

## The Concept of "Old Age" in the N.V. Gogol's Epistolary Heritage

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**Abstract:** The epistolary heritage of the famous Russian writer Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol serves the material for the current study. The fact that in the process of writing, an author's "self-modeling" is organically combined with irrational intentions, makes the conclusions regarding the aesthetic preferences of the word painter, more reasonable. The subject of this research is to determine the concept that the author puts into lexical items "old", "ancient" and "old age". Author proves that the origins of reverent attitude of N.V. Gogol to oral folk legendry, ancient manuscripts, art memorials, Gothic architecture and sometimes, just decrepit things should be found in the romantic aesthetics. Extremely valuable historical, biographical and cultural images and concepts appear in N.V. Gogol's mind during contemplation of time-proved items of interest. In addition the author substantiates the concept that for a writer with his morbid view on the problem of death, a principle of "going beyond one's body" and the idea of gaining immortality through identification with the "body" of relatives, nation, humanity and the God, is extremely important. Accordingly, the vector of the writer's spiritual path is directed from the adolescent fraternity worship ("the body of loved one"), through ethnographic finding ("the body of the nation") to the reform efforts ("the body of humanity") and asceticism ("the body of God").

**Key words:** Epistolary heritage • Old age • Antiquity • Artifact, nostalgia • Eldership and immortality

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### INTRODUCTION

It has been proved that the epistolary and artistic heritage of N.V. Gogol are closely related [1, 2]. At that, the extremely important is the intermediate specificity of writing, communication with spoken word, creative tasks, literary tradition and the realities of life [3]. When analyzing Gogol's letters we have found that the writer often uses the lexemes "old", "ancient" and "old age". In this regard, there was a need to identify the semantic fields of the corresponding concept. The study of N.V. Gogol's letters was based on systematic approach, using the texts studying methods such as a comparative-historical approach, structural analysis procedure, historical and typological method and historical and literary technique.

**Main Part:** Even in the letters written while studying at gymnasium, N.V. Gogol uses the word-combinations "old friend" and "elder friend" - in the sense of

"longstanding". "Do not forget your faithful old friend, always and everywhere loving you...» [4, X, p. 81] - so a writer to-be concludes his letter to G. Vysotsky. At that time the addresser was 18 years old and the addressee - 20.

A little later, N.V. Gogol sends the letters to P.P. Kosyrovsky and A.S. Danilevsky and other "old friends". Remarkable is the text of latter correspondence: "Come, if you care about our conversation that made me so happy last time, if you care about old friend and a bottle of Madeira» [4, X, p. 129]. Quoted fragment includes literary characters that refer to the motive of friendly feast: poor rural house (Vasiljevka), unpretentious food (in the subtext, i.e. in the letter the meals are modestly passed over the silence), good wine and intimate conversation with a true friend. Perhaps some "artistic merit", the "academicism" of the style of writing is not entirely associated with the age and status of persons engaged in correspondence, though vividly demonstrates their value navigators and literary priorities.

The word-groups "old friendship", "old friends", "old established ties" and so on used by N.V. Gogol during the period from 1830's to 1840's in his writings to M.A. Maksimovich [4, X, p. 359], I.I. Sreznevskaya [4, X, p. 368], M.S. Shchepkin [4, XI, p. 38], M.P. Balabin [4, XI, p. 146, p. 176; XII, p. 114], A.S. Danilevsky [4, XI, p. 158], N. Ya. Prokopovich [4, XI, p. 163], P.A. Pletnev [4, XII, p. 116], S.A. Smirnova [4, XIII, p. 34, 309; XIV, p. 140], V.A. Zhukovsky [4, XIV, p. 52], S.P. Shevryyov [4, XIV, p. 55] and S.T. Aksakov [4, XIV, p. 210] are justified from a worldly viewpoint.

In the letter to A. Danilevsky written by N.I. Gogol in Moscow in 1851, as in his writing to the same addressee, sent 23 years before, sounds the same subject of conversation when meeting with a playmate, though the word intonations are different: "... I sincerely ask Him [God], you and myself, to drink one day in my old age a bottle of old wine and remember all the passed away time and gratefully, sincerely thank God for the life» [4, XIV, p. 248]. Anacreontic variations typical for the first third of the XIX century give way to motives full of Christian humility. And the word "Madera" is replaced by the "old wine" that in the context of the letter, associates with the religious tradition in which the wine is not only an emblem of community minded, but also a sign of the Lord's blood, that was shed by Him to give people salvation.

The lexical item "old" in the epistolary heritage of N.V. Gogol overwhelmingly is endowed with positive connotation; exceptions can be counted on one hand. Often the word "old" is used to mean "time-tested", "true". His own "perennial" utterances, N.V. Gogol describes as follows: "the old truth» [4, X, p. 330], "the old verity» [4, XI, p. 36], [4, XIII, p. 100], "one of the decrepit old rules of mine» [4, XII, p. 138], "advice, that smells terrible old days, though yet a very smart advice» [4, XII, p. 256].

Old thing often symbolizes something very valuable. "I prefer the old" - confesses N.V. Gogol to N.Y. Prokopovich [4, XI, p. 100]. Here are two examples of the writer's nostalgic adherence to his personal things, written in the same letter "... it is better to lie together on the couch in your permanent apartment at B. Wrangell's, you're wearing a robe, with a pipe, I'm wearing an old frockcoat, talking bally rot». [4, XI, p. 99]. In acknowledgment of the comprehensive narration of news, A.V. Gogol jokingly promises his sister to send "old jersey, which is completely worn out": "you can dress it

in a way that your lyapanka which you're wearing well up to date, will be visible through the tears" [4, XI, p. 300]. We face a classic example of Plyushkin's fetishism: period from 1840 to 1841 is the time of writer's inspired work on the first volume of "Dead Souls". Decripit thing is intended to allow the holder to move from present to the past that has already happened. Moreover, the artifacts withdraw as it were the being out of the time. Artifacts are a way to achieve immortality [4].

N.V. Gogol travels extensively. When referring to observed sights, the statement about the antiquity of ancient samples of architecture and masterpieces of paintings serves often a priori evidence of unrivaled excellence of artists who have created them. See, for example, the following examples: "quite old" (about Lubeck [4, X, p. 152]), "a very old... Such old antiquity you've never seen" (about Bremen [4, XI, p. 53]), "one of the most historic towns"(about Aachen [4, XI, p. 53, 55]), "old town..." (about Cologne [4, XI, p. 56]). The writer's most favorite city - Rome, is vested the epithet "old" most frequently: "Rome is just as good, old and majestic as it was before," - states N.V. Gogol in the letter to his mother [4, XI, p. 186] (note the partial equivalence of the elements of synonymic raw "good - old - majestic").

The fashion for everything medieval was widespread in times of romantic aesthetics supremacy: Gothic architecture, historical sites and ancient texts. In the contemplation process of decrepit objects of interest, the historical, biographical, cultural images and meanings, extremely valuable to N.V. Gogol, appear in his mind [6, 7]. The idea of the close relationship of the old and new, inspired to N.V. Gogol by Bible, perhaps, is still up to date owing to principles of historiographical "School of Sir Walter Scott," popular in 1820's, that reveals the complexity, multidimensionality and contrariety of the path of humanity, proclaiming the idea of the development of "spiral". Dialectical understanding of history is depicted in Gogol's letter to V.G. Belinsky: "... the old and the new go against and once one pours over on one side and falls into the excess, another immediately pours over in revenge on the other side» [4, XIII, p. 361].

Epistolographic analysis leads to the conclusion on the evolution in Gogol's judgment on Russian (and little Russian) "antiquity". At the age of 16, the writer speaks of it as "deaf" and "forgotten» [4, X, p. 62]. Two years later - as a "fun", interesting for himself, but funny for uninitiated people [4, X, p. 113].

In the early 1830's, during the time of the most active treatment to Slavic folklore, the writer, in his own words, "shoots requests» [4, X, p. 167] to relatives and loved ones while searching the "notes kept by the ancestors of some established families, age-old manuscripts of the Hetman times and stuff like this» [4, X, p. 167]. "You will make me a big favor, if find out notebooks similar to those with songs, that I think most are found in ancient coffers among the antique papers from the old gentry, or the afterlives of old gentry...» [4, X, p. 285]. N.V. Gogol is not limited to collection of factorial forms, he desires to send him even clothing: "If you meet somewhere a peasant wearing strange hat or dress, remarkable by something extraordinary, even if it was ragged - take it up!" - writes Gogol to his mother and sister Marya Vasil'evna from St. Petersburg [4, X, p. 209]. It is noteworthy that now Gogol refers even himself, 22-year-old "Petersburger", to "old people": "...we, as luck would <...>, are surrounded by fusionists and the people of today's world <...> and there is no one around, with whom us, the old people, that is me and you, mammy, could say a word about the relics of the past" [4, X, p. 215].

In the 1840's the "scenic and ethnographic" sight on the past is finally replaced by emerged philosophical mind. N.V. Gogol again speaks of the inherent value of history. In his letter to N. Yazykov, the writer advises: "... shake up Russian past, especially the times of tsars. They are alive and talking and closer to us" [4, XII, p. 477-478].

Severity of patriarchal morals N.V. Gogol correlates with decency, devotion to the Word of God. In the letter to A.M. V'el'gorskaya he is talking about the Household Book: "The instructions and directions, on how to conduct one's own house, how to deal with people, how to keep household earthly and heavenly, except of vitality of detailed customs of antiquity, are striking for deep experience of life and fullness of embracing all of the responsibilities, how the housekeeper can preserve the image of God's goodness in the treatment of everybody" [4, XIV, p. 110].

In the next letter to A. M. V'el'gorskaya, sent half a month later, N.V. Gogol calls the Countess "to look at the shrine" of Moscow. The "ancient churches" will open "the remains of Old Russian life" and then, in the writer's opinion, Apollinaria Mikhailovna will be able to make know the way "to perform her duty on earth" [4, XIV, p. 110]. As is obvious from the last quotation, N.V. Gogol is

sure that the ancient covenant is a proof of the ancestors' truth of faith; and the way of salvation may open only to those who follow the old mitzwot.

Speaking about human foreordination, N.V. Gogol increasingly emphasizes the wisdom of those who have seen something of life. "The old man looks first with the eyes of sense, rather than feeling" - argues 33-year-old writer in his epistle to S.T. Aksakov [4, XII, p. 92]. He begins to think about approaching old age long before it comes. In his letter to M.P. Balabina, N.V. Gogol ironically portrays himself as a frail, skinny man made similar to "a mummy or an old German professor with run-flat stocking on the leg, dry as a toothpick" [4, XI, p. 244]. And then seriously confesses "... for me it's hard to call up rusting strings in the depth of my heart. I will tell you only, that it's hard to find yourself an old man being in the age of adolescent. It is terrible to find the ashes instead of flames and feel the <impuissance> of the admiration» [4, XI, p. 245]. This confession is worthy of any "needless man" in romantic novels with their typical components: a disappointment in all, emotional apathy and indifference to life. "Literary" character of revelation is confirmed also by "stylistic signs" of elegiac genre: "strings of heart", "ash" and "flame".

The writer is seriously concerned about his health, that is particularly clear in his letters of the late 1840's - early 1850's: "My blood grew old like old-mannish blood, flowing too slowly and not only does not seethe, but hardly can warm up itself» [4, XIII, p. 385]. "I need to make a great effort to write not just a letter, but even a short note. What is that? Is that old age or just temporary torpor of my physical vigor?" [4, XIV, p. 155]. N.V. Gogol is worrying about unfinished writing.

In the early 1850's, hints of humility over the inexorability of time appear in writer's letters: "We are people already old, what a joy in these routs" [4, XIV, p. 218]. "... When falling into talk, it's hard to bring our tangs to heel. You know, the old age is talkative and, thanks to God, we are already at its gates" [4, XIV, p. 221]. Correspondence over the last decades testifies to the titanic work to soul-searching exhortation of fellow creatures [8]. N.V. Gogol gets a feeling of being elder- worth of wealth of knowledge and experience. At this time the Institute of Russian elders acquires to the writer a particular relevance [9]. The writer seeks to become a stronghold of the inner spiritual life, he denounces, comforts, gives helpful tips and teaches Divine Wisdom.

Eldership involves spiritual youth, vigor and flush of wisdom [10]. N.V. Gogol is pleased to note similar instants of his enlightenment: "Sometimes I am down in health and sometimes the grace of God gives me a feeling of freshness and vigor and then the work is more cheerful" [4, XIV, p. 261]. Gogol's letters to A.M. Vel'gorskaya, O. A. Smirnova and others prove that he, as a true elder, becomes a fiduciary of family secrets and thoughts, involved in the daily lives of his spiritual children.

### CONCLUSIONS

Based upon the epistolary heritage of N.V. Gogol, that allows us to put in perspective the creative intention of the word painter, the writer endowed positive connotation to lexical items "old", "ancient" and "old age" from an early youth to his last years of life. To him, they were related to comprehension of somewhat long-standing, time-tested, true and eternal.

The origins of reverent attitude to the oral folk tales, ancient manuscripts, art memorials, Gothic architecture and sometimes - just to decrepit things, should be found in the romantic aesthetics, whose peak of popularity in Russia was evidenced right in 1820-1830's.

Personal factor is of great importance as well. Artifacts seize being out of time. For N.V. Gogol, with his morbid view on the problem of death, the principle of "going beyond his body," and the idea of gaining immortality through the identification with the "bodies" of hostages to fortune, the nation, whole humanity and God was extremely important. Accordingly, the vector of the writer's spiritual path is directed from the adolescent fraternity worship ("the body of loved one"), through ethnographic finding ("the body of the nation") to the reform efforts ("the body of humanity") and asceticism ("the body of God").

In the light of N.V. Gogol's religious and mystical moods, the phrase addressed to P.A. Vyazemsky, is of particular significance: "How much new is in the old!" [4, XI, p. 156].

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