on Leonard Kent, *The Complete Tales of Nikolai Gogol*, trans. Constance Garnett and Leonard J. Kent, vol. 1 (Chicago, 1985), with our own modifications when we considered it appropriate.

31. *Ibid.*, 1:103–4.

32. The centrality of food in Gogol’s universe is the subject of Alexander P. Obolensky’s *Food-Notes on Gogol*, *Readings in Slavic Literature* 8 (Winnipeg, 1972), which does not, however, draw any substantive theoretical conclusions. Simon Karlinsky, “Portrait of Gogol as a Word Glutton, with Rabelais, Sterne, and Gertrude Stein as Background Figures,” *California Slavic Studies* 5 (1970): 169–86, comes closer to the crux of the matter when he connects comestibles to Gogol’s “word gluttony,” in particular noting his obsessive arrangement of foodstuffs into lists that still do not serve to “convey the impression of the scene” (182–83). Karlinsky nonetheless limits his observations to the symptomatic level, that is, Gogol’s linguistic “need to play with” words, and not its cause. On the sublime object of desire and its “impossibility,” see Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London, 1989), 194–95.

sure of narration, and the pleasure of the object that blocks or diverts it (for example, the hot buttered rolls of Pan'ko's wife). This denial of pleasure to the elite reader opens up a space for Pan'ko's own performance and provides the basis for another audience's identification with it.

The "Ukrainian" slip of the elite reader's tongue, and the sudden "blockage" of his alimentary-symbolic system, show that even if Gogol' has "forgotten" the Ukrainian language, it has not forgotten him. As we shall discuss more fully below, it functions as the repressed "unconscious" of *Dikan'ka*, where it will irrupt in the mirror of the Russian language, its structuring double. But if in the foreword it is, for the time being, kept in abeyance, the possibility of its irruption is already figured in the debate between the panych from Poltava and Foma Grigor'evich. The self-invented little panych in his pea-green coat, who resembles, and hence aspires to the place of, an assessor or an officer ("khot' seichas nariadit' v zasedateli ili podkomorii"), telling tales in an incomprehensible language (the "language of printed books") and reciting parables in Church Slavonic, of course figures the Russian language that Gogol' has chosen for *Dikan'ka*'s idiom.<sup>33</sup> For his part, Foma, the earthy *d'iak* in the potato-mash colored gabardine, figures the Ukrainian language, which eludes the printed page, a medium associated in no uncertain terms with Russians.<sup>34</sup> The fact that Gogol' presents these two narrators as nothing more than reflections of one another (in their food-colored clothing and blue- or red-trimmed handkerchiefs)<sup>35</sup> only underscores the terms of the conflict.

Foma, after all, has sport precisely with the panych's language, telling an old seminary joke about the student who had learned his Latin so well that he forgot "our Orthodox tongue," adding the suffix *-us* to every word. The reference to Kotliarevs'kyi's macaronic Ukrainian-Latin verses in the *Eneïda* is obvious.<sup>36</sup> But the joke takes on even more resonance if one considers that Latin and Russo-Slavonic exist at the same semantic level in Kotliarevs'kyi's poetics as material to be parodied (debased) by its juxta-

33. Gogol', *PSS*, 1:105.

34. Pan'ko describes Foma's attitude toward printing in the introduction to "Veher nakanune Ivana Kupala" (St. John's Eve): "It happened that one of these people . . . scribes or something . . . wheedled this story out of Foma Grigor'evich, and he completely forgot about it. But then that very panych in the pea-green coat . . . arrives from Poltava, brings with him a little book, and . . . shows it to us. . . . Since I know how to read after a fashion . . . I began reading it out loud. I had hardly read two pages when [Foma Grigor'evich] suddenly took me by the arm. 'Hold on! Tell me first what it is that you're reading.' . . . 'What do you mean, what I'm reading, Foma Grigor'evich? Your tale, your own words.' 'Who told you that those are my own words?' 'What better proof do you want? It's printed here: "As told by such-and-such a sexton.'" 'To hell with whoever printed that! The son of a bitch Russian is lying. Is that how I told it? What's one to do when a man's got a screw loose in his head! Just listen, I'll tell it to you now.'" Ibid., 1:137-38. Of course, Foma is also articulating here Gogol's own annoyance with the editor of *Otechestvennyye zapiski*, who, he felt, bowdlerized the story when it was first published in that journal under the title "Basavriuk." See *ibid.*, 1:521-23.

35. *Ibid.*, 1:105-6.

36. For example, "*Eneus noster mahnus panus / I slavnyi troianorum kniaz', / Shmyhliav po moriu, iak tsyhanus, / Ad te, o reks! pryslav nunk nas.*" Ivan Kotliarevs'kyi, *Povne zibrannia tvoriv* (Kiev, 1969), 113-14; more such verses at 188-89.

position with colloquial Ukrainian. Catching sight of a rake, Foma's student asks:

"What do you call that, father?" And, without looking at what he was doing, stepped on the teeth of the rake. Before the former had time to answer, the handle flew up and hit the boy on the forehead. "Damned rake!" cried the schoolboy, grabbing his forehead and jumping a yard into the air, "may the devil shove its father off a bridge, how it can hit!" So you see! The poor boy remembered the name.<sup>37</sup>

The rake "hits the cause," as it were, it clears the blockage, jolts the memory of the student for the Ukrainian language. In a sense, this rake is lying at the bottom of a *mise-en-abîme*, for Foma's tale in turn jolts the panych's memory (he is not pleased to remember and starts spoiling for a fight) and could be imagined to function analogously for Gogol' himself, were it not for the fact that everything remains safely repressed: the conflict is deferred when Pan'ko's wife brings out food (rolls and butter),<sup>38</sup> as usual in Gogol', a sublime and immobile object.

As Pushkin's hawking of Gogol's "piglet" to "good society" made good use of the print shop anecdote, and as the elite reader of the first lines of *Dikan'ka*, foreign to food and fun, is there so that *we* can be in on the joke, so too the elite figure of the "author" Nikolai Vasil'evich Gogol' himself supports the skaz of the *raconteur* Rudyi Pan'ko (for the period that the latter is beloved of the reading public, that is, in 1831–1832). But in each case, the elite figure must be distanced from the performance he patronizes, lest the fun fizzle out. This fact is illustrated by an anecdote told by Sergei Aksakov à propos his first meeting with Gogol'. Aksakov and his circle were among the few at the time who knew "who Rudyi Pan'ko was," having been so informed by Pogodin. Yet witness the confusion of the *defrocked* company (in the perfect state, it would seem, to receive Pan'ko) upon suddenly being introduced to the young dandy behind the mask, with full Russian *imiaz-otchestvo* besides: "May I introduce you to Nikolai Vasil'evich Gogol'!" The effect was powerful. I became very embarrassed and ran to put on my frock coat, mumbling empty words of trite introduction. At any other time I would not have met Gogol' in this way. All of my guests . . . were also somehow perplexed and silent."<sup>39</sup> One might picture the same scene in a Yankee drawing room full of people who had just thrilled to the jumping of Jim Crow but who suddenly, and ceremoniously, were introduced to his maker, a white Thomas Dartmouth Rice. Thanks to Aksakov, we are witness to a desublimation, the "dreary world" announced when the patron at last steps out from behind the minstrel performer. And could the chuckling and snorting of the proletarian typesetters be imagined to accompany the setting of a book by blue blood "Nikolai Vasil'evich Gogol'" rather than by one Rudyi Pan'ko? Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that Pan'ko claims to have forgotten how he got

37. Gogol', *PSS*, 1:105.

38. *Ibid.*, 1:106.

39. S. T. Aksakov, *Istoriia moego znakovstva s Gogolem*, ed. E. P. Naselenko and E. A. Smirnova (Moscow, 1960), 10.

his nickname, "Red" (Gogol' gave it to him, of course); but, he adds, once one has gained such a name, a *prozvishche*, it stays with you "for the ages."<sup>40</sup> It is unnecessary to note that in Ukrainian, this word means a family name, the name by which others judge us. Like his "patronless" book—and like Gogol' himself—Pan'ko has effectively forgotten his father.

Although the elite patron must be kept at a distance for the minstrel performance to have its effect, his impotent gaze nonetheless is the place from where the performance must be viewed. Gogol's Russian public feels this gaze, it hears this voice clucking in disapproval, and acts out, snorting and giggling, forging an imaginary identification with the romantically exotic characters and with Pan'ko himself. And the latter encourages just such an identification at every turn. Each time he threatens the figure of the elite readers, his so-called *liubeznye chitateli*, with the potholes of the *Dikan'ka* roads or is unable to describe to them the fun of the *vechernitsy* or almost forgets to tell them the way to the party,<sup>41</sup> another reader desires nothing more than to join Pan'ko's Ukrainian, lower-class *my* ("we") and to leave *vy* ("y'all who yawn at the Petersburg balls") behind. If Pan'ko's conscious discourse is wholly directed to this *vy*, to the elites, then its unconscious counterpart uses the rhetorical *ty* ("thou") to reach out to a different audience, which is thus pulled toward the *my* ("we"). Such instances are few in the foreword but telling:

Inogda *zaidesh v pokoi velikogo pana: vse obstupiat tebia i poidut durachit'*  
(Just like happens when *you* enter the apartments of some fine gentleman: everyone gathers around *you* and begins to make *you* feel like a fool)<sup>42</sup>

(note also that here *ty* is called a peasant [*muzhik*]);<sup>43</sup>

Inoi raz *slushaesh, slushaesh . . . nichego, khot' ubei, ne ponimaesh'*  
(Sometimes *you* listen and listen . . . but *you* can't understand a damned thing)<sup>44</sup>

(in reference to the panych's Russian discourse);

Eshche *napugaesh' dobrykh liudei*  
(*You* might scare good people away)<sup>45</sup>

(referring to the teller of horror stories); and two passages that refer to the consumption of food:

40. Gogol', *PSS*, 1:104.

41. *Ibid.*, 1:106–7, 104, 106. In this way, Pan'ko's *skaz* introduction to *Dikan'ka* may be counted among Gogol's "dramas of abortive communication." Hodgson, "Paradox," 113. Yet the communication *not* achieved with the elite reader, who has been figured in the *sermocinatio* of the introduction's first words, is the foundation for the communication, or, more precisely, for the identification, that *does* take place. *Ibid.*, 111–12.

42. Gogol', *PSS*, 1: 103.

43. "It wouldn't matter so much if it were important servants; but no, some little kid . . . pesters you too. . . . 'Where are you going? Where? Scram, peasant, out with you!'" *Ibid.*, 1:103.

44. *Ibid.*, 1:105.

45. *Ibid.*, 1:106.

A maslo, tak vot i techet po gubam, kogda *nachmesh'* est'  
(And the butter fairly melts on *your* lips when *you* begin eating);<sup>46</sup>

*Stanesh'* est'—ob"iaden'e, da i polno  
(As soon as *you* begin eating—it's a treat, and that's plenty).<sup>47</sup>

A public who, like Rudyi Pan'ko or Jim Crow, is driven away and insulted, who cannot appreciate the language of printed books, who puts a scare into "good people," and who is imagined to have access to "full eating," denied the elite reader—who is this but the *chern'*, the rabble, to whose taste Gogol' is pleased to pander? Is there not room for this audience at the *khutir*? And does not every character from "good society" here—the elite reader, Pushkin, and Nikolai Vasil'evich Gogol' himself—play the role that Pan'ko, the minstrel, demands of him?

Signaled in the foreword to *Dikan'ka*, this "innocent" game of distancing and identification is at once replayed and problematized in the first, hence programmatic, tale of the collection, "The Fair at Sorochintsy." No coincidence, then, that, as the introduction to "St. John's Eve" makes clear, the story is told by the self-consciously literary and urbanized panych.<sup>48</sup> For it is precisely this "literariness" that informs the nature of his performance, that in fact underscores the story *as* performance. Like the character of Mr. Interlocutor in the minstrel show, in blackface but dressed in formal tails and without a trace of black dialect,<sup>49</sup> the panych acts here as something of a master of ceremonies who quite literally brackets the show with his own introduction (the description of the summer's day) and epilogue (the elegiac meditation). As such, these "bookends" constitute one (the vertical, as it were) axis of the three along which Gogol' constructs his story, the other two being an "underlying" horizontal one, comprising the Ukrainian-language epigraphs opening each of the thirteen chapters; and a second horizontal one running "above" the first and consisting of the Russian-language *fabula*, with its descriptions of the fair, the characters, and the action. Each of these axes is, concomitantly, mapped according to three stylistic codes. As codes, they assume an awareness of a given set of conventions and expectations on the part of the reader, ones that are as much ethnocultural and social as they are literary.

The fact that the epigraphs that constitute the first horizontal axis are drawn from two constellations of sources, that is, Ukrainian folklore and Ukrainian (burlesque) literature, is no less important than the fact that they are *in Ukrainian*. Within the Russian imperial literary code, it was precisely as specific—specifically Ukrainian—genres that they functioned, in effect, to metonymically represent Ukraine.<sup>50</sup> In this respect, Ukrainian

46. *Ibid.*, 1:107.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*, 1:137.

49. Cf. John Blair, "Blackface Minstrels in Cross-Cultural Perspective," *American Studies International* 28, no. 2 (1990): 58–59; Saxton, "Blackface Minstrelsy," 8–11.

50. Cf. Hryhorii Hrabovych [George G. Grabowicz], "Semantyka kotliarevshchyny," *Do istorii ukrains'koi literatury: Doslidzhennia, ese, polemika* (Kiev, 1997), 321–22.

folklore, which had been appearing in Russian journals for about a quarter century, together with the rediscovery of the region's colorful history, generated a panoply of associations that served to define this at once exotic and familiar people for a Russian audience.

Against this background, Gogol's own use of folklore in the epigraphs is noteworthy. With the exception of the one to chapter 5 (the somewhat melancholy "Ne khylysia iavoron'ku . . ." [Droop not, sycamore tree . . .]), all of the folkloric epigraphs to "The Fair" evoke nothing more and nothing less than, to quote Pushkin, a "singing, dancing, merry, simple, and at the same time sly tribe."<sup>51</sup> This impression is only underscored by Gogol's no less noteworthy choice of literary epigraphs—from Kotliarev's'kyi, Petro Hulak-Artemov's'kyi, and from two anonymous "Little Russian comedies"—his father's, in fact.<sup>52</sup> By virtue of their themes (dancing, singing, drinking, sexuality, buffo violence, and superstition), to say nothing of the stylistic ("low") register, not only of the epigraphs in question, but also of the Ukrainian language as such, qua "dialect," the literary texts become effectively indistinguishable from the folkloric ones, which, in turn, cannot but serve to reconfigure their status. The result is a concatenation of functionally undifferentiated utterances, which, obliterating as it does their ontological hierarchy, creates a single, homogenous socio-cultural space that now represents Ukraine as an "unconscious" souvenir. What remains, in other words, is "the rustle of language," its material texture, vaguely familiar but ultimately incomprehensible.

The critical obverse of this coin is the Russian-language fabula, the second horizontal axis of the "The Fair." What was put in abeyance in the foreword is here free to speak: the panych from Poltava represents and reintegrates the Ukrainian material of the epigraphs into a single, Russian voice. As a result, the relationship between the two horizontal axes takes on a peculiar—mocking, if you will—reciprocity. For if, on the one hand, the epigraphs serve to authenticate Gogol's counterfeit while in the process—at the cost of—losing their own identity, the fabula restores this identity, but in linguistic blackface, wherein it is now comprehensible precisely for being "gentrified." Indeed, it is only in and through the medium of the imperial literary language that the Ukrainian setting actually coalesces and comes to life, and the Ukrainian characters actually acquire voice and form. What Gogol' gives us, then, in the relationship of the fabula to the epigraphs is specular, reflective, yet ultimately distorting, like the mirror Paraska plays with near the end of the tale:

Here she got up, holding the mirror in her hand and, bending her head down to it, walked atremble about the house, as though in dread of falling, seeing below her, instead of the floor, the ceiling. . . . "Why, I'm like a child," she cried laughing, "afraid to take a step." And she began tapping with her feet; . . . at last her left hand dropped to her hip, and

51. *RKL*, 1:139.

52. *Sobaka-vivtsia* (The dog-sheep) and *Prostak* (The simpleton), both by Gogol's father, Vasyl' Hohol'-Janov's'kyi.

she went off into a dance, clinking her taps, holding the mirror before her, and singing her favorite song.<sup>53</sup>

Paraska's dancing and singing a Ukrainian folksong in turn draw Cherevik into his own dance with his daughter, which then in turn elicits Tsybulia's laughter and his announcement that Paraska's bridegroom has arrived. The mirror, in other words, quite literally generates and integrates into a signifying whole the "singing, dancing, merry . . . tribe," which "like a frightened child" would otherwise remain immobilized amid the "incomprehensible" whispering of the Ukrainian epigraphs. It would appear that only the simulacrum of the Russian language is able to symbolize it and bring it fully to life.

And by this very same token, it is crucial that Paraska's mirror also generate, in the form of a rem(a)inder, the essence of Gogol's Ukraine, that which ultimately drives all the dancing, singing, and laughter. The first thing the girl sees reflected in her mirror is "the ceiling with the boards lined up under the rafters from which the priest's son had so lately tumbled" (134). Recapitulating as it does Khivria's aborted amorous adventure, the image reminds the reader of the uninhibited sexuality that permeates this exotic world. Sexuality, in fact, determines the entire fabula, from the moment that Grits'ko lays his half-leering, half-tender eyes on Paraska to the dance of the old hags at their engagement. If one reads Grits'ko's bombardment of Khivria with a handful of mud as a peculiar expression of infantile sexual aggression;<sup>54</sup> the appearance of the pig in the window as the priest's son is hiding in the rafters as a signifier of sexuality as such;<sup>55</sup> or the sexually ambiguous position that Cherevik finds himself in with Khivria in the road as a bit of (homo?)sexual fantasy,<sup>56</sup> it becomes clear not only, or not so much even, that what drives the characters' actions is sexuality, but that this sexuality is rampant, polymorphous, aggressive, and spontaneous, expressed in myriad ways and in practically every gesture. Indeed, it is the surfeit of sexual situations and sexual innuendo—and what is dancing and singing and offering "dumplings, pancakes, buns, doughnuts, cakes"<sup>57</sup> if not an invitation to do the nasty?—that defines Gogol's Ukraine in "The Fair at Sorochintsy" as a fantasy of unfettered enjoyment. No wonder the typesetters worked to stifle their laughter, and Pushkin to broadcast his: Gogol' opened before them a world of enjoyment ultimately unavailable to them both in equal measure, but—and this brings us back to the young panych from Vasylivka gazing at his peasants from his porch and carriage—also to Gogol' himself.

53. Gogol', *PSS*, 1:134.

54. *Ibid.*, 1:114.

55. *Ibid.*, 1:127. A pig, of course, functions as a signifier of sexual anxiety with astonishing insistence and consistency in a number of Gogol's stories.

56. "'What's lying there, Vlas?' 'Why, it looks like two people/men [*chelovek*]: one on top, the other on the bottom. Which of them is the devil I can't make out yet!' 'Why, who is on top?' 'A woman!' 'Oh, well, then that's the devil!'" *Ibid.*, 1:128–29. Gogol's use of the word *chelovek* (which means "person" in Russian, but "man" or "husband" in Ukrainian) is ambiguous.

57. *Ibid.*, 1:122.

It is, thus, this irruption of sexually charged, uncontained energy that the literate, worldly narrator seeks to contain—to “stage manage,” as it were—in the brackets to the tale, as if afraid of the implications of his own enjoyment. The stylistic keys of both the opening description of a Ukrainian summer day in the beginning and the elegiac closing paragraphs stand in awkward contrast to the carnivalesque buffo of the story itself.

The first is something of a prose poem, a lyric, romantically lush depiction of a landscape (which, together with Gogol's description of the Dniepr in “Strashnaia mest” [A terrible vengeance] has functioned in the Russian popular imagination as a signifier of Ukraine no less powerful than Repin's painting of Zaporozhian Cossacks).<sup>58</sup> The very surfeit here of language, with its accumulation of rhetorical devices, epithets, and similes inscribes in nature the same surfeit of fecund, elemental energy that we find in the epigraphs as well as the fabula.

Yet what is crucial here is that, in contrast to the epigraphs and the burlesque world of the fabula that mockingly mirrors them, the stylistic register of the opening paragraphs was, in 1831, impossible in Ukrainian. The poetic lyricism of these passages was possible only in Russian. Juxtaposed to both the epigraphs and fabula, the description of the summer's day demonstratively manifests its difference from the Ukrainian material, simultaneously graphing this difference as inferiority. It proclaims the capacity of the Russian literary language to express *both* the literary and folkloric, the lyrical and the burlesque, the high and the low. By thus subsuming the Ukrainian low, Gogol's Russian counterfeit effectively obviates the *raison d'être* for performance in Ukrainian, which by its very nature cannot (at least not until the appearance of Kvitka's “Marusia” in 1834) perform anything but the low.

The closing paragraphs reiterate this suggestion even more emphatically while at the same time opening up yet another perspective on Gogol's Ukraine. Like the lyricism of the opening passage, the elegiac register of these paragraphs can only signify Russianness, once again securely containing the exotic Ukrainian material within the imperial system of literary codes. Yet precisely as elegy, with its unexpected appearance of a retrospective first-person narrator, they constitute something of a meta-narrative—again, possible only in Russian—that tells, to paraphrase Robert Cantwell, of Gogol's ritual “Russianizing” through his blackface performance of Ukrainian culture:<sup>59</sup>

The sounds of uproar, laughter, and song grew fainter and fainter. The strains of the fiddle died away, growing feeble and losing their vague notes in the emptiness of the air. Somewhere there was still the sound of dancing feet . . . and soon all became still and deserted.

58. It might be noted in this connection that Spirin's cover illustration to *Sorotchintzy Fair* “quilts” these signifiers together, borrowing the laughing Cossack (in his *red jacket*) from Repin's painting and making him the emblem for the devilish enjoyment of the fair.

59. Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* (Urbana, 1984), 265.

Is it not thus that joy . . . 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.<sup>60</sup>

The movement here is, of course, quite literally one of distancing. But in this it only recapitulates explicitly and in a different key the implicit distancing that in fact takes place throughout the story itself. For is the erasure of Gogol's family name from the epigraphs stolen from his father's comedy not merely the obverse of Pan'ko's amnesia concerning *his* father—a way for the ethnically insecure provincial writer to distance himself from the culture he represents? Like the imitation of the Negro by the socially insecure Irish and Jewish performers of blackface seeking promotion in an America where they were judged inferior,<sup>61</sup> Gogol's own performance of Ukrainian culture becomes at once a locus of identification *and* a demonstration of difference that will allow him to obtain a passport into the elite world of Pushkin, Aksakov, and Vasilii Zhukovskii.

And here one encounters something that, as in so much of Gogol's writing, serves only to overdetermine matters. It is not enough, it seems, that the world he represents should be disintegrated and reconstituted for the enjoyment of his imperial audience. As the hags "exuding the indifference of the grave" at Paraska's and Grits'ko's engagement would indicate,<sup>62</sup> the two lovers are headed not so much for the joys of the marriage bed as they are for a wake. They and the world they represent are ready to be interred and mourned, their death an occasion for an elegy by their last remaining "old comrade" (*starinnyi brat*).<sup>63</sup> The elegiac ending, in other words, speaks of the fundamental impossibility of Ukrainian, only the repressed ("unconscious") trace of which—the epigraphs—now inscribes its symbolizing substitute,<sup>64</sup> the blackface of Russian that guaranteed Gogol's entry into literature.

However, a final double take is in order. Does Gogol' succeed in gentrifying Ukraine in *Dikan'ka*'s mirror, on the one hand? And does his Russian audience remain unchanged, having looked into this mirror, on the other? Let us return for a moment to the epigraphs to the "Fair." For a public such as the Petersburg typesetters or, for that matter, any Russian reader who did not have "the patience," as Andrii Tsarynnyi wrote in his review of *Dikan'ka*, "to first learn a glossary so that he could later understand" works published in Ukrainian,<sup>65</sup> these disembodied, fragmented,

60. Gogol', *PSS*, 1: 136.

61. Cf. Lott, *Love and Theft*, 96; as well as Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley, 1996), 48–49, who draws an analogy between minstrelsy and the cultural negotiations of Scots and English in the late eighteenth century.

62. Gogol', *PSS*, 1: 135–36.

63. Cf. Hryhorii Hrabovych [George G. Grabowicz], "Hoholia mif Ukraïny," *Sučasnist*, 1994, no. 19 (October): 145.

64. Cf. Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore, 1985), 6–9.

65. Tsarynnyi, "Mysli malorossiianina," 311.

and (to most of his readers) unintelligible voices constitute something akin to an empty signifier for Ukraine, a world in which Kotliarevs'kyi, Hulak, and anonymous Ukrainian folksingers dance and drink and mount each other together on the same stage with Cherevik, Tsybulia, and Golopu-penko. The contemporary reader feels the "emptiness" of the epigraphs especially keenly. In the Academy of Sciences edition, they are reproduced, fetishistically, in Gogol's idiosyncratic Russian orthography (unlike the Russian text, whose orthography is modernized); in scholarly-popular editions, they are rendered in (mostly) correct Ukrainian orthography; while in the popular editions, they appear in Ukrainian with all manner of misspellings. They cannot be integrated, they "stick out," irrupting from the signifying fabric of the Russian-language fabula. An "unconscious" souvenir of Ukraine, they sound a note of unease in the midst of the idyll and may lead the reader to search for new meanings in the text. Through the reorganizing power of the repressed Ukrainian language, "Ukraine" becomes a potential center of a performance of Ukraine that had consciously announced "Russia" as its guarantor of meaning.

Hence, the risk is always present that Gogol's public, chasing the elusive "rustle of language," will find that the *very place* from where it looks at Ukrainian culture has shifted. Lott, among others, has argued that the lasting legacy of blackface minstrelsy was "the blackening of America," the process by which the emerging popular (national) culture was forever conditioned by its problematic appropriation of blackness.<sup>66</sup> Could it not, then, be argued that Gogol's own repression of ethnic difference on the backs of his "singing and dancing" Little Russian folk effectively "Ukrainianized" an emerging Russian national (popular) culture? George Grabowicz suggests as much when he observes that it was precisely through Gogol, through his use of "parody, subversion, provocation, ambiguity, and decentering," that a specifically Ukrainian comic discourse made its way into, and forever changed, Russian literature.<sup>67</sup> But then Pushkin already seems to have recognized this fact when in his review of the second edition of *Dikan'ka* he exclaimed, "How amazed we were at a Russian book that made us laugh."<sup>68</sup> One imagines that by this time the typesetters of St. Petersburg were responding with unconcealed mirth.

66. Lott, *Love and Theft*, 89–107.

67. Hrabovych [Grabowicz], "Semantyka kotliarevshchyny," 331. We would propose the term *recentering* in place of *decentering*, insofar as the "carnavalesque" moment evoked by Grabowicz is rather utopian.

68. *RKL*, 1:139.