Gogol: An Overview

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GOGOL: An Over-View

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Magnificent remains of an early golden age in Russian culture remind one of the high achievement of Kiev and Novgorod during an era in which the rest of Europe was deeply immersed in the chaos, confusion, and stagnation of the Middle Ages. These early Russian cities, especially Kiev which lay in the fertile southern steppe, received nominal direction in cultural matters from the Byzantine race which rather successfully converted the Russians to Orthodox Christianity. With a combination of avid imitation and inventive originality, these Slavs and Varangians produced numerous churches, in both wood and stone, reflecting the finest traditions of Byzantine architecture. Moreover, clerics kept chronicles and recorded several impressive epics, such as The Lay of the Last of Igor. Even ideas of representative government were flourishing in the city known to its inhabitants as "Lord Novgorod the Great." But this unique phenomenon, this unexpected and generally unappreciated age of enlightenment, was doomed to oblivion under the savage horsemen of the Golden Horde.

The Mongols began their migration across the steppes around 1240. Although Novgorod and Pskov in the forests of the North were able to resist total domination for some time, Kiev in the fertile Ukrainian plains, soon was consigned to the
Mongol yoke. The Russians were thus virtually cut off from Byzantium (which was itself well into its prolonged period of decline) and in significant contact with European civilization only in the North, where Novgorod was forced to waste its resources fending off the aggressions of the Teutonic Knights. The sublimity of Kievan architecture and the vigor and noble beauty of the bylina were understandably lost to the rigors of war and oppression. Fortunately, however, oral tradition thrived during this period, providing a rich treasury of folklore for Russian authors of a later time. Centuries were required before the emerging Muscovites could force the Mongols back to the East. Even then, however, Russia went on in virtual isolation from the rest of the world—and the advances of the Renaissance—until Peter the Great began his epic program of Westernization.

One of the obstacles in the path of Russian literature at this point was that of language: the Russian written language was a mixture of the spoken language and the Old-Slavonic. Throughout the eighteenth century, Russian literature struggled along in a slavish and unnatural imitation of Western literature, especially that of Boileau and French "Pseudo-Classicism" and later of the "sentimental school" of Rousseau and Sterne.

Lomonsov, an amazingly well-rounded savant of this century, and generally known as the father of modern Russian literature, expressed his opinion of the nature of the
Russian language:

Charles V used to say that with God one ought to converse in Spanish, with a friend in French, with enemies in German, and with women in Italian. Had he known Russian he certainly would have added that in this language one could suitably talk to all of them. For he would find in it the majesty of Spanish, the liveliness of French, the strength of German, the tenderness of Italian, and together with all this the wealth, as well as the exact precision, of Latin and Greek.3

However, just as with Latin in the time of St. Jerome, the Russian language was still marked by the discrepancy mentioned above between oral and written usages. Russia needed a Jerome or a Dante to give literary respectability to the vernacular tongue. Karamzin (1766-1826), Krylov (1786-1844), and Zhukovsky (1783-1852) were the early giants in freeing the vernacular from its unnatural liaison with the Old-Slavonic. Karamzin, Russia's first great prose writer, marked his career with a multi-volume history of Russia. Zhukovsky was a classical scholar who gave his fellow Russians a translation of the Odyssey taken from a German work. Krylov, known as the Russian LaFontaine, also furthered the "Russification" of the language. At any rate, the written language became increasingly more versatile to the extent that the French translator of Pushkin and others, Prosper Mérimée, could say around 1840 that it was "the richest of all European languages."4

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In the midst of this great progression of history and culture, Nikolai Gogol came to life in the spring of 1809. His paternal ancestry consisted basically of village priests who had added "Gogol" to their family name of Yanovsky as a pretension to nobility. A truer strain of nobility--albeit Polish nobility--entered the family through a favorable marriage of Nikolai's grandfather. But the essentially peasant tradition, that of the colorful cossack heritage in the Ukraine, also made a deep impression on Gogol. In addition to this clerical, romantic, and nominally noble background, it is important to note that there was a traditional belief of divine intervention into the Gogol-Yanovsky family. For instance, Nikolai's father, Vasily, is said to have married the daughter of a neighboring landowner after seeing a vision, experiencing a divine revelation.

This girl whom Vasily wed bore a total of twelve children, only four of whom survived early childhood. Nikolai was one of these surviving four; still, he was plagued in his youth with delicate health and was rather ugly, skinny, and endowed with a noticeably long nose. His mother idolized little Nikolai, the first of her children to survive. She was provincial, naive, and superstitious; moreover, she retained these child-like traits through her adult life. Vasily was an amateur playwright and actor who was sentimental,

*It should be noted that the Orthodox faith allowed marriage for members of the lower clergy.
sickly, and at times mentally disturbed.

Nikolai spent his high-school years boarding at Nyzhyn, which lay about eighty miles from his native town of Sorochintsy. He was decidedly not a good student at Nyzhyn. The available evidence suggests that he was not at all a likeable boy.

His penchant for gorging himself with sticky sweets, his otherwise sloppy eating habits, his aloofness, and pitiable physical stature earned him the appellation of "the mysterious dwarf." A subsequent difficulty in adjusting himself to high-school realities is suggested by the fact that he would walk with a "perverse perseverance" on the wrong side of the street, while even wearing his shoes on the inappropriate foot. He did finally achieve some positive attention at school in his ability in acting, especially in the impersonation of comic old women. This interest in acting reflected young Gogol's interest in the theatrical comedies written by his father. Moreover, he was noted by some of his fellows for his poetry. Some of his first writings in verse were: "Two Little Fishes," a lyrical ballad about Nikolai and his dead brother; "The Robbers," a tragedy in iambic pentameter; and "Russia under the Yoke of the Tartars." He also began his disastrous Hans Küchelgarten while at Nyzhyn. These poems in general were marked by his early hero-worship of Pushkin and his temporary infatuation with German idealism.

Gogol had few close friends at school, and even fewer could claim to have any insight into this aloof introvert. To be sure, he did not readily open himself to his acquaintances,
It is known, nevertheless, that he had long wished to become a great, dignified statesman. There was within Gogol a naïve and self-effacing altruism, perhaps somewhat close to noblesse oblige, which drove him to the conviction that he must both "serve mankind" and register his own name in the history of Russia. That Gogol's early life was lonely and enwrapped in the tensions of his own paradoxical personality is again demonstrated in a retrospective letter to his mother:

I remember: I never felt anything strongly, I looked upon all as if it were created for the purpose of gratifying me...I looked upon everything with dispassionate eyes.

The bland objectivity indicated by this excerpt is altered by a later portion of the same letter:

...you described so strikingly, in such a horrifying way, the eternal torments of sinners that all my sentiments became awakened and almost shattered, a fact which instilled and stirred up in me, later on, the loftiest thoughts.

Gogol made his way to Petersburg upon graduation from Nyezhin. His alleged goal was to attain a position in the civil service and thus to begin his career of altruism and fame. Some would say that he was perfectly sincere in his quest for employment but became disillusioned with life in the metropolis and sought respite in literature. Another

#It should be noted here that young Gogol spent much time at the impressive residence of Troschinsky, his noble Polish grandfather.
opinion is that Gogol willfully procrastinated in securing a job—even refusing to use his letters of recommendation—while trying his hand in poetry. His first published poem was a conventional, romantic piece entitled "Italy." It achieved little, if any, notice from the critics or public at large. But Gogol was saving money (borrowed from his mother, now a widow) to print, at his own expense, Hans Küchelgarten. The poem was indebted to Chateaubriand's René, Byron's Childs Harold, Pushkin's Eugene Onegin, and generally to the weltschmerz leit-motiv popular at the time. This first significant attempt at verse was the would-be epic narration of a young German's wanderings after finding the harmony of his paternal retreat destroyed by outside influences. The poem attracted much more attention than did "Italy," enough to merit a number of unfavorable reviews. With the exception of an encouraging touch or two of Ukrainian spirit which had miraculously found its way into the poem, this verse attempt was a palpable failure. Gogol was protected to an extent by the pen name—V. Alov—under which he had published Hans Küchelgarten. But the gloomy egoist knew no limit to shame. After the poor reviews, he gathered all remaining copies of his poem and burned them; he was never again to write verse. This early disappointment in romantic poetry was probably a major step in Gogol's transition to versatile prose writing. In 1847 he wrote of his early period for An Author's Confessions:

My first efforts were couched in a lyrical and serious vein. Neither I nor my schoolmates would ever have predicted that I was to become a comic and satirical writer.
To soothe his wounded ego, young Gogol left for Lübeck in August of 1829. To justify to his mother this expensive excursion, he invented stories of chest pains, which would be alleviated at the Lübeck spas, and an account of his incurable love for a woman, as seen in the following excerpt from a letter:

Who could have expected a weakness of this kind on my part? But I saw her... No, I will not tell her name... She is too exalted for anyone, not only for me... No, this was not love... At any rate, I have never heard of a similar love. In a fit of madness and of terrible inner torments I was craving, I was burning to get intoxicated by a single look of hers.

Gogol's capacity for insincerity is clearly demonstrated in the above lines. It is quite possible that he enjoyed toying with the provincial credulousness of his mother. At any rate a literal burlesque was created when his mother interpreted the lines as meaning that Nikolai had gone to Lübeck to cure a venereal disease contracted from this lady of such an idealized description. But he rose heroically to the demands of this development and rather indignantly chided his poor mother for having suspected such a lapse in his moral purity. Actually, this incident helps to illustrate an important aspect of Gogol's psychology: sexual timidity, on which more commentary is forthcoming.

Like his own wandering Hans, Gogol returned after a time to his own soil--the Ukraine. In 1830 he wrote a few minor tales with Ukranian color, thus conforming to a fashion of the time. He was now holding a government job. There is
some indication that he collaborated at this time with the notorious Faddey Bulgari of the Third Department; however, opinions on the matter differ. At any rate, Gogol was finding acceptance in the literary world of Petersburg.

With resounding success he published the first part of The Evenings on a Farm near Didanka in 1831 and the concluding portion the following year. Also in 1831 he found employment teaching history at a girls' boarding school; with fewer responsibilities than demanded by his government position, Gogol now had more time for writing. He had attracted enough attention to be received by both Zhukovsky and Pushkin, the latter having been Gogol's hero from an early age. Another step in his long journey of disillusionment came in May of 1831, when Gogol—with a letter of introduction from Zhukovsky—and braced with liquor—appeared for the first time at Pushkin's home. Informed by the butler that Pushkin was still in bed at that hour of the morning, Gogol expressed worshipful awe that the great poet had been at his desk so late as to require such late sleeping. But the butler replied tersely and to the point that Pushkin—far from working late—had simply been up all night playing cards!

*The Third Department of His Majesty's Own Chancery was an organization, directly responsible to Tsar Nicholas, which infiltrated literary circles to expose liberal sentiments. It should be noted that Gogol, with the noble pretentions of his family, always tried to maintain a good rapport with the autocracy.*
THE EVENINGS ON A FARM NEAR DIDANKA

Gogol's **Evenings** was remarkable in its lack of literary conventions. The primary theme of the collection of short stories was "the intrusion of evil, irrational powers into plain, everyday life." The stories were of two basic types: the duma, or Ukrainian folk epic; and the vertep, or Ukrainian comic burlesque. The collection displayed a balance between the rough comedy and realism of Ukrainian folk tradition and the mystical, metaphysical supernaturalism typical of German Romanticism. The result was a pleasing blend of the bizarre and the exotic. Like so many other story cycles, **Evenings** was given a frame. The stories were allegedly being presented by a rustic Ukrainian beekeeper as his own recollections of interesting tales. The homely conversation of red-haired Panko in the prologues bore the influential stamp of Sir Walter Scott.

"The Fair at Sorochintsy" is the first of the collection. It begins in nature pathos and then moves into a rustic comedy. The plot involves the efforts of a young peasant, Grytsko, to outwit another peasant, Solopy, and his wife. Grytsko would marry the daughter of Solopy, and the arrangement is quite agreeable at first with the older peasant. Complications arise when Solopy's wife refuses to wed her step-daughter to the peasant Grytsko who had previously called her a witch and casually thrown dung in her face. Grytsko, ever resourceful, enlists the aid of a shady gypsy who
appears as a devil manifested in the body of a pig in order to scare the parents of the beautiful peasant girl.

The panes flew out with a crash and a terrible pig snout pushed its way through the window and let its eyes wander around the room as if it were asking: "What are you doing here, good people?"

Here one has an example of Gogol's frequent "pig imagery," a strange technique which is well fitted to the grotesque.

The mayor in The Inspector General sees pig snouts at one point; the petition of Ivan Nikiforovich, from the Mira科尔od collection, is carried off by a pig; and a pig rouses Khoma Brut from his sleep in "Viy."

"St. John's Eve" is a rather gothic story which espouses the theme that innocent blood must be shed to gain wealth and power, and that the subsequent success is both temporary and self-destructive. The supernaturalism in this story goes beyond the ruse of the disguised gypsy in "The Fair at Sorochintsy."

The eerie happenings here are presented in a mood of uncompromised reality.

Gold pieces and precious stones in chests and in cauldrons were piled up in heaps under the very spot on which they were standing. His eyes glowed...his brain reeled...Frantic, he seized the knife and the blood of the innocent child squirted into his eyes...Devilish laughter broke out all around him. Hideous monsters galloped in herds before him. Clutching the headless corpse in her hands, the witch drank blood like a wolf...His head was in a whirl!

With a desperate effort he started running. Everything about him was lost in a red light. The trees all bathed in blood seemed to be burning and moaning. The blazing sky quivered.

But this amazingly realistic passage of horror is followed by a colorful and gay digression on wedding feasts!
is thus a difficulty when humor and horror are found in such 
close proximity: that is, the tone does not always correspond 
to content. In other circumstances, however, Gogol exploits 
an incongruity between tone and content to attain sublimely 
ludicrous, or dazzling, effects.

An open combination of the real and the fantastic is 
displayed in "Christmas Eve." This is a story rather in-
tricately plotted which presents characters along a spectrum 
from the devil to a pious blacksmith. A delightful innova-
tion of the tale is that the devil is portrayed as a comic 
bungler, an object of ridicule. The devil, whose machinations 
do not pass the notice of the blacksmith, finally has his 
nostril pulled and is ridden by the blacksmith in a sort of 
"epic flight" all the way to the court of Catherine the Great 
in Petersburg. In the nose-pulling of the devil is an intro-
duction to the fascinating nose leit-motiv to be mentioned 
later.

In opposition to the positive message of the comic 
"Christmas Eve," the theme of The Terrible Vengeance is 
total negation. It is the only prose work of Gogol completely 
devoid of humor! An evil tremendously more powerful than that 
of the other tales is seen here triumphing over religion, 
love, virtue, and mortal strength. There is also a portion 
of mystery and suspense as the key to the plot is withheld 
until the end of the story. The setting of the Ukraine 
brings out an inevitable lyricism in magnificent descriptions 
of scenic rivers and landscapes. But this lyricism is mixed 
with a horror that manifests itself both physically and
mentally. Katerina's insanity in the tale is probably the first great portrayal of the subconscious by a Russian author.\(^5\)

The story of "Ivan Fyodorovich Shponka and his Aunt" is a definite departure from the other tales in *Evenings*. It is the only selection not based on Ukrainian folklore. Interestingly, its characters are rather complete. Indeed, they are so artfully and delightfully drawn that they seem to live on, beyond the bounds of the narration. Shponka, for instance, is practically immortalized in the following passage:

Shponka was not the sort of man to be easily bored. While his coachman was saying his prayers, "he unstrapped his trunk, took out his linen, and subjected it to a thorough examination to make sure that it had been properly washed and nicely folded.\(^6\)

And the genius which Gogol possessed for the homely and the grotesque is demonstrated in the complaint of Storchenko:

"I must tell you sir," he addressed Shponka, "that I've been in the habit of stopping my ears for the night over since that damned incident in a Russian inn when a cockroach crawled into my left ear..."\(^7\)

The plot, however, suffers in comparison to these achievements. The story is ended practically in mid-sentence at a point where just enough complications have arisen to elicit high interest. Panko explains to the reader beforehand that the story had been written down for him by an acquaintance, but that his wife—unfortunately illiterate—confiscated the

\(^*\)The coachman was a devout Jew.
last several pages for cookie sheets. Probably as Gogol planned, the reader inevitably goes on, half-disbelieving that Fanko would even dare to begin such a story, until the warning is forgotten. Gogol's *coup-de-grace* is complete when, with eager anticipation, the reader turns the last page only to find the story at a premature end, reminiscent of the abrupt closings of Sterne.

These stories from *Evenings on a Farm near Didenka* embody the variant elements of style which Gogol brought to such perfection. He was able to use the music and magic of words, beyond their actual meaning. In fact, his use of the language was such that he has been called "the least translatable of all Russian writers." The artist of words would use precise details, or trivia, to create an illusion of reality, until there was no longer any distinction between reality and pure fantasy. His lyrical passages were often mixed with romance, comedy, the grotesque, and powerful, unexpected metaphors and similes. For instance, recalling the scene of the devil-pig from "The Fair at Sorochintsy," one reads that poor Solomy ran from the inn to escape the frightening swine but fell with a thud to the street, where he lay "like the dreadful dweller of a narrow coffin."

As mentioned before, "Ivan Fyodorovich Simonka and his Aunt"—the only tale not based on folklore—was glaringly at a loss for a plot. This phenomenon is consistent with the fact of Gogol's lack of inventive creativity. He did
not invent themes, he merely collected them. He even wrote to his long-suffering mother for old vignettes of local Ukrainian color.\textsuperscript{10} Perhaps a comparison can be made to Shakespeare as a dramatist: that is, both drew ideas from the materials of others, but both excelled in the imagination of thematic intensification if not in that of invention. Gogol himself noted his own lack of purely creative genius years later in his \textit{Author's Confession:}

\begin{quote}
I never created anything out of mere imagination.\textsuperscript{\#} Only in those things was I successful which I took from reality and which were based on the data I knew... The more details I had seen and considered, the better were my productions. My mind is in this respect thoroughly Russian, that is, a mind capable of deriving rather than inventing.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

The author's mind, so "thoroughly Russian" in this one respect was infrequently—if ever—opened up to the surveillance of those about him. Like Byron, Gogol was seen as a "bundle of paradoxes"; and those who wrote about him have been able to agree on little else. His own deep depression and his intimate connection with his homeland have been cited as major reasons for the intensity of \textit{Evenings}. In reference to this depression, Gogol wrote that

\begin{quote}
I became a prey to fits of melancholy which were beyond my comprehension...In order to get rid of them I invented the funniest characters in the funniest situations imaginable.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

Gogol was a man too reserved to be entirely honest about his

\textsuperscript{\#}This statement probably does not give due credit to Gogol's obvious capacity for creating both scenes and characters.
inner thoughts, but he was probably too scrupulous to be absolutely insincere. He was well aware of the contradictions within his own personality, which perhaps manifested themselves in the seeming contradictions of his prose. The following letter is one written to his mother in 1829 on the subject of his own creation.

Why has He combined all this with such a terrible mixture of contradictions, obstinacy, insolent conceit and base humility? But my perishable mind is not strong enough to fathom the great designs of the Almighty.  

Sergius Aksakov, the prominent Slavophile, wrote a rather uncomplimentary description of Gogol in 1832:

...there seemed to be in him something crested and cunning. In his costume pretensions to dandyism were noticeable. I remember he had a bright motley waistcoat with a big watch-chain. On the whole, there was something about him which restrained me from any sincere enthusiasm and warmth, in which I so often indulge.

Yet Aksakov was for years thereafter one of the author's closest friends. Gogol perhaps himself provided the best key for comprehending his personality when he wrote that it would be revealed only through his "real life-work." But far from finding some well-defined secret in Gogol's writings, one must inevitably discover that his "real life-work" is troubled, clouded in confusion and chaos.

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It is certainly not an exaggeration to say that Pushkin was the greatest single influence on the literary life of Gogol. But it is singularly strange that this could be so true when the two writers were so nearly opposite each other. Pushkin has been hailed as the "bright, affirmative genius of Russian literature," whereas Gogol's reputation lies largely in his tendency to see only the negative side of life. While Pushkin was always "divinely obvious," Gogol was mostly mysterious—"even under the veil of extreme obviousness." A childhood urge to "serve mankind" too often found its way into the literary philosophy of Gogol; Pushkin, on the other hand, felt simply that "the aim of poetry is poetry." Unfortunately, Gogol, possibly the most ego-centric of Russian writers, could never in his writing be so unself-conscious. Stylistically, it may be said that Pushkin thrived on proportion, while Gogol flourished in the lack of it. The characters of the master poet were created straightway—out of one piece, if you will. The characters of his Ukrainian worshipper, however, were made from many pieces. Gogol's characters were constructed like a mosaic, from numerous differently shaped and colored pieces strangely blended into a harmonious whole. In the matter of direct influence, Pushkin suggested to Gogol the exploitation of trivia and the study of such foreign writers as Shakespeare, Cervantes, Dante, and Molière. Furthermore, he suggested to Gogol several ideas for composition.
By 1833, Gogol was undecided on whether to write history or comedy. Moreover, it seems that he had still not grasped the thought of writing as a full-time profession, even after the success of Evenings. He complained to Pushkin about an "intellectual constipation" which blocked his endeavours to create. At any rate, Gogol took a position lecturing on world history at the university in Petersburg. He was capable to an extent, but was hampered in his teaching by laziness. Unfortunately, he could really gain a full comprehension of no historical period other than the Middle Ages, which must have appealed to his penchant for romance. He clung to a romantic view of history with emphasis on Providence and hero-worship.

A return of creative powers brought Arabesques in 1835. This was another collection, a conglomeration of essays on history and science, criticism, fragments of novels, and three masterful stories. Somewhat dismayed with Gogol's pretentious and rhetorical remarks in some of the essays, Belinsky wrote a smashing condemnation:

If essays of this kind are called scientific, then may God preserve us from such science.

Still, Belinsky praised the three stories--"Nevsky Prospekt," "Diary of a Madman," and "The Portrait"--just as he had praised Evenings on a Farm near Didanka. Later in the same year came Mirgorod, including "The Old World Landowners," Taras Bulba, "Viy," and "The Story of the Quarrel between Ivan Ivanovitch and Ivan Nikiforovitch."
Gogol then put to the test an idea given him by Pushkin. En route to Moscow with two friends, he stopped at a town, asking the officials seemingly innocent, yet embarrassing questions. His conclusion was affirmative, that the idea for The Inspector General would be feasible in reality.

When The Inspector General was finished, in 1836, authorization for performance was granted by the tsar himself, who over-ruled the decision of the cautious censors. Nicholas even appeared at the premiere showing and ordered that all civil service heads should see the play.

But in spite of official approval from the tsar, Gogol's play concerning provincial bureaucratic corruption found itself in the midst of angry opposition. Gogol exaggerated to himself the magnitude of these indignant outcries. In fact, he enjoyed feeling that he was persecuted and that God had designed special trials for his own education. Note the following letter to Pogodin dated May 15, 1836:

Everything that happened to me, it was all salutary for me. All the insults, all the unpleasantnesses were sent to me by divine providence for my education, and today I feel that it is not an earthly will that directs my path. This path must be necessary for me.

Because of the relatively wide public reaction to The Inspector General, Gogol saw that he could both influence and teach with his powerful pen. This didactic purpose begins to creep into his writing from this point in his life.

Partly to collect thoughts and to gain objectivity, and partly to augment his martyr complex, Gogol went into
"exile" with his friend Danilevsky in July of 1836. He patronized theatres in nearly every city he visited; moreover, he was deeply impressed with Gothic churches and the Alps, even to the point of climbing Mont Blanc. He was plagued by ill health during much of the trip and was likely in a state of convalescent pensiveness when he wrote to Zhukovsky in November:

My task is hugely immense and I shall not complete it soon. Many new classes and the most varied gentlemen will rise up against me. But what am I to do? It is my destiny to be at odds with my compatriots. Patience. Someone invisible is prescribing my way with a mighty staff. I know that my name after me will be more fortunate than I am and the descendants of these very compatriots, perhaps with eyes moist with tears, will pronounce their reconciliation with my spirit.

The increasing mystical inclination here is obvious. Gogol's original egotism, which compensated for feelings of inferiority, was now wed with the idea of a profound religious calling. Gogol was in Paris, where he became friends with Alexandra Smirnova—a friend of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Zhukovsky—and the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz, when Pushkin died in May, 1837.

* * *
"Nevsky Prospekt" begins with a series of vivid descriptions of what one might expect to see on that particular avenue. Gogol's ability to transform a triviality into a sensational experience is given witness by his account of mustaches.

Here you meet marvelous mustaches that no pen, no brush could do justice to, mustaches to which the better part of a life has been devoted, the objects of prolonged care by day and night; mustaches upon which enchanting perfumes are sprinkled and on which the rarest and most expensive kinds of pomade are lavished; mustaches that are wrapped up at night in the most expensive vellum; mustaches which to their possessors display the most touching devotion and which are the envy of passers-by.

The theme of the story is that of the cruel discrepancy between appearance and reality. A young artist, Piskarev, and a lieutenant, Pirogov, espY two young women walking along Nevsky Prospekt. Pirogov boldly gives chase to the blonde German while Piskarev timidly follows the brunette, wishing only to see where she lives that he might admire her from afar. But upon reaching her residence, the brunetto--aware of the artist following her---invites Piskarev to follow her in. Complete disillusionment results as he discovers that he has been led into a house of prostitution.

He then dreams of her in a more exalted state. Drugs to induce sleep are the next element in his downfall. In a desperate effort to reform the young beauty and to win her for himself, the artist visits her again one morning. He issues
a sincere, but pitiable, proposal of marriage which she coldly refuses. Convinced that there can be no good in a world which allows such a beautiful young girl to be a cruel whore, Piskarev goes home and slits his throat. Meanwhile, Pirogov is trying ineptly to seduce the blonde wife of a German tinsmith. He is put off time and again and finally beaten by the jealous tinsmith and his German friend. Thus, trivial lusts and vulgarity continue while the attempted idealism of the young artist is extinguished and forgotten. Gogol expresses the theme in the closing paragraph, which contrasts greatly with the beginning of the tale.

Oh, do not trust that Nevsky Prospekt!... Everything's a cheat, everything a dream, everything is other than it seems!... the devil himself lights the street lamps to show everything in false colors. 2

"Diary of a Madman" is probably indebted to the writing of E. T. A. Hoffmann, who was extremely popular in Russia. Like "Nevsky Prospekt," it gives Gogol an opportunity to vent his offended idealism upon the inequities of reality. He would overwhelm reality with his indictments and his bitter laughter. 3 "Diary of a Madman" is another story of unrequitted love and a subsequent escape from reality. In the ravings of the madman, Gogol demonstrates rather well the illogical, associative patterns of thought. One sees here rather explicitly how the author's intensifying imagination tends to exaggerate, magnify, and distort mere trifles into matters of haunting significance.
An interesting insight into Gogol's psyche may be gleaned from the depths of "The Portrait." It is the account of Chertkov, another young artist, who is induced by a satanic power to exchange his genius and creative talent for mere success. By conforming to the fashions of the day, Chertkov lets his true talent die. He is eventually driven insane. Part Two of the story gives a retrospective explanation of the demonic power embodied in the portrait. Another painter of a previous time is persuaded to paint a portrait of an evil old money-lender who dies on his deathbed. With the portrait only partially complete, the artist realizes that a diabolic power from the old usurer is being transferred to the canvas. Unable to destroy the portrait, he goes to a monastery to expiate himself and to purify his soul. He refuses to paint again until he has cleansed his spirit through a long period of ascetic existence in the wilderness. This need to do penance, to purify one's unworthy heart in order to be fit to perform the work of God, becomes later an important aspect of Gogol's life.

Taras Bulba has been called the cossack Iliad. Indeed, Gogol himself thought of it as an epic. He gave it a poetic accuracy while taking liberties with historical facts. The tale has generally been cited as the height of Romanticism in Gogol; still, there is a substantial

*Money-lenders in Russia were primarily Jews. They were despised for their infidel religion and for their usury. The Jews were frequently accused of liaisons with the devil.
amount of realism in given passages throughout the work, especially in the detailed descriptions of cossack organization both on and off the battlefield.

A romantic travelogue is provided in parts of Taras Bulba, notably in the scenic journey to Sotch. Gogol here flourishes in the rolling plains of his native Ukraine. The vivid account of the boisterous life at Sotch is also romanticized to an extent; but one is still held in awe at the tremendously vigorous, indomitable life-style of the cossacks. These idealized horsemen of the frontier are not unlike the American cowboys of the West in their mutual position as national heroes and titans of folk tradition.

In order to complete the education of his two sons, who had previously been in school at Kiev, Taras Bulba escorts them to the cossack stronghold. He then stirs up sufficient excitement to launch a pogrom against the camp-following Jews and an expedition against the Roman Catholic Poles. Such violence could not possibly have been looked down upon in the world of the fifteenth-century cossacks. They belonged to a time that was pre-moral; and violence was the mode of both life and death. Although ideas of religion and patriotism were important to the cossacks, they could manifest these abstractions only with the slash of a sword and the shot of a pistol.

Possibly the only major weakness of Taras Bulba comes during the siege of the Polish city Dubno. Andriy defects
from his Ukrainian brotherhood to join within the city walls a Polish girl with whom he had fallen in love in Kiev. The love affair is expressed rather melodramatically, and the beauty of Andriy's betrothed is described in trite, conventional terms. Lindstrom has written a rather concise summary of this sort of criticism:

His young heroines all possess the same doll-like beauty—egg-shaped face, black hair, flashing eyes—as though he had learned a formula to apply whenever necessary. Old or aging women appear in his stories, but his only other concept of women seems based on atavistic fear.4

This fear of women was probably a key factor in the life of Gogol (He was never romantically involved with women.) and severely limited his capacity to illustrate love and feminine beauty! The seductive vampire-witch in "Viy" is apparently the embodiment of all these fears. Unable to describe the gentler virtues of women, Gogol wrote thus on their evil aspects and their stupidity. For instance, he injects a bit of opinionated witticism into the narration of "Nevsky Prospekt":

...Stupidity, however, adds a special charm to a pretty wife. I have known several husbands anyway who were enrapured by the stupidity of their wives.5

There is finally a spiritual theme in Taras Bulba which should not be passed over. It is significant that the cossacks don the role of defenders of the faith against both Catholics and the Tartar infidels; moreover, it is important to note that the tie of religion and patriotism looms even greater than the parental obligation as Taras
murders his own son. The themes of sacrifice and the messianic role are obvious as Taras encourages his men before a battle, which is subsequently lost:

Let us first drink to our holy Russian Orthodox faith and to that time when it will spread over everywhere and become the only faith.⁰

"Viy" is basically the story of Khoma Brut, a young philosophy student. While travelling across country with two school-fellows, he encounters an old witch who rides him for all he is worth. Remembering his exorcisms, Khoma reverses the predicament and rides the witch for some time, beating her with a stick all the while. Finally, the witch falls in complete exhaustion, and Khoma discovers her to be a beautiful girl! A few days later, Khoma is rather forcibly summoned to the home of a cossack whose daughter, being near death after some unknown encounter, specifically asked that the young philosopher pray over her dead body for three nights. Spurred by the hope of a generous reward on one hand and by fear of the cossack on the other, the reluctant Khoma prays over the body, which was that of the witch he had previously ridden and thrashed. He is locked in an old church each night until cockcrow to perform his duty; and the terrors of the witch rising from her coffin and hideous monsters crawling about increase progressively until the dreadful moment on the third night:

All of a sudden... in the midst of the stillness... the iron lid of the coffin burst with a crash and the corpse rose up. It was more terrible than the first time. Its teeth
clacked horribly against each other, its lips twitched convulsively, and incanta-
tions came from them in wild shrieks. A whirlwind swept through the church, the
icons fell to the ground, broken glass came flying down from the windows. The
doors were burst from their hinges and a countless multitude of monstrous beings
flew into the church of God. A terrible noise of wings and scratching claws filled
the church. All flew and raced about looking for the philosopher.

Khoma is protected, as it were, by his prayers until
the most terrible monster of all—the Viy—is brought. The
Viy is a gnome so gruesome as to defy translation. It
wrecks death on poor Khoma as it sees him behind his
shield of exorcisms. Thus, the quintessence of horror in
Gogol’s mind was the being endowed with the vision that
could pierce through the façades and into the depths of
man’s hidden soul.

A departure from the gothic to the grotesque is seen in
"The Nose." This story has been described as everything
from a castration fantasy to a straight dream sequence.
Its original name was "Son," Russian for "The Dream." But,
with his incurable penchant for word-play, Gogol reversed
the spelling to "Nos," which is Russian for "The Nose."
The plot is, briefly, the mysterious disappearance of a
Major Kovalyov’s nose and his subsequent difficulties in
retrieving it. Burlesque is completely unchained as Kovalyov
confronts on the street his own nose disguised as a state
councilor. It is possible that Gogol borrowed this nose
leit-motiv from passages in Sterne’s Tristram Shandy;*

*Sterne’s Tristram Shandy had been translated into Russian
by 1807.
Moreover, the nose-joke was rather frequent in Russia during that period. But Gogol's primary source of inspiration must certainly have been his own nose, which he described as so sharp and long that it could

...penetrate personally without the assistance of fingers into the smallest snuff-box, if of course a chiquesade did not come to repel the intruder.  

The Inspector General, or Revisor, features the amiable anti-hero Khlestakov. Khlestakov, whose name comes from the Russian verb "to lash with a whip," is one of the most spontaneous and unconscious liars in all literature. Its plot, suggested by Pushkin, is the comic progression of events when a vain fop, a young bungling n'er-do-well from Petersburg, is mistaken as an inspector general while passing through a rather backward provincial town. Demonstrating remarkable versatility, he accepts the servility and bribes of the authorities as simple matters of course even before realizing the nature of the mistaken identity. He adapts himself well to the majestic role bestowed upon him by the obsequious mayor and officials.

The play is a veritable encyclopedia of small-town bureaucratic corruption and inefficiency. Frightened officials make the most elaborate preparations to give Khlestakov an idealized view of the town. The height of irony is achieved in the play as Khlestakov proposes marriage to the mayor's daughter and then makes his exit--with hundreds of
rubles in his pockets—just as news is received that the real inspector general is about to arrive!

The Inspector General created new problems for the actors: it differed from both the Neoclassical comedy and the current vaudeville to which actors and audiences were accustomed. Gogol furthermore broke with theatre tradition in the omission of love intrigue, the complete absence of didacticism, and the refusal to differentiate between "good" and "bad" characters. The characters, however, free from labels of "good" and "bad," seem smothered in a universal mediocrity which reflects Gogol's generally pessimistic perception.

Some would say that Gogol was compelled to express himself negatively because only in that manner could he "assert himself against others" and "emphasize his own superiority." But he did not condescend to moralization or direct indictments in order to make clear the message of the play. His results were accomplished through irony, an irony hidden under the pretense that there was no irony at all. Gogol seemingly hinted at a motive of social duty which drove him to write The Inspector General.

I saw that in my former works I laughed for nothing, uselessly, without knowing why. If it is necessary to laugh, then let us laugh at that which really deserves to be laughed at by all. In my Revizor I decided to gather in one place and deride all that is bad in Russia all the evils which are

*In nineteenth century Russia the Ruble was worth about fifty-one cents, but, like the nineteenth century dollar, it bought approximately six or seven times more than it buys today.
being perpetrated in those places where the utmost rectitude is required from man.

However, his previously mentioned martyr complex, the fact of his essentially conservative political views, and his native recognition of noblesse oblige all tend to detract from his image as a great altruistic reformer.
Upon the untimely and violent death of Pushkin, Gogol went to Rome. He found there an enchantment which perhaps even rivalled that of his native Ukraine. His mind was ultimately diverted from the tragedy of Pushkin's death, but he suffered both from ill health and another failing of his creative ability. The death of Pushkin left a vacuum in the literary hegemony of Russia. Gogol began to feel that he must take the lead in Russian letters in order to further the cause of God. At the same time, he felt the need to purify his own soul so as to be worthy of this calling. At this time it can be said that his moralizing began to interfere with his art.

Gogol added to his mystical outlook while in Rome; rumors that he had converted to Catholicism were circulating in Russia. An experience which perhaps augmented his other-worldliness came in 1839. The author had established a deep friendship with the young Count Iosif Vielgorsky who was visiting Rome. Tragically, the noble companion was subjected to a slow death with tuberculosis. Gogol was infinitely devoted to Vielgorsky, sitting faithfully at his bedside through the dismal period before death. Again, an intensely depressing experience contributed to Gogol's coming religious turn.

In the autumn of 1839, Gogol was back in Russia as a pampered guest of Aksakov and his Slavophiles circle. He
stayed for a time at the Winter Palace with his friend Zhukovsky, and attempted, without great success, to resume writing. Aksakov, being once admitted to the hallowed interior of Gogol's writing chamber, described the eccentric mode of dress which—in the manner of Schiller's rotten ankles—the author used as a sort of creative stimulus:

...in place of boots—long Russian woolen stockings, which reached above the knee; instead of a jacket—a velvet Spencer over a flannel camisole, with a large, bright-colored scarf wrapped around his neck and a raspberry-colored, velvet kokoshnik, embroidered in gold, on his head, quite similar to the headdress of Finnish tribeswomen.

The long-waning literary powers finally returned the next summer when Gogol was once again in Italy. He was able to revise Taras Bulba and to compose "The Overcoat." In that same year, he was stricken with a grave illness, probably aggravated by nervous strain. At a point very near death Gogol experienced a vision! This mysterious supernatural phenomenon, on which he never elaborated, was to mark decisively his turn to religion. He thereafter was convinced of his role as teacher and prophet; his art was becoming only a vehicle for his messianic duty.

In 1841 Gogol returned to Moscow in his effort to push Dead Souls past the censors. It is interesting that this great novel, which practically glorified the damnable machinations of Chichikov, was submitted by Gogol after his stunning religious experience of the previous year. It is probable that the bulk of the work had been completed before
his acclaimed vision. It is known from Gogol's letters to Zhukovsky that the first few chapters were written by 1835. Gogol intended from the very beginning that *Dead Souls* should be a masterpiece. This fact is illustrated in a letter to Zhukovsky dated in December, 1836.

I am working at my *Dead Souls* which I had begun at Petersburg. I have remade all that was done before, I have reconsidered the whole plan, and now am working it out quietly as if I were writing a chronicle... If I ever complete this book in the manner I should like to--what a colossal, what an original subject!* What a varied crowd! The whole of Russia will appear in it! This is going to be the first production of mine that will preserve my name.

The key to understanding how Gogol was able to publish *Dead Souls* after his zealous turn to religion lies partly in the undeniable excellence of the book, partly in the fact that it was near completion by 1840, and partly in the fact that Gogol devised a completely new plan--far greater than the one alluded to above--for transforming *Dead Souls* into an epic of purification. Inspired by the example of Dante's epic in three parts, Gogol conceived of a trilogy in which the first part, published in 1842, would represent man in his depravity. The second and third parts were planned to bring Chichikov and Plyushkin, respectively, to their spiritual salvation. At this point it was becoming obvious that Gogol disapproved of the very characters he had created in earlier years when he could practice "art for art's sake."

*The "original subject" was again suggested by Pushkin.*
In May of 1842 Gogol left Russia to resume his life of voluntary exile. He was at the time well aware of the change which he had undergone. He wrote to Madame Smirnova about his transformation and his experiences with old friends while in Russia:

All my literary friends had gotten to know me at a time when I was still the former man, and even then they did not know me very well... Since the time when I left Russia, a great change has taken place in me. 

Gogol again found himself in a period of failing creativity. A tremendous tension arose in the artist who felt the calling for something great while being unable to produce it. Where originality could not be summoned, didacticism crept in. His Part Two of Dead Souls was becoming the saga of "reasoned-out moral puppets" instead of artfully drawn personalities. Aksakov was concerned with these developments and warned Gogol of his plight:

I cannot stand any moralizing, nor anything that looks like faith in talismans. You are moving on the razor's edge. I tremble lest the artist come to grief!

Gogol was painfully aware of the inadequacy of his didactic attempts when he wrote again to Madame Smirnova in April, 1845:

For a long time now, God has taken from me the ability to create. I have tortured myself, forced myself to write, suffered severe pains when I realized my impotence.

Plagued by sickness and by the dismal thought of being unworthy to perform the bidding of God, Gogol burned most of
his second part of Dead Souls in the summer of 1845.

The hopelessness of continuing with Dead Souls required a major revision of the pious Ukrainian's campaign to reform mankind. The method of teaching directly, rather than indirectly as in the novel, was the product of his literary frustration. In 1846 he published The Denouement of the Revizor, the purpose of which was to allegorize and to give a retrospective Christian significance to his essentially pessimistic, secular play of 1836. Then came Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends, a book which Gogol expected to be a revelation to all Russia. It was filled with moral commonplace and incredibly reactionary political doctrine. Of much importance is the fact that Gogol's new didactic work lacked the very religious fire which he was attempting to propagate. Selected Passages had no delays in securing approval for publication; the censors adored it, and the government welcomed it with open arms. Belinsky, however, was naturally enraged over the social connotations of the book—which negated the relatively liberal sub-themes of The Inspector General and the first part of Dead Souls—and consequently, like the Viy, saw through the façades and into the depths of Gogol's troubled mind:

"It is not the truth of Christian teaching that your book breathes but the fear of death, of the devil and of hell.""  

Again, Gogol possessed the self-awareness to see the truth of Belinsky's charge. The author felt that there was
a need for him to fear damnation. He confessed in 1847 that his amoral characters of the past were actually manifestations of himself:

None of my readers knows that in laughing at my characters they laughed at myself... I began to depict in my heroes my own nastiness.\textsuperscript{13}

At another moment Gogol was brought to confess that "there is something of Khlestakov in me."\textsuperscript{14} Thus, with the failure of both his moral writing and his moral teaching haunting him and beset with doubts about his own moral state, Gogol left on a pilgrimage to the holy land in January, 1848.
"The Overcoat" displays Gogol at his incongruous best, vigorously mixing images of comedy and of city. Akaky Akakyevich, whose name is a Russian children's word for excrement, is the epitome of the downtrodden, ill-starred man. As Gogol puts it:

The child was christened, and during the ceremony he began to cry and pulled such a face that it really seemed as though he had a premonition that he would be a titular councilor one day.

Akaky was a man of simple needs and few talents; however, he possessed

the peculiar knack when walking in
the street of passing under a window
just at the time when some rubbish was tipped out of it.2

Much of the excellence of the story lies in its vivid, often humorous, often grotesque descriptions of the characters and their actions. For instance, Gogol's illustration of Petrovich has become a veritable shrine to the disciples of the homely and the grotesque:

His feet, as is the custom of tailors when engaged in their work, were bare.
The first thing that caught his eye was Petrovich's big toe, which Akaky knew very well indeed, with its deformed nail as thick and hard as the shell of a tortoise.3

The most important part of the plot is the revenge taken by Akaky's ghost on the un-named official—the Very Important Person—who feigns an investigation of the stolen overcoat while Akaky freezes to death from the icy winds of
Petersburg. Some have interpreted this eventual retribution in terms of social justice. But it is unlikely that the introspective, conceited Gogol actually wrote with the purpose of rectifying such an inequality. A more likely explanation is that Gogol—at his best—nearly always expressed himself in a negative or grotesque manner. Therefore, it is only natural that Akaky's life should be a pitiable one, for herein lies the negative impulse. On the other hand, Gogol's penchant for the incongruous, the grotesque and the bizarre is exercised ingeniously in allowing Akaky's ghost to attain a vengeful strength never dreamed of by the poor mortal himself. Still it is important that "The Overcoat" gained a reputation as an outcry against the inhumanity of the bureaucracy.

In the final analysis, it seems that "The Overcoat," as a living work of art, on its own championed a cause not recognized by the author.

The plot of Dead Souls is rather simple: the story is merely a series of genre pictures bound together by a common relation to Chichikov, the amiable but roguish anti-hero. The idea which motivates the plot comes from the economics of serf-owning in Russia at the time. All a man's serfs were listed for purposes of taxation on a census roll. When a serf died, his name was not removed from the roll.

*A collateral idea, but one based almost entirely in my personal speculation, is that Gogol sub-consciously attempted to justify his dalliance in Petersburg in 1829 by later drawing sordid pictures of the life that would have awaited him as a civil servant of low rank."
until the next census; meanwhile, the unfortunate master had to pay an annual tax on a serf whose services he no longer received. Chichikov, the unscrupulous, but colite, opportunist, exploits this oddity in tax-accounting in a plan to establish himself as a well-to-do landowner by simply buying cheaply the "names" of dead serfs, or souls, and then mortgaging them to the government as if they were actual property.

The numerous episodes and complications of the novel are probably worthy of detailed and individual expositions. However, they must be sacrificed en masse to the god of expediency in favor of the most memorable passages—those describing the wonderfully colorful and varied types of provincial characters. To illustrate these varied characters, Gogol used to his advantage a blend of trivial details and sweeping generalizations. Chichikov, for instance, is first described as a man of no noticeable peculiarities:

...a gentleman who was surely no Adonis but whose appearance was not too unpossessing either. He was neither too fat nor too thin, nor could he be described as either old or young.

But later there is much specific detail given on the rogue's manner of dress, his refined social poise, and the contraband French soap which he so cherished for keeping his complexion clear. Chichikov is decidedly the mental giant of the novel. Generally, he is able to manipulate the other characters as if he were a puppeteer. Still, there is a definite humanity in him which Gogol sees as
transcending his petty schemes:

What is he then? A villain? No. Why, why must we be so severe in passing judgment on others? We haven't any villains today.5

Petrushka and Selifan, Chichikov's servants, are reminiscent of the low-comic servants of Shakespeare. They imbibe freely in alcohol, sleep on their master's bed whenever possible, and do not seem to be disturbed by a minor thrashing. Petrushka, who sleeps without undressing is noted for the unique possession of "his own personal aura, a peculiar smell."6 Moreover, he sleeps soundly:

...deeply, wonderfully, as only the fortunate can sleep, who know nothing about hemorrhoids, lice, or overdeveloped mental faculties.7

Manilov is the eternal simpleton, probably too dull to ever expect anything less perfect than bliss. He is not a very memorable personality, as Gogol hinted: In a word, everyone has his own peculiarity, whereas Manilov had none.8

Manilov is not the type to take an over-active part in the management of his estate, nor in anything else, for that matter. His general passivity is indicated by the fact that the bookmark in a book he is in the process of reading has been at page fourteen for two years. But Manilov, simple as he is, is not to be denied happiness; indeed he and his wife find it where others might well pass it over:

Frequently, as they sat on their divan, he would abruptly abandon his pipe and she her sewing, if she happened to be sewing at the moment, and without provocation impress
such a lengthy and languishing kiss upon each other's lips that, while it lasted, you could easily smoke a small cigar to the end. To be brief, they were what is called happy.

Nozdrev is the egotistical, cheating bully. "Chances are that the reader is familiar with faces like Nozdrev's," muses Gogol. Nozdrev is again a universal type:

They are quick to make friends with you, and before you know it, they are addressing you familiarly. It looks as if their friendship will last to the grave, but it somehow always happens that you fall out on the very first evening at the celebration of the friendship.

If there is a villain in Dead Souls, Nozdrev would have to be the one. He is the only major character who both lacks a sense of humanity and possesses an aggressive malice.

The Nozdrevs won't disappear from the face of the earth for a long time to come. There are plenty of them among us, although perhaps they wear different coats.

Sobakevich is hard to compare to Nozdrev, but he is nearly the perfect antithesis of Hanilov. He is stout, active in his estate, and remarkably shrewd. The beauty of his character portrayal is how his home and the furnishings all seem to possess the strength, the proportions, even the attitude of this man who looks "very much like a medium-sized bear." In a sort of grotesque display of metempsychosis, the furniture seems to cry out: "I, too am Sobakevich. I too, I resemble Sobakevich." His ability to negotiate in business to his own advantage sets the stage for a restrained, but delightful, burlesque as
Chichikov is on the verge of paying the going price of live serfs for the dead ones on Sobakevich's rolls.

Plyushkin is the tragic figure of the novel. He alone has fallen from the harmony of a happy family life into the lowest depths of selfishness, self-destruction, and misanthropy. "Like most widowers," Plyushkin became stingy, suspicious, and generally withdrawn from the world.

...the weavers had to weave the same lengths of cloth as before--and it was all dumped into the storehouse and left there to rot and go to ruin, while Plyushkin himself became a ruin.14

A special word in passing must be given to the postmaster and his audience of good rural folk as he tells the unforgettable tale of Captain Kopeikin. When rumors are flowing throughout the town as to what might be the true identity of Chichikov, the postmaster suggests that, instead of Napoleon, the mysterious visitor is very likely Captain Kopeikin, who had unfortunately lost an arm and a leg. Then comes the magnificently long, colorful, and detailed account of how Captain Kopeikin had disappeared after the war. The comedy hits hard as the men finally associate the mutilation of the captain with the unscathed limbs of Chichikov. The total effect is perhaps the greatest literary illustration of the rural mind in all its credulousness and parochial logic.

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The Last Years, 1848-1852

Since 1847 Gogol had corresponded with Father Mathew Konstantinovsky. This priest was uneducated but well-experienced in the persecution of dissenters. He tormented Gogol with images of eternal suffering and damned souls. For some strange reason, even though he had read none of Gogol's works other than Selected Passages and Part Two of Dead Souls, he wanted to dominate the man as an artist.

It is seen in a letter to Father Mathew that fear of his own spiritual coldness—not piety—was Gogol's motivation for his pilgrimage:

Alas, it is not easy to pray. How can one pray if God does not want you to?... Only now I am surprised at my own conceit, wondering how it is that God has not struck me and wiped me off the face of the earth... It even seems to me that I have no religion. I confess Christ only because my reason and not my religion commands me to do so... I only wish to believe.

The plaguing doubts were not alleviated by the visit to Jerusalem; nevertheless, Gogol continued with Part Two of Dead Souls on his return to Europe. By 1850 he had read several chapters to Madame Smirnova and Aksakov, with a favorable reaction. The plan of the second part, as mentioned earlier, was to regenerate the erring Chichikov, to educate him in the ways of righteousness.

Gogol, with all his doubts and weaknesses, admired the strength and resolution of Father Mathew. To purge himself of his egotism, Gogol tried surrendering himself to the will

*The four extant chapters of Part Two are from the 1843 version.
of the priest. Moreover, he forced himself to live ascetically. His last visit with Konstantinovsky came in February of 1852. It is alleged that Gogol was ordered to denounce Pushkin as a pagan and a sinner. While refusing to acquiesce in all that the priest demanded, Gogol—so totally bound in doubt—nevertheless began a fast in order to gain pardon. A few days later, Gogol awoke at night and burned his most recent additions to Dead Souls, later claiming that the burning was an accident. He was so consigned to the idea of death at this time that he refused the plea of Metropolitan Filaret to end his fast. Hallucinatory dreams, leeches, blood-letting, hot-and-cold-water therapy—such as tormented Gogol's Madman—all contributed in making his death the most wretched imaginable. His last words were:

A ladder, faster, give me a ladder...

Gogol, in retrospect, was probably the most personal of all Russian authors. In fact, he regarded his writings as "a disguised history" of his own soul. His position in the progression of Russian Letters was rather unique. He was the greatest representative of that strange period when European romance was giving way to realism. Interestingly, he was the only major Russian writer who stood apart from the "mainstream of political ferment." Where it is helpful to recall the artist in "The Portrait" who felt he must purify himself before he could paint again.
His epitaph—"Through my bitter word I shall laugh"—is helpful in gaining a last insight into the character of the artist. He had such an intensifying imagination that laughter was necessary to lessen the burden of his hauntingly distorted perception. His own tragedy was inevitable when he ceased being able to laugh.

Perhaps the greatest tribute to Gogol came from Dostoevsky as he spoke of his own literary generation:

We have all come out of Gogol's overcoat.
FOOTNOTES

Introduction

2. Lavrin, p. 4-5.
3. Lavrin, p. 3.
4. Lavrin, p. 4.

The Early Years

2. Setchkarev, p. 5.
8. Lavrin, p. 25.
9. Lavrin, p. 34.
10. Setchkarev, p. 20.
13. Lavrin, p. 36.
15. Setchkarev, p. 34.
FOOTNOTES
The Evenings on a Farm Near Didenka


5. Setchkarev, p. 113.


8. Lavrin, p. 52.


10. Setchkarev, p. 31.


13. Lavrin, p. 31.

14. Lavrin, p. 54.

15. Lavrin, p. 32.
FOOTNOTES
The Pushkin Years

2. Lavrin, p. 12.
7. Lavrin, p. 96.
8. Setchkarev, p. 43.
10. Setchkarev, p. 48.
11. Setchkarev, p. 50.
FOOTNOTES

From Arabesques to The Inspector General


8. Lindstrom, p. 133.


14. Lavrin, p. 27.

15. Lavrin, p. 151.

16. Lavrin, p. 150.
FOOTNOTES
Transition of the Artist


3. Setchkarev, p. 60.


5. Lavrin, p. 163.

6. Setchkarev, p. 70.

7. Setchkarev, p. 74.


10. Setchkarev, p. 75.

11. Lavrin, p. 211.

12. Lavrin, p. 218.


FOOTNOTES

The Overcoat and Dead Souls


The Last Years and Conclusion

1. Lavrin, p. 236.
2. Lavrin, p. 228.
5. Setchkarev, p. 91.
7. Setchkarev, p. 91.
8. Lavrin, p. 192.
10. Setchkarev, p. 91.
11. Lindstrom, p. 142.
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