

Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol
ARUS642, Fall 2008
W 11:30-2:30
HUM 131

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DRAFT

Course Description

This course will examine Nikolai Gogol (1809-52) and the rise of Russian prose in the 1830s and 1840s. We read much of Gogol's prose fiction, including *Dead Souls*, and his play *The Inspector General*. The contexts for Gogol's work include the major artistic, cultural, and political concerns of a period when Russian literature moved from poetry to prose, and when publishing in literary journals made professional writing feasible. The course surveys the main critical arguments about this enigmatic author's work, which perplexed critics from their very publication. While nineteenth-century critics followed Vissarion Belinsky's lead in regarding Gogol as a pre-eminent realist, critics at the beginning of the twentieth century roundly rejected this view. Moreover, the politically conservative nature of Gogol's last work, *The Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* (1847), led Belinsky to question all his earlier work, creating a critical problem: one Gogol or two—the writer and the thinker?

Required Texts

Gogol, N. V. *Sobranie sochineniii v semi tomakh*. 7 vols. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1984-86. PG3332 A1 1984

Recommended Translations

Gogol, Nikolai. *Dead Souls*. Trans. by Robert A. Maguire. New York: Penguin, 2004. ISBN 0140448071

Gogol, Nikolai. *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol*. Trans. by Richard Pevear and Larisa Volokhonsky. New York: Vintage, 1999. ISBN 0375706151

Reserve Texts

- Fusso, Susanne and Priscilla Meyer, eds. *Essays on Gogol: Logos and the Russian Word* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1992. PG 3335 Z8 E84 1992
- Maguire, Robert. *Exploring Gogol*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994. PG 3335 Z8 M17 1994
- ———, ed. and trans. *Gogol from the Twentieth Century: Eleven Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976. PG 3335 Z8 M18

On-Line Resources

- Chicago Manual of Style, 15th edition: link is at Library website, Instructions and Tutorials, Cite

Requirements

- Works that may be read in English are so noted.
- Weekly one-page responses to questions (10%)

- Four-page paper, due Wednesday, September 17, plus revision, due Wednesday, September 24, on “The Overcoat” (20%)
- Six-page paper, due Wednesday, October 29, plus revision, due Wednesday, November 5, on *The Inspector General* (30%) Two critical evaluations of the play by Gogol himself are in the bibliography, if you would like to use one or even both of them.
- Ten-page paper due Wednesday, December 10 (revision optional), on *Dead Souls* and two critical interpretations of the work, in which you weigh the merits of the two interpretations. (40%)

Syllabus

Week 1

W Aug 27 Introduction to Nikolai Gogol: Issues around his “life and work”

Write a short (approx. 1 page) account of things that surprised on you on this (re)reading of “Shinel’.”

Week 2

W Sept 3 “The Overcoat,” (Shinel’, *Sochineniia*, 1842)

- Boris Eichenbaum, “How Gogol’s ‘Overcoat’ is Made” (1918), in Maguire, *Gogol*, 267-93.

Week 3

W Sept 10 “The Overcoat,” (Shinel’, *Sochineniia*, 1842)

- Dmitry Chizhevsky, “About Gogol’s ‘Overcoat’” (1938), in Maguire, *Gogol*, 295-322.

Week 4

W Sept 17 Gogol’s Narrators

1. Introductions to Parts I and II of *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* (Predislovie, *Vechera na khutore bliz Dikanki*, 1831, 1832)

2. “Ivan Fedorovich Shponka and his Aunt” (Ivan Fedorovich Shponka i ego tetushka, *Vechera na khutore bliz Dikanki*, 1832)

1. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, Part I, Chapters I-XII; Part VI, Chapter XL (available on the web at <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/1079> or <http://www.tristramshandyweb.it/home.htm>)

Week 5

W Sept 24 “Old Fashioned Landowners” (Starosvetskie pomeshchiki, *Mirgorod*, 1835)

- Poggioli, Renato. “Gogol’s *Old Fashioned Landowners*: An Inverted Eclogue,” in *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal*, 241-64. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975.
- Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VIII:611-724 (Baucis and Philemon)

Four-page paper due

Study questions on the role of the narrator in "Starosvetskie pomeschiki."

- What elements constitute his identity? How does he define himself with reference to Afanasii Ivanovich and Pulkheria Ivanovna?
- What kind of image of his own reader does he project?
- How would you characterize his tone and diction? Can we call his voice an example of *skaz*? If so, what features serve to set off his voice from that of the author?
- How does he compare with the other Gogolian narrators we've encountered so far--Rudiy Pan'ko, Kurochka (the narrator in "Shpon'ka"), the narrator in "Shinel"—or narrators from other works, like Karamzin's "Bednaia Liza," Pushkin's "Stantsionnyi smotritel'" or Tristram Shandy (in its elegiac moments—"Alas, poor YORICK!")?

Week 6

W Oct 1 No Class (Rosh Hashanah)

R Oct 2 In English

1. "Vii" (Viy, *Mirgorod*, 1835)
2. "The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich" (Povest' o tom, kak possorilsia Ivan Ivanovich s Ivanom Nikiforovichem, *Mirgorod*, 1835)
3. "Nevsky Prospect" (Nevskii prospekt, *Arabeski*, 1835)
4. "The Nose" (Nos, *Sovremennik*, 1836)
 - E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776-1822), "A New Year's Eve Adventure" (1815)
 - Belknap, Robert. "Novelistic Technique." *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel*, ed. by Malcolm V. Jones and Robin Feuer Miller, 233-50. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.

Revised four-page paper due

One-page response to one of the topics below:

1. Explore the connection between the "gnome" Vii and the old woman/ witch/ corpse. Why is the story named after Vii, who appears on only one page?
2. Discuss the depiction of the human body in "The Two Ivans."

Discuss the motif of doubling--two Ivans; two Ivan Ivanoviches; two women named Agafya (=Gapka); etc.

Week 7

W Oct 8 "Diary of a Madman" (Zapiski sumashedshego, *Arabeski*, 1835)

Week 8

W Oct 15 *The Inspector General* (Revizor, 1836), Acts I-III

Vasily Gippius, "The Inspector General: Structure and Problems," in Maguire, *Gogol*, 215-65

Week 9

W Oct 22 *The Inspector General*, Acts IV-V

Iurii Lotman, "Concerning Khlestakov," in *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History*, edited by Alexander D. Nakhimovsky and Alice Stone Nakhimovsky, 150-87. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Week 10

W Oct 29 *Dead Souls* (Mertvye dushi, 1842), chapters 1-2

Iliad, for some real Homeric similes

Six-page paper due

Week 11

W Nov 5 *Dead Souls*, chapters 3-4

Revised six-page paper due

Week 12

W Nov 12 *Dead Souls*, chapters 5-6

Dmitry Merezhkovsky, "Gogol and the Devil," in Maguire, *Gogol*, pp. 57-102

Week 13

W Nov 19 *Dead Souls*, chapters 7-8

Frederick T. Griffiths and Stanley J. Rabinowitz, "Gogol in Rome," in *Novel Epics: Gogol, Dostoevsky, and National Narrative* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1990), pp. 41-95

Week 14

W Nov 26 No Class (Thanksgiving)

Dead Souls, chapters 9-10

Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol*, "Poshlust", 63-74.

Week 15

W Dec 3 *Dead Souls*, chapters 11, Epilogue

Vissarion Belinsky, "Pis'mo k N. V. Gogoliu" (1847, pub. 1872)

Gogol's reply, August 10, 1847

Final paper due Wednesday, December 10

From the bibliography below, choose two critical articles (or chapters in books) on a single work by Gogol and compare/contrast them. What are the major concerns of each author? How do the two authors' approaches differ? How are differences in approach reflected in differences in interpretation? Does one approach result in a more successful interpretation (in your opinion, of course)? If so, what are your reasons for finding it more valid? Is there anything about the Gogol work in question that you feel neither critical piece notices or correctly interprets?

Bibliography

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