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### **IMAGES OF UKRAINE AND UKRAINIANS IN THE STORY “TARAS BULBA” BY M. GOGOL (1835)**

The theme of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Cossackdom is one of the main themes in the work of M. Gogol. For him, this theme was very important in the context of his family. It is known that Gogol's ancestors on his mother's side were Cossacks. For example, the writer's distant ancestor Ostap Gogol was a hetman of the Right-Bank Ukraine at the beginning of the 17th century.

However, the subject of Ukraine also interested Gogol as a historian and artist. In the early 1830s Gogol was deeply researching the history of Europe in the Middle Ages and wrote several historical articles. In particular, he wrote a lot about medieval knights.

Who are knights? This concept originated in Western Europe in the Middle Ages, especially in the 11th-13th centuries. Knights participated in military campaigns, fought in combat tournaments, and joined religious and military associations. At that time, the countries of Western Europe developed a chivalric code – certain rules of morality and behavior for knights. The leading ideas of the chivalric code were courage, honor, defending Christian faith, protecting the poor and disadvantaged, trustworthiness, dignity, etc. The knights also served their beloved ladies, for whom they performed feats, won battles, and composed poems and songs. In one of his articles, Gogol compared Ukrainian Cossacks to the knights of Western Europe.

The Zaporizhian Sich was a fortified center of the Zaporizhian army in the second half of the 16th-18th centuries, located beyond the Dnipro River. The Ukrainian Cossacks had their own code of honor, just like the knights of medieval Europe. Above all else, the Cossacks valued freedom, Christian faith, justice, honesty, loyalty to their comrades and the ideals of the Zaporizhian Sich. The images of Ukrainian Cossacks as strong, brave, loyal, purposeful, and friendly people are sung in Ukrainian folklore and art.

The rulers of that time often used the military skills of Ukrainian Cossacks to protect the state borders. However, the freedom-loving and independent nature of the Ukrainian Cossacks posed a danger to the rulers. That is why the Zaporizhian Sich was destroyed by the Russian Empire. It happened in 1775, when Empress Catherine II issued a manifesto “On the liquidation of the Zaporizhian Sich and its incorporation into the Novorussian province.” On the order of Catherine II, the last hetman of the Zaporizhian Sich, Petro Kalnyshevsky, was arrested and sent to prison in the Solovky Monastery, where he was held for 25 years.

After Catherine II's manifesto, the Cossacks settled in different lands (by the way, there are also ancient Cossack settlements in Poltava region), and some of them fled across the Danube, where the Zadunayska Sich was formed. On this theme, Ukrainian composer S.

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Hulak-Artemovskiy wrote the famous opera “Zaporozhets Beyond the Danube” (1863). It is about Ukrainian Cossacks, who found themselves in a foreign land, longing for their homeland.

In the early 19th century, Gogol emphasized the need to create “a complete, satisfactory History of a people who had been acting independently of Russia for almost four centuries.” Therefore, 60 years after Catherine II’s manifesto, the writer set out to revive the name of Zaporizhian Sich in fiction, as well as its glorious history, and to poetically glorify the deeds of the Ukrainian Cossacks. The story “Taras Bulba” (first edition, 1835) was devoted to this.

It is interesting that the word Ukraine (in the original Ukraina) appears 7 times in the text of “Taras Bulba.” In the times of the Ukrainian Cossacks, according to M. Gogol, everything was different: nature was more beautiful, characters were more powerful, and the history of Zaporizhian Sich was brighter compared to the author’s time (60 years after the manifesto of Catherine II, which destroyed the Cossacks).

In the first edition of the story “Taras Bulba” in 1835, one can feel the author’s deep nostalgia for the heroic past and admiration for the glorious history of Ukrainian Cossacks.

M. Gogol put the historical path of the Ukrainian people into the broader context of European history. The writer portrays Ukraine as a special historical and geographical entity, as a land in need of protection, so the Zaporizhian Sich is depicted as its organic part, a military school designed to educate Cossacks for the defense of Ukraine.

As the story progresses, the concepts of *Zaporizhian Sich* and *Ukraine* become inseparable from each other. They both have a heroic meaning. The Zaporizhian Sich is depicted by the author as a stronghold of Cossack freedom for the whole of Ukraine.

Ukraine in M. Gogol’s novel is not only a wild land that the Cossacks defend from enemy attacks, it is also a place where the Ukrainian nation was formed, and Zaporizhian Sich became the center of this national process.

In “Taras Bulba,” history is presented in vivid characters, strong feelings, and aspirations of the Cossacks. The main idea of the work is the idea of a “common cause,” the defense of the Cossacks’ faith in Christ and the ideals of the Zaporizhian Sich. For this purpose, the Cossacks do not spare themselves, they leave their family and prosperous lives, and boldly rush into great battles. The idea of a common cause gradually unites the Cossacks into a single entity, cementing different characters into a single whole.

The history of Ukraine in Gogol’s work appears as a majestic heroic epic, but at the same time as a domestic story – the private history of Taras Bulba’s family, which is part of the general history of Cossacks.

The story begins with the old Cossack Taras Bulba waiting for his sons Ostap and Andriy to arrive. The sons were studying at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. The father dreamed that they would become good Cossacks and serve the Zaporizhian Sich faithfully. Taras Bulba took his sons to the Sich to defend Ukrainian lands like other Cossacks. But the sons had different personalities and different fates.

In his portrayal of the Cossacks, Gogol constantly uses the words “knights,” “knightly,”

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“knightly honor,” and “knightly glory.” For Taras Bulba, the main thing is “knightly honor,” which is the defense of the faith of Christ and the Zaporozhian Sich. He himself is a guardian of the “knightly honor” and teaches this not only to his sons but also to other Cossacks.

For Taras Bulba, the leader of the Ukrainian Cossacks, there is no middle ground: one must either fight for “knightly honor” or die in a fair battle. This is how he raised his sons.

Ostap always imitates his father and remains faithful to the ideals of the Zaporizhian Sich as a true Ukrainian Cossack until the last minute of his life. Ostap was captured by enemies during a fierce battle. But he bore the suffering in captivity like a giant, “with unprecedented firmness.” He bravely accepts execution, sacrificing his life for the sake of freedom and Cossack brotherhood. Ostap’s death in the novel resembles the execution of Jesus Christ.

In Gogol’s story, Andriy is also portrayed as a knight, but in the European rather than Ukrainian tradition. As you know, the entire medieval culture was imbued with the cult of women. Like the European knights of the Middle Ages, Andriy serves a beautiful lady – a beautiful Polish girl. He accidentally saw a Polish girl and fell deeply in love with her. For her sake, he is ready to abandon his father, mother, comrades, and homeland.

Perceiving a beautiful woman as a deity, Andriy is ready to throw everything at her feet. Andriy did not give up on God, because for him love is a manifestation of divine love. However, when he crossed into the enemy camp, Andriy betrayed the Zaporizhian Sich and his comrades, which contradicts the Cossack code of honor. Andriy was a Christian and a knight, but a knight who acted in the name of a woman, not in the name of a “common cause,” “knightly honor.”

Therefore, Taras Bulba had no choice but to kill Andriy according to the epic tradition and in accordance with the code of honor of the Ukrainian Cossacks.

The author does not poetize Taras Bulba’s deed in the scene of Andrii’s murder. Moreover, the author calls Taras Bulba a “son-killer.” From the viewpoint of private human story, Taras Bulba’s act is certainly a sin (that’s why the author calls him a son-killer), but from the viewpoint of a heroic epic, it is a natural and proper act of a true “knight” who cannot forgive the betrayal of the Cossacks’ “common cause.”

The finale of the story describes the heroic death of Taras. And moral superiority is on the side of Taras Bulba. Captured by enemies, he accepts martyrdom, but to the end he remains faithful to the “common cause” – he tells the cossacks from the height of the cliff, where he was executed, how they can better avoid danger. It is Taras who has the last look at the Cossacks, who managed to save themselves and will continue the “common cause.”

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