BRIDGING THE CHASM BETWEEN THE EAST AND THE WEST:
A CRITICAL STUDY OF GOGOL’S TARAS BULBA

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ABSTRACT

Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol, Ukrainian-born Russian dramatist, novelist and short story writer is considered to be one of the prominent figures of Literary Realism. Critics have often referred to him as the ‘father of Russian realism’. A prolific writer who showed varied influences in his works ranging from Greek epics to French songs of the Knights, almost all of his works have been translated into different languages of the world including English. Taras Bulba is a romanticized historical novella by Nikolai Gogol that tries to bridge the gap between the ‘western’ mind set influenced by culture and the ‘eastern’ ruled by nomadic passion. It tells the story of an old Zaporozhian Cossack, Taras Bulba, and his two sons, Andrii and Ostap who join the Zaporozhian Sich in Southern Ukraine and go to war against Poland. The story can be understood in the context of the Romantic nationalism movement in literature, which developed around a historical ethnic culture which meets the Romantic ideal. The author is so enamoured by the romantic ideal of the far from perfect life of the Russian Cossacks that he prefers it to the dull and uneventful life of the city and its government offices. His writings injected a freshness of the Ukrainian outdoor life, the life of the steppe, into Russian literature which had hitherto been suffering from asphyxiation by foreign influences and pseudo-classicism. The character of Taras Bulba is a composite of several historical personalities. It is mainly based on the legend of cossack Sava Chaly whose killing was ordered by his own father for betrayal of Ukrainian cause. Taras Bulba, though written in 1834, is still considered to be one of the finest Russian classics.

KEY WORDS- Cossack, Sich, Zaporozhe etc.

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