Nikolai Gogol

SELECTED PASSAGES FROM CORRESPONDENCE WITH FRIENDS

Translated by
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INTRODUCTION

Between 1842, when *Dead Souls* was published, and 1847, when he brought out *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends,* Nikolai Gogol was occupied with two things: the continuation of *Dead Souls* (a task that plagued him until his death in 1851) and the clarification of his religious, moral, and aesthetic views. The latter forms the content of *Selected Passages,* the last of Gogol's works to be published during his lifetime.

We do not know exactly when Gogol decided that he must publicly expose his convictions on these topics. His first mention of the book is April 2, 1845, in a letter to A. O. Smirnova,[1] at which time he appears to have been much concerned about the effect his fictional works had produced. He thought this new effort would set the record straight. At the end of April he wrote to the Minister of Education, S. S. Uvarov, to thank him for a pension Uvarov had just approved for him, to inform Uvarov that his new book would be much more useful to Russia than anything he had done previously, and that "its subject would not be foreign to your [Uvarov's] own convictions."[2] This letter to Uvarov marks

1. Gogol's long and intimate friendship with Smirnova dates from 1831, when he sent her a copy of his first book, *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka.* She was at that time well known at court as well as in literary circles and she often intervened with the Emperor when the censors gave her friends trouble. Indeed, she was to approach Nicholas I on several occasions on Gogol's behalf. She also became one of Gogol's more frequent correspondents and one of his closest confidantes.

2. Translated by Carl R. Proffer in *Letters of Nikolai Gogol* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967), p. 157.

the beginning of the controversy over *Selected Passages,* for Uvarov promptly publicized it in an attempt to prove that Gogol was a supporter of the status quo in Russia. Gogol's friends, both Westernizers and Slavophiles, thought it a pity at best that Gogol had written such a letter; at worst, they were disgusted by what seemed to them to be toadying on Gogol's part to the government of Nicholas I. Indeed, Belinsky was to refer to this letter some two years later in his famous "Letter to Gogol" when he said,

> your letter to Uvarov became known in Saint Petersburg, in which you lament that your works have been misinterpreted in Russia, and subsequently you express dissatisfaction with your previous works and declare that you will be pleased with your own works only when he, who, etc. Now judge for yourself: is it any wonder that your book has lowered you in the eyes of the public both as a writer and, still more, as a man?[3]

Gogol was indeed worried about misinterpretations of his earlier work. In a letter of July 25, 1845 to Smirnova—at which time he was deeply engaged in working on *Selected Passages*—he declared that the true meaning of *Dead Souls* was still a secret and that this secret would only be revealed in the succeeding volumes. The groundwork for the future battle between the author of *Selected Passages* and its critics was already being prepared, one and one half years before publication of the book.

By the end of July 1846, the first part of the book was ready for publication (it came out as a whole in late January 1847), and Gogol was more than ever convinced of its necessity—"for everyone." By the following October Gogol had sent P. A. Pletnyov, his publisher,[4] "the fifth and final notebook." The volume,

3. Translated by James P. Scanlan in *Russian Philosophy,* edited by James M. Edie, James P. Scanlan, Mary-Barbara Zeldin; with the collaboration of George L. Kline (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), I, 318.

4. P. A. Pletnyov (1792–1865), one of the foremost literary critics of the day, had been Pushkin's friend and took over the editorship of *The Contemporary,* the literary journal founded by Pushkin, after Pushkin's death in 1837. In 1846 Pletnyov sold *The Contemporary* to friends of Belinsky, who became its literary critic until his death in 1848. With the sale the

he said, "was necessary for the general good." "I am told this," Gogol went on, "by my heart and by God's mercy. . . . I acted firmly in the name of God when I was compiling my book; I took up my pen in praise of his Holy name. . . ."[5] Again, Gogol's desire was to help everyone, to perform a religious and moral service for mankind.

By December 1846, as the publication date was drawing closer, Gogol was becoming increasingly uneasy about the reception *Selected Passages* might obtain. As his letter of December 10, 1846, to A. O. Rosset, the brother of Smirnova, indicates, he was uncertain how the public would take his latest effort—because of what he had to say and the style in which he had chosen to say it.

In early January 1847, Pletnyov advised Gogol that the censors had objected to some of the letters.[6] Gogol replied,

> I absolutely cannot see a reason why *it is better* not to print those letters, which, it seems to me, will make some civil servants examine themselves a little more severely—especially those who have beautiful souls and good intentions and sin through lack of knowledge. If only two or three people in all of Russia look more clearly at many things after my book, then it is already extremely good.[7]

The more he contemplated the reactions to his work, the more nervously did Gogol ask his friends for their comments and the more furiously did he inform them of his reasons for writing it. He told S. T. Aksakov[8] that everyone would attack, but the attacks would be necessary since they would give him much information, both about himself and about his readers. He told his mother that he was publishing his "Testament" in order to help

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journal's orientation turned definitively liberal. Pletnyov was one of Gogol's closest friends and, at times, his patron.

5. Proffer, p. 163.

6. Nos. 19, 20, 21, 26, and 28.

7. Proffer, p. 167.

8. S. T. Aksakov (1791–1859) met Gogol as early as 1832 and remained friendly with him the rest of Gogol's life. The father of the Slavophiles K. S. and I. S. Aksakov, Aksakov is best known as the author of the realistic works *Years of Childhood* and *A Family Chronicle*. His *Recollections of Gogol* is an important source for all writers on Gogol.

others, because a real Christian must always remember death, and this remembrance will keep him from sin and thus earn him a good end—indeed, "the constant thought of death . . . lends strength for life and good deeds in life."[9] He told A. P. Tolstoy,[10] just after publication, that *Selected Passages* had been mangled by the censors. He informed Rosset that the practical point of the book had been ruined: "Almost everything that explains how to apply what is said to actual deeds was not passed—all the letters to people in government jobs, to civil servants in Russia in which I explain the possibility of doing truly Christian deeds in any position in our secular offices."[11]

Even though he was only beginning to receive opinions on *Selected Passages* in late January and early February 1847, Gogol was already aware of what at least the westernizers would say. His letter to Rosset of February 11, 1847, in part predicts what Belinsky would later write:

I did not compile this book to anger the Belinskys, Kraevskys, and Se(n)kowskis;[12] I was looking into the inside of Russia, not at literary society. Now the book consists of generalities, and instead of those peo-

9. Proffer, p. 169.

10. Gogol met A. P. Tolstoy (1801–1873), who had twice been a provincial governor, in Ostend during the summer of 1844. Tolstoy was in many ways a typical conservative administrator. His home was in Moscow, but he spent a good deal of time abroad. In the fall of 1848 and spring of 1849 Gogol lived at the Tolstoy house in Moscow. Gogol seems to have been impressed with Tolstoy's rank, although he also seems to have thought Tolstoy, who was of a rather mystical persuasion, needed much advice in order to make him a proper Russian administrator. Many of the letters in *Selected Passages* were addressed to Tolstoy.

11. Proffer, p. 171.

12. A. A. Kraevsky was coeditor, with Belinsky, of the journal *Notes of the Fatherland.* Kraevsky and Belinsky split in 1846 and Belinsky became literary critic of *The Contemporary.* Kraevsky was one of the bitterest critics of *Selected Passages.* O. I. Se(n)kowski was one of the editors of *Library for Reading.* He was also professor of Arabic, Turkish, and Persian at the University of St. Petersburg. He had been attacked some twelve years before the publication of *Selected Passages* in Gogol's article "On the Condition of Journalistic Literature in 1834 and 1835," printed in *The Contemporary* in 1835.

ple and subjects which should have stepped out before the readers, I alone stepped out on the stage, exactly as if I were publishing my book in order to display myself. . . .[13]

It was precisely this charge of pride that was shortly to be leveled against Gogol.

The responses to *Selected Passages* came quickly, and they were even worse than Gogol had expected. As he wrote to Zhukovsky[14] on March 6, 1847, "the publication of my book burst forth exactly like a slap in the face—a slap in the face of the public, a slap in the face of my friends, and, finally, a stouter slap in my face." While he felt that he might have made a fool of himself, still Gogol tried to explain: "the opponents as well as the defenders are more or less in an uneasy state, and many are simply nonplussed as to where to turn, being unable to make many apparently contradictory things harmonize—because of the sharpness with which they were expressed."[15] His sensitivity to criticism again overcame him, however, and he concluded his letter by suggesting that perhaps he had been guilty of those very sins that he had anathematized in his book.

At the same time, Gogol could not bring himself to agree with those who regarded him as a traitor to the cause of humanity and decency. Indeed, Belinsky was to call him a "proponent of the knout, apostle of ignorance, champion of obscurantism, panegyrist of Tatar ways. . . ."[16] Many (mostly extreme Slavophiles) saw *Selected Passages* as a definitive break with Gogol's past work and on this ground justified their own dislike of what Gogol had

13. Proffer, p. 171.

14. V. A. Zhukovsky (1783–1852) is best known as a translator, probably the finest that Russia has produced. Indeed, many Russians claim that his translations surpass the originals. He worked particularly with German and English poets of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He is very important for his work in shaping a Russian poetic language of feeling. He was considered, before Pushkin, the leader of the progressive literary movement in Russia.

15. Proffer, p. 173.

16. *Russian Philosophy,* I, 315.

previously written while praising his new effort. A few—Prince Vyazemsky among them[17]—thought *Selected Passages* was of a piece with Gogol's earlier writing, but the Prince also thought it went too far: Gogol must reach a middle way. Vyazemsky probably found it contradictory to accept Gogol as a great writer and to reject *any* of his works, so he took this way of getting around the problem. Only the article by Apollon Grigoryev[18] insisted that Gogol's opinions had not changed at all and that both Slavophiles and westernizers were wrong to think they had.

Most serious of all, however, was the series of attacks by Belinsky, climaxed by the open letter. It was Belinsky who carried the day. His opinion of *Selected Passages* has, indeed, prevailed from that time to this.[19]

Gogol's replies, in which he tried to explain his book and correct the impression it had created,[20] were of no avail. The only explanations for such a work as *Selected Passages,* so far as his critics were concerned, were either that Gogol had gone mad as a result of religious fanaticism (even a villain who had driven him to this madness was found—Father Matvey Alexandrovich Konstantinovsky, an Orthodox priest who was close to Gogol at this time[21]) or that he was attempting to ingratiate himself with the government so that he might receive financial support. It was perhaps the charge of having done a complete about-face that an-

17. Prince P. A. Vyazemsky (1792–1878), an intimate friend and appreciator of Pushkin, was also the foremost champion of romanticism in Russia in the 1820s.

18. A. A. Grigoryev (1822–1864), a poet and critic, became editor of *Moskvityanin* in 1850. As a critic, he operated on the theory of "organic criticism," according to which all art was an outgrowth of the national soil.

19. For details of the controversy surrounding the publication of *Selected Passages,* see Paul Debreczeny, *Nikolay Gogol and his Contemporary Critics* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, April 1966), pp. 50–63.

20. All Gogol's replies were in private letters, except for *An Author's Confession,* which was not published during his lifetime.

21. For an example of this attitude see David Magarshack, *Gogol* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), pp. 261–262.

noyed Gogol the most, and he planned to republish some of his earlier essays, written some ten years before, along with another edition of *Selected Passages,* to prove that his ideas had been consistent.[22] Unfortunately, perhaps, he never did so.

Modern critics of *Selected Passages* are divided into two camps: those who follow Belinsky's opinions—by far the majority—and reject *Selected Passages* as a rather worthless work with a few flashes of intelligence here and there, and those of a religious persuasion who see the volume as a genuine expression of the ideals of Russian Orthodoxy. Almost none, however, follow Grigoryev's line and view *Selected Passages* as of a piece with Gogol's earlier opinions.[23] Indeed, there has long been a curious tendency amounting to a traditional prejudice on the part of Gogol critics to separate his fictional and nonfictional works, as well as to separate his writings before *Selected Passages* from the *Passages* themselves, as though Gogol were a schizophrenic (and not a very bright one at that). This means that very few have dealt seriously with the book, just as there has been little extended work on Gogol as a whole in the west. Most western readers have thus been forced to consider Gogol in a vacuum. There have so far been only six books entirely devoted to Gogol in English, three in German, eight in French, one in Spanish, and one in Italian.[24] Considering the enormous interest in Russian literature in recent years, and considering the great importance

22. Proffer, p. 230.

23. Carl Proffer is one of the few exceptions to this rule. For his opinion see footnote 1 to Gogol's letter of July 30, 1846, pp. 229–230 of his translation of Gogol's letters. I myself am strongly in agreement with Proffer.

24. English: Paul Debreczeny, *Nikolay Gogol and his Contemporary Critics* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, April, 1966); F. Driessen, *Gogol as a Short Story Writer: A Study of his Technique of Composition* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), translated from the Dutch; Janko Lavrin, *Gogol (1809–1852), A Centenary Survey* (London, 1951); David Magarshack, *Gogol* (London, Faber and Faber, 1957); Vladimir V. Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol* (New York: New Directions, 1961); Vsevelod Setchkarev, *Gogol—His Life and Works* (New York: New York University Press, 1965), translated from the German

German: W. Kasack, *Die Technique der Charakter-Darstellung bei Gogol*

of Gogol within that literature, these books are remarkably few. As for the literature in Russian, while there is a great deal of it, there has also been singular paucity of treatment of *Selected Passages*—most recently, indeed, almost no treatment of the book at all, as Soviet critics have concentrated either upon Gogol as a social critic of the old regime or upon Gogol's "literary" qualities. I have been unable to find even one contemporary article in any language entirely devoted to *Selected Passages.*

Of the works on Gogol published in the last three decades (and there are not many), only three make extended mention of *Selected Passages:* Konstantin Mochul'sky's *Gogol's Spiritual Journey* (published only in Russian), Paul Evdokimov's *Gogol and Dostoevsky: Descent to Hell* (published only in French), and Vsevelod Setchkarev's *Gogol: His Life and Works.* Of the three, only the first two, both written by men who are themselves concerned with religion, find *Selected Passages* of significance, in so far as they believe the volume expresses nineteenth-century Russian religiosity. Mochul'sky, for example, says that the basic idea of the book is the construction of a single Christian culture, a religious base for state and property, a complete church-world.[25] For Evdokimov, that *Selected Passages* "is the source of later religious thought is a demonstrated fact. All great Russian thinkers to the present day are in debt to his genius."[26] Nevertheless,

(Wiesbaden, 1957); Otto Kraus, *Der Fall Gogol* (Munich, 1912); F. Thiess, *Nikolaus W. Gogol und seine Bünenwerke* (Berlin, 1922),

French: Nina Gourfinkel, *Nicholas Gogol dramaturge* (Paris, 1956); Modeste Hormann, *Gogol, sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris, 1946); Louis Leger, *Gogol* (Paris, 1914); D. S. Merejkovsky, *Gogol et le diable* (Paris, 1939), also published in Russian and German; N. A. Hilsson, *Gogol et Pétersbourg: Recherches sur les antécédents des contes pétersbourgeois* (Stockholm, 1954); B. F. Schloezer, *Gogol* (Paris, 1932 and 1946); A. Schick, *Nicolas Gogol—une vie de torments* (Sceaux, 1949); Raina Tyrneva, *Nicolas Gogol—Ecrivain et moraliste* (Aix, 1901)

Spanish: Claudio Giaconi, *Un Hombre en la trampa* (Santiago, 1960).

Italian: Enrico Pappacena, *Gogol* (Milan, 1930).

25. K. V. Mochul'sky, *Dukhovny put' Gogolya* (Paris, 1934), p. 101.

26. Paul Evdokimov, *Gogol et Dostoïevsky ou la Descente aux enfers* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1961), p. 131.

Mochul'sky still thinks of *Selected Passages* as somehow separated from Gogol's earlier work, while Evdokimov avoids a precise discussion of the problem.

Thus very few voices have been raised in opposition to what Belinsky decided more than one hundred and twenty years ago. One would have to search very far indeed to find a parallel situation in literature, or in any realm other than science, for that matter. The stumbling block has been precisely the one on which Vyazemsky stubbed his toe; that is, it is almost impossible to accept what appear to be reactionary, cruel—one might say stupid—opinions as the work of the same man who wrote *The Inspector General,* "The Nose," "The Overcoat," and *Dead Souls,* all of which most readers and critics consider to be violent satiric attacks on the social system of old Russia, in spite of what Gogol himself said on the subject. Since few wish to be identified with the practical suggestions offered by Gogol in *Selected Passages,* the possibility that the work is indeed "Gogolian" is rejected. At best, it is slighted on the ground that the man who produced such fictional monuments was simply not the same man who produced *Selected Passages.* The alternative, which only Evdokimov has faced, is to reinterpret Gogol's fiction, a formidable task indeed in the face of such overwhelming majority opinion.

At the risk of arousing further controversy, one might suggest, for example, that *Selected Passages* in reality constitutes a statement of the basic ideas which were to form the foundation of Part II of *Dead Souls,* if not also of Part III; that is, it points the way to a regeneration of the "dead souls" we find in Part I, in much the way Dante's *Purgatorio* shows the way of salvation for sinners—not a contradiction of *Inferno,* but a part of the same structure in which *Inferno, Purgatorio,* and *Paradiso* all have a definite place.[27] The first four chapters of Part II (all that

27. Even D. S. Mirsky, who rejects *Selected Passages* as largely of no value at all, believes that Gogol had something dantesque in mind when he wrote *Dead Souls (A History of Russian Literature* [New York: Vintage Books, 1958, pp. 154–155]).

were rescued from the fire when Gogol burned his manuscript just before he died) seem to bear out this point of view. If this suggestion has any validity, it certainly makes *Selected Passages* vital to an understanding of what Gogol was trying to do; it means that the same mind was responsible for both the fiction and the nonfiction, and that Gogol's claim of consistency was justified, Belinsky and his followers notwithstanding.

As Gogol pointed out in his letter to Rosset, *Selected Passages* as such, apart from its connections with his other work, was meant to be a practical book, almost, one might say, a conduct book, in much the same sense as Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Castiglione's *The Courtier* are conduct books. More important than a statement of the conduct recommended, however, since that could really be forceful only as exemplified in persons carrying out the conduct (Machiavelli gives us Cesare Borgia and Castiglione supplies examples of the courtier's conversation), is an understanding of the underlying orientation of the writer which makes that conduct comprehensible. What sense does Machiavelli make without his theories of history, of art, and of science? And what is Castiglione without Renaissance Platonism?

From this point of view, the most important essay in *Selected Passages* is the last one, "Easter Sunday," which by no means was so placed accidentally, any more than the famous troika passage accidentally ends the first part of *Dead Souls*. "Easter Sunday" is the summation of Gogol's attitude in so far as his objective is concerned and a final statement of the conviction that supports the rest of the book. Gogol makes it quite clear in this essay that he sees the essential fact of Christ (who should be the focal point of man's existence) as His gift of life through love, the love of brotherhood. As Mochul'sky remarks, "Gogolian religion is [a] sobornaya" religion.[28] As Gogol is also well aware,

28. *Op. cit.*, p. 92. The concept of *sobornost,* a word from which the adjective "sobornaya" is derived, is a complicated one. The words I should use to describe it are communion and union, the "I-we" relationship rather than the "I-you" relationship. It is basically an organic concept concerned

however, man has not yet attained that reality of salvation in this world that Christ offers him;[29] that is, the Garden of Eden

with A. S. Khomyakov's view of the character of the Church. Komyakov said in *The Church is One* (p. 3): "The unity of the Church follows of necessity from the unity of God: for the Church is not a multitude of persons in their separate individuality, but a unity of the grace of God, living in a multitude of rational creatures, submitting themselves willingly to grace." George Florovsky in his *Puti russkogo bogoslovia,* Paris, 1937, p. 277, puts it this way: "Sobornost for Khomyakov does not coincide with public opinion or corporateness. Sobornost for him, in its general meaning, is not the human but the divine character of the Church," which is unity. It is not a matter of historical reality but of spiritual reality. The religious tradition of *sobornost* is perhaps best expressed by Serge Bulgakov in his *The Orthodox Church* (translated by Donald Lowrie; Paris, 1935; pp. 74–75):

> The word is derived from the verb "sobirat," to reunite, to assemble. From this comes the word "sobor," which . . . means both "council" and "church." *Sobornost* is the state of being together. The Slavonic text of the Nicene Creed translates the epithet *katholiki,* when applied to the Church, as "sobornaya," an adjective which may be understood in two ways, each equally exact. To believe in a "sobornaya" church is to believe in a *Catholic* Church, in the original sense of the word, in a Church that assembles and unites; it is also to believe in a *conciliar* Church in the sense Orthodoxy gives to the term, that is, in a Church of the oecumenical councils, as opposed to a purely monarchical ecclesiology. To translate *"sobornost,"* I have ventured to use the French word "conciliarité," which must be used both in a restricted sense (the Church of the Councils) and in a larger sense (the Church Catholic, oecumenical). *Sobornost* may also be translated as "harmony," "unanimity." Orthodoxy, says Khomyakov, is opposed both to authoritarianism and to individualism, it is a unanimity, a synthesis of authority. It is the liberty in love which unites believers. The word *sobornost* expresses all that.

Bulgakov goes on to speak of this as a qualitative conception rather than a quantitative one. Since it is both qualitative and inward, I felt justified in using the word "communion" above. Furthermore, the idea involves, as Vladimir Solovyov has pointed out in his *Russia and the Universal Church* (translated by Herbert Rees; London: The Centenary Press, 1948), fidelity to a common tradition. It is doubtful that Gogol himself knew the term, although he was obviously aware of the tradition, since Khomyakov was known to him more as a poet than as a theologian. Indeed, the first complete edition of Khomyakov's writings was not published in Russia—because of censorship troubles—until 1860, shortly after Khomyakov's death and eight years after Gogol's death.

29. We find here a reference to that paradise on earth which forms the core of Father Zossima's teachings in *The Brothers Karamazov.*

is attainable only by a mankind purged of sins—in particular, the sin of pride. Over and over again, Gogol tells us that man, including himself, must become better. It is only his desire to become better that gives man hope (Gogol's conviction that this desire is innate in all men also informs *Selected Passages* with a constant optimism). If the Resurrection were to be celebrated as it ought to be celebrated, each man would embrace every other man as a brother. It is not abstract preachment of love that is meaningful, but concrete expression of love, a fulfillment of man's basic desire. Long before Dostoevsky had thought of Raskolnikov, Gogol was objecting to those who claim to love "Man," but cannot love men.

Gogol was not such a fool as to believe that this state of affairs had already come about; indeed, *Selected Passages* is no more sanguine about conditions in Russia than Gogol's earlier work had been—Gogol was castigating falsity, hypocrisy, and pettiness just as severely as he ever had. But "Easter Sunday" goes further than mere castigation to propose a solution to these evils, to point out the real possibility that is open to man. It was for this possibility that he was striving—for the attainment of this truth, not for the preservation of an obviously unsatisfactory status quo, as the outraged Belinsky thought.[30]

In accord with that Great-Russian nationalism peculiar to those born outside Great-Russia, Gogol was convinced that the true Christian possibility had been preserved only in Russia and in its religion, Orthodoxy.[31] Not only "Easter Sunday," but many other essays in *Selected Passages* oppose the "inner holiness" of Russia to "western falsity." The Orthodox Church, says Gogol in "A Few Words on our Church and our Clergy," is the Church

30. One can only wonder in this connection whether Belinsky really did read the whole of *Selected Passages,* despite his claim that he had read it through one hundred times.

31. The most violent passages in Belinsky's open letter are those which denounce Gogol's belief that religiosity is the prime characteristic of the Russian. What, one wonders, would Belinsky have said of Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer,* not to mention *Crime and Punishment, The Idiot,* and *The Brothers Karamazov?*

which, "like a chaste virgin, has uniquely preserved itself since apostolic times in the immaculate purity of its origins, this Church which is whole, whose profound dogmas and least external ceremonies are as though sent directly from Heaven for the Russian people" is the salvation of Russia and of the world. As Gogol also emphasizes, he is speaking only partially of the Church Visible. Even more important is the Church Invisible, for the Church lives in men's lives, not simply in formal relations.

In spite of—or because of—the great amount of time that Gogol spent abroad (he left Russia—because of the reaction to *The Inspector General*—in 1836 and did not return, except for sojourns during the winters of 1839–40 and 1841–42, until 1848), he was convinced that true morality resided in his homeland, if only its spiritual reality could be made manifest. Easter Sunday meant not only going to church but embracing one's brother like a brother. So far as Gogol was concerned, he had offered that embrace in *Selected Passages,* and he had been rejected, in spite of all the humanitarian and philanthropic aspirations voiced by Westerners and by Russian Westernizers. For Gogol, the West was already obviously a failure, from the point of view of the true God and true morality. He says in "Easter Sunday":

> One would think the nineteenth century would joyously celebrate this day which is so much at the heart of its magnanimous and humanitarian movements! But on this day, as on a touchstone, you see how pale are all its Christian aspirations and how they are all only in dreams and thoughts, not in deeds. If on this day one should embrace his brother as a brother, he does not embrace him. He is ready to embrace all humanity as his brother, and he does not embrace his brother. He is so separated from this humanity, for which he prepares such a magnanimous embrace, that one man who has insulted him, the one whom Christ commands him immediately to forgive, he does not embrace. Having been separated from humanity, alone, clinging more conspicuously than others to the grievous sores of his spiritual unworthiness, more than all others demanding compassion for himself, he pushes him away and does not embrace him. He achieves an embrace only with those who have insulted him in nothing, with whom he has never come in conflict, whom he never knew and into whose eyes he never even looked. This is the kind of embrace a man of the present century gives to all mankind, and for that he thinks of himself as a real humani-

tarian and a perfect Christian! A Christian! They have driven Christ into the street, into the leper-houses and hospitals instead of summoning Him into their homes, under their roofs, and they think they are Christians!

It is a religious conviction, thus, which is at the base of Gogol's morality. It is a religiosity, further, which shows quite close connections with that of the Slavophile lay theologians of the time—such men as Khomyakov, Kireyevsky, and S. T. Aksakov,[32] for example, the last of whom Gogol knew well personally.[33]

Gogol's difficulty arose when he tried to apply the principles of "Easter Sunday," his religious principles, to practical affairs, that is, when he attempted to set down ethical precepts to guide the activity of individual human beings in the world, when he tried to spell out his superstructure, to use a Marxist expression.[34] The practical activity—the ethical code—he advocates, as the conclusion of his religious position, does appear to be reactionary and a betrayal of humanitarian principles. Some of it—for example the domestic advice he gives in "What a Wife Can Do for Her Husband in Simple Domestic Matters, as Things Now Are in Russia"—strikes the reader as downright silly. And what he recommends in such essays as "Woman in the World," "What the Wife of a Provincial Governor Is," "The Russian Landowner," "Rural Justice and Punishment," and "To One Who Occupies an Important Position" seems at best naïve, the

32. I. V. Kireyevsky (1806–1856) was one of the foremost of the Slavophile thinkers. His most important work was the article "On the Necessity and Possibility of New Principles in Philosophy," printed in the journal *Russian Colloquy (Russkaya Beseda)* in 1856.

33. What Dostoevsky's mature work owes both to Gogol and the Slavophile thinkers is incalculable, although still seriously underrated.

34. This is a difficulty Dostoevsky avoided—what was Alyosha meant to do in the world? We know no more than that he was to love actively. But Dostoevsky never tells us precisely, practically, what that activity is to be. As the writer of *Exodus* well knew, it is far easier, and more effective, to say what we should not do than it is to say what we should do. Indeed, Dostoevsky was to regard his great attempt to depict a positively good man in *The Idiot* a failure. One is also reminded of William Blake's remark that Milton was of the devil's party without knowing it.

work of a man who had so far withdrawn from the world that he no longer had the least idea of what it was like. Belinsky, indeed, accused Gogol of knowing nothing about Russia.

Gogol was giving his advice, however, not so that things might remain as they were, but so that they might be made different. The recommendations could be successful only if a change of heart first occurred, and if they were carried out in the spirit of that change. If we examine his recommendations, we discover that they are all concerned with the relations between men and predicated upon the attitudes of the persons involved. The moral activity we find in *Selected Passages* thus, while repugnant in a static world, becomes quite different if viewed in the light of Gogol's religious convictions. He thought of the moral activity as the practical result of realizing love for one's fellow man within oneself, on the one hand, and as conducive to the arousal of such love in those to whom the love was displayed, on the other. The moral activity is both born in the spirit and leads back to it. In Gogol's view, therefore, Belinsky's attack was unjustified, because Belinsky had understood neither Gogol's base nor his goal. Gogol was convinced, in other words, that he had been misinterpreted once again. In July-August 1847 he wrote to Belinsky (although he never sent the letter):

> Such a wrong view you have taken of the meaning of my works. My answer is in them. When I wrote them I held in reverence everything which man should hold in reverence. In my work there is no dislike and mockery of authority, nor of the basic laws of our country, but of perversion, of deviations, of incorrect interpretations, of bad application of them, of the scabs which have accumulated, of a life inappropriate to it. I have never mocked that which forms the basis of the Russian character and its great powers. There was mockery only of triviality unnatural to its character. . . . If we ignore the duties to people who are close to us and chase after society, then we will lose both the former and the latter in exactly the same way. Lately, I have met a great many fine people who are utterly confused. Some think that the world can be corrected by reorganizations and reforms, by turning in one or another direction: others think that by means of some special, rather mediocre kind of literature (which you call *belles-lettres*), it is possible to have an effect on the education of society to a better condition. No constitutions can correct discontent within. . . . Society forms and molds itself—of its own

accord; society is made up of individuals. It is necessary for each individual to fulfill his duty. Man must remember that he is not at all a material brute, but an elevated citizen of an elevated heavenly community. Until he begins to live at least a little bit the life of a citizen of heaven, the earthly community will not come into order.[35]

How, Gogol must have wondered, could he have been accused of being a monstrous supporter of cruelty and oppression when he had intended just the opposite? Why had not his book been read fairly instead of, as he believed, angrily? How could anyone accuse him of doing an about-face? Gogol believed firmly that the attitude he had displayed in *Selected Passages* was precisely the same as the attitude that underlay his earlier comic works. It was because they had not proved useful that he had disowned them, not because of what they said; in other words, the failure lay in communication, not in content. After all, the corruptions portrayed in *The Inspector General* and *Dead Souls* had been portrayed just so that the spectators and readers would recognize these corruptions in themselves—would realize that they too were "dead souls" and would take steps to correct themselves, as he thought he was taking steps to correct himself, to become better, as he put it. *Selected Passages* represented, he thought, his own attempt to become better, and he hoped it would help others to do the same. It was, in this sense, an attempt to overcome the failure of his previous life and work. As he said in the "Preface": "I wanted . . . to atone for the uselessness of everything published by me up to now, since in my letters . . . there are more things needful to man than there are in my fictional works."

Selected Passages was, after all, a literary endeavor, and we find when we examine the literary essays in the book that Gogol's view of literature was part and parcel of his world view.[36] Far from having given up literature, as Belinsky claimed and as

35. Proffer, pp. 179, 184.

36. For a fuller discussion of Gogol's aesthetic theory, see my article in *Russian Review*. Most of the ideas expressed here were first expressed in that article

Setchkarev now claims, he considered it vital to his concerns.[37] Literature, like any other of man's activities in this world, has a purpose to serve (*Selected Passages* is imbued with the idea of service; everything a man does should be dedicated to the service of his fellow men and to the service of God; the opposite way, dedication to the ego, is the path of pride, evil, and damnation). Gogol saw the literary artist in much the way he had been seen in the great tradition stretching back to the ancient Greeks—as a prophet and seer who had been given his talent by the Divine so that he might reveal certain truths to man. He went further in that he believed that literature should contribute to the task of bringing about the brotherhood of mankind (this is a position, be it noted, which Leo Tolstoy was to reiterate almost half a century later in *What is Art?* although Tolstoy attempted to give his argument more logical structure than did Gogol). The Russian writer, rooted in his native land and in Orthodoxy, must serve a Christian end. Poetry must call man

> to a battle, not for our temporal liberty, our rights and privileges, but for our soul. . . . Our poetry will be imbued with an angelic passion and, having struck every string there is in the Russian, it will move the most hardened soul with a holiness with which no power and no instrument in man can contend: it will evoke our Russia for us—our Russian Russia: not the one jingoist patriots coarsely show to us nor the one foreign Russians display to us from abroad, but the one that has its root in ourselves and will display us in such a way that everyone, without exception, however different their ideas might be, of whatever education and opinions, will say with one voice: "This is our Russia; it is a warm refuge for us, and now we are really at home in it, under our native roof and not in a foreign land."

Gogol's aesthetic theory was thus united with his religious,

37. It is hard to understand the charge that Gogol had lost his interest in literature when almost half the total number of pages in *Selected Passages* is concerned with literary topics. In addition, he continued work on *Dead Souls* until his death. That he burned his creative work just before he died is beside the point. We can hardly say that he had lost his creative powers without having read that work. It is quite possible that perfectionism (increased by the disappointing, to him, reception his earlier work had gained) rather than the loss of creative powers brought him to the destruction of what he had written.

moral, and national theories. Instead of giving up art for religion, he united them; rather, he showed how, in his view, art, like morality, depended on religion. Belinsky objected because he thought Gogol was no longer a member of his liberal camp; modern critics object because they think Gogol sold out art-for-art's-sake. But it is highly doubtful that Gogol himself ever took either position; certainly his writings indicate that he did not. He could hardly have betrayed what he did not believe in to begin with. The literary essays in *Selected Passages* (as well as the essays he wrote for *Arabesques* some twelve years earlier) tell us that art's excuse and reason lay within the larger context of spiritual purpose. Art, in other words, is a species of moral activity (a point of view also put forth by Schiller, whom Gogol greatly admired).

If *Selected Passages* is viewed in the way I have tried to suggest, then it becomes clear that the essays and letters form a united whole, in spite of their seeming disparity, not through the "position philosophy" which Setchkarev tries to ascribe to them, but through the religious, moral, national, and aesthetic views of Gogol, which are in fact one. It is entirely possible that *Selected Passages* in this sense constitutes a summation—in Gogol's eyes—of what he was trying to do, of what his work was at least intended to be all about.

Perhaps he took himself too seriously. Perhaps, in spite of the humor in his works and in spite of his personal penchant for practical jokes, one subject eluded Gogol's humor—himself. Perhaps, also, Gogol found discursive prose difficult, so that it often seems either flat (when he tries too hard to be clear) or incoherent (when he tries too hard to be poetic). This is true of many another creative writer—Dostoevsky comes to mind—who tries to explain what he is after. It is not that he is wrong—it is rather that the mode of expression fails, just as Gogol believed (on quite good evidence) that the mode of expression in his fictional work had failed. I venture to say that Gogol's difficulty lay in an inability to communicate his thought because he did not have the

form to fit it. He was trying to set literature on another path. "No," he said, "neither Pushkin, nor anyone else, ought now to be our model: other times have come."

In other words, Gogol's difficulty in *Selected Passages* lay in his originality so far as Russian literature was concerned. When one form, his fiction, which was largely new in Russia, had proved inadequate, he tried another. The historical record is clear: the second form could not manage it either.

It is surely no sufficient answer, however, to say that Gogol did not know what he was talking about when he wrote discursive prose, any more than it is an answer to say that his fiction was the result of the unconscious impulse of genius, that *The Inspector General* and *Dead Souls* were written by an angel or demon who somehow managed to bypass the conscious mind of Nikolai Gogol. He did undergo a "descent to hell," as Evdokimov puts it, but he certainly seems to have thought that was only the first act of a larger drama that concludes with "Easter Sunday."

It is, I think, a distinct failure of the critical attitude that Gogol has only sporadically been listened to when he tried to speak for himself, as he did in *Selected Passages*. This has occurred, it seems to me, simply because he said things about himself and his work that most critics preferred—and prefer—not to believe. But surely, what the author thinks he is saying is more to the point than what we choose him to say, T. S. Eliot notwithstanding. The reactions to *Selected Passages* in Gogol's day and since indicate which path critical opinion has chosen to take. In short, before we decide what Gogol's works signify, it behooves us to consider what Gogol thought they signified. *Selected Passages* at least gives us the opportunity to do so.

Gogol cast *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* in the form of familiar letters to individuals whom he knew well. Some of the letters—probably those headed by such designations as "To Zh———y" (I have supplied the names in place of the initials whenever I could be reasonably sure of whom

the initials indicated) may well have been actually addressed to individuals. Others he wrote especially for the volume. Some were dated, some not. In any event, the informality of the letters bears stressing, since Gogol seems to have thought he could accomplish his purpose better by an avoidance of art rather than by a concentration upon it. It was straightforward communication he desired, the communication of one soul, as he might have put it, with another rather than literary artistry, the desperate attempt of a man who felt lonely and misunderstood to make his ideas and feelings clear. In this sense, *Selected Passages* constitutes an intensely personal record, as Gogol was himself aware. In his letter to Belinsky of about June 20, 1847, commenting upon Belinsky's article which had appeared in *The Contemporary,* Gogol said that this was "a book in which the personal spiritual history of a man is involved, a man who is not like others and, in addition, a secretive man who has long lived within himself and suffered from the inability to express himself."[38]

Yet, with all his attempts to say precisely what he meant, Gogol did a lot of stumbling and stuttering through *Selected Passages.* He had never been stylistically an easy writer, and *Selected Passages* seems to have increased his stylistic difficulties instead of lessening them. He often appears to have felt frustrated by a language that did its best to keep him from saying clearly things that demanded clarity. The work is full of repetitions, involutions, awkward phrasings, long and involved sentences, blunt, almost crude expressions, so that the reader sometimes feels that Gogol is engaged in a battle both with himself and with the reader. It is as though he was trying too hard and the effort clogged his pen.

All this has presented the translator with some difficulties, since this translation is meant to serve two purposes: to give the reader of English a chance to find out what Gogol himself thought without being befogged by the often prejudiced remarks of com-

38. Proffer, p. 177.

mentators and to allow the reader of English to see the image of himself personally that Gogol wished to project. These purposes are, I believe, in accordance with Gogol's own when he wrote *Selected Passages.* The difficulties consisted in deciding how far Gogol should be clarified—by smoothing out his often awkward phrasing, by rewording his repetitions, by changing the sequence of his word order, by softening the emotional stress so evident in the original. I have tried to avoid doing any of these things so far as I could, since my aim has been to let Gogol speak for himself without interposing my own prejudices and tastes. *Selected Passages,* in short, is Gogol's personal record and should stand as such. I wanted the translation to be accurate, but not slavish, grammatically clear, but not free. This has been a narrow line to walk, and it may be that I have occasionally slipped. For any such slips I can only apologize and beg the reader to remember that both Shakespeare and Browning occasionally split an infinitive or dangled a participle.

One further note: it may be that a reader well acquainted with the literature on Gogol will find some resemblance between my ideas on the subject and those of Merezhkovsky, Mochul'sky, and Evdokimov. I am indeed indebted to the work done by these men, although an introduction seemed an inappropriate place to enlarge greatly on that indebtedness.

This is the place, however, for me to express my deep gratitude to Professor Serge A. Zenkovsky of Vanderbilt University for his enormous help in checking the manuscript and suggesting changes. His knowledge and kindness saved me from many a false step, although I am, of course, responsible for any faux pas that may remain.

J. Z.

SELECTED PASSAGES FROM CORRESPONDENCE WITH FRIENDS