

## Nikolai Gogol Vladimir Nabokov

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Nikolai Gogol Vladimir Nabokov

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The Inspector General

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Richard Ayoade's *The Double* brings Russian novel to life

202-213) For the last two decades of his career Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov ...

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Nikolai Gogol was the most idiosyncratic of the great Russian novelists of the 19th century and lived a tragically short life which was as chaotic as the lives of the characters he created. This biography begins with Gogol's death and ends with his birth, an inverted structure typical of both Gogol and Nabokov. The biographer proceeds to establish the relationship between Gogol and his novels, especially with regard to "nose-consciousness", a peculiar feature of Russian life and letters, which finds its apotheosis in Gogol's own life and prose. There are more expressions and proverbs concerning the nose in Russian than in any other language in the world. Nabokov's style in this biography is comic, but as always leads to serious issues—in this case, an appreciation of the distinctive "sense of the physical" inherent in Gogol's work. Nabokov describes how Gogol's life and literature mingled, and explains the structure and style of Gogol's prose in terms of the novelist's life.

'One of the most exhilarating, engaging, and original works ever written by one writer about another' ELIZABETH HARDWICK Nikolai Gogol was one of the great geniuses of nineteenth century Russian literature, with a command of the irrational unmatched by any writer before or since. His strange tales, though often read as forceful demands for social change, were displays of the fantasies of the human spirit. In this ideal marriage of subject and critic, Nabokov analyses his endlessly inventive compatriot, focusing on the masterpieces *Dead Souls*, 'The Overcoat' and 'The Government Inspector'. Misunderstood by his contemporaries, mishandled by theatre directors and ending his life mistreated by doctors - with medicinal leeches hanging from his exceptional nose - it took Nabokov to give Gogol, 'the oddest Russian in Russia', the critical biography he and his singular, brilliant work deserve.

The acclaimed author of *Lolita* offers unique insight into works by James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Jane Austen, and others—with an introduction by John Updike. In the 1940s, when Vladimir Nabokov first embarked on his academic career in the United States, he brought with him hundreds of original lectures on the authors he most admired. For two decades those lectures served as the basis for Nabokov's teaching, first at Wellesley and then at Cornell, as he introduced undergraduates to the delights of great fiction. This volume collects Nabokov's famous lectures on Western European literature, with analysis and commentary on Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, Gustav Flaubert's *Madam Bovary*, Marcel Proust's *The Walk by Swann's Place*, Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," and other works. This volume also includes photographic reproductions of Nabokov's original notes, revealing his own edits, underlined passages, and more. Edited and with a Foreword by Fredson Bowers Introduction by John Updike

Interviews, articles, and editorials from the 1960s and 1970s reveal Nabokov's personal views on a range of subjects, including art, education, politics, literature, movies, and modern times

Fresh, stylish new translations of Gogol's greatest short stories collected in a beautiful edition Admired by writers from Nabokov to Bulgakov to George Saunders, Gogol is considered one of the more enigmatic of the Russian greats. He

only wrote one novel, *Dead Souls*, and destroyed much of his later work, so his stories constitute his major output. In this collection, beautifully and skilfully translated by Oliver Ready, Gogol's three greatest St Petersburg stories - 'The Nose', 'The Overcoat' and 'The Diary of a Madman' - are presented alongside three masterworks set in the Ukrainian and Russian provinces, demonstrating the breadth of Gogol's work. Gogol's extraordinary work is characterised by his idiosyncratic and often very funny sensibility, and these stories offer us his unique, original and marvellously skewed perspective on the world.

As a novel-writer and a dramatist, Gogol appears to me to deserve a minute study, and if the knowledge of Russian were more widely spread, he could not fail to obtain in Europe a reputation equal to that of the best English humorists. A delicate and close observer, quick to detect the absurd, bold in exposing, but inclined to push his fun too far, Gogol is in the first place a very lively satirist. He is merciless towards fools and rascals, but he has only one weapon at his disposal—irony. This is a weapon which is too severe to use against the merely absurd, and on the other hand it is not sharp enough for the punishment of crime; and it is against crime that Gogol too often uses it. His comic vein is always too near the farcical, and his mirth is hardly contagious. If sometimes he makes his reader laugh, he still leaves in his mind a feeling of bitterness and indignation; his satires do not avenge society, they only make it angry. As a painter of manners, Gogol excels in familiar scenes. He is akin to Teniers and Callot. We feel as though we had seen and lived with his characters, for he shows us their eccentricities, their nervous habits, their slightest gestures. One lisps, another mispronounces his words, and a third hisses because he has lost a front tooth. Unfortunately Gogol is so absorbed in this minute study of details that he too often forgets to subordinate them to the main action of the story. To tell the truth, there is no ordered plan in his works, and—na strange trait in an author who sets up as a realist—he takes no care to preserve an atmosphere of probability. His most carefully painted scenes are clumsily connected—they begin and end abruptly; often the author's great carelessness in construction destroys, as though wantonly, the illusion produced by the truth of his descriptions and the naturalness of his conversations.

Since its publication in 1842, *Dead Souls* has been celebrated as a supremely realistic portrait of provincial Russian life and as a splendidly exaggerated tale; as a paean to the Russian spirit and as a remorseless satire of imperial Russian venality, vulgarity, and pomp. As Gogol's wily antihero, Chichikov, combs the back country wheeling and dealing for "dead souls"—deceased serfs who still represent money to anyone sharp enough to trade in them—we are introduced to a Dickensian cast of peasants, landowners, and conniving petty officials, few of whom can resist the seductive illogic of Chichikov's proposition. This lively, idiomatic English version by the award-winning translators Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky makes accessible the full extent of the novel's lyricism, sulphurous humor, and delight in human oddity and error.

From the writer who shocked and delighted the world with his novels *Lolita*, *Pale Fire*, and *Invitation to a Beheading*, and so many others, comes a magnificent collection of stories. Written between the 1920s and 1950s, these sixty-five tales—eleven of which have been translated into English for the first time—display all the shades of Nabokov's imagination. They range from sprightly fables to bittersweet tales of

loss, from claustrophobic exercises in horror to a connoisseur's samplings of the table of human folly. Read as a whole, *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov* offers an intoxicating draft of the master's genius, his devious wit, and his ability to turn language into an instrument of ecstasy.

This book presents an array of perspectives on the vivid cultural and literary politics that marked the period immediately after the October Revolution of 1917, when Russian writers had to relocate to Berlin and Paris under harsh conditions. Divided amongst themselves and uncertain about the political and artistic directions of life in the diaspora, these writers carried on two simultaneous literary dialogues: with the emerging Soviet Union and with the dizzying world of European modernism that surrounded them in the West. The book's chapters address generational differences, literary polemics and experimentation, the heritage of pre-October Russian modernism, and the fate of individual writers and critics, offering a sweeping view of how exiles created a literary diaspora. The discussion moves beyond Russian studies to contribute to today's broad, cross-cultural study of the creative side of political and cultural displacement.

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