Penguin Classics

# GOGOL

# DEAD SOULS

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NIKOLAI VASILEVICH GOGOL was born in 1809; his family were small gentry of Ukrainian cossack extraction, and his father was the author of a number of plays based on Ukrainian popular tales. He attended school in Nezhin and gained a reputation for his theatrical abilities. He went to St Petersburg in 1829 and with the help of a friend gained a post in one of the government ministries. Gogol was introduced to Zhukovsky, the romantic poet, and to Pushkin, and with the publication of *Evening on a Farm near Dikanka* (1831) he had an entrée to all the leading literary salons. He even managed for a short period to be Professor of History at the University of St Petersburg (1834–5). *Diary of a Madman* and *The Story of the Quarrel between Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich* appeared in 1834, *The Nose* in 1936, and *The Overcoat* in 1842. Gogol also wrote the play *The Inspector* (1936), *Dead Souls* (1842), and several moralizing essays defending the Tsarist régime, to the horror of his liberal and radical friends. He lived a great deal abroad, mostly in Rome, and in his last years became increasingly prey to religious mania and despair. He made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1848, but was bitterly disappointed in the lack of feeling that the journey kindled. He returned to Russia and fell under the influence of a spiritual director who told him to destroy his writings as they were sinful. He burned the second part of *Dead Souls*, and died in 1852 after subjecting himself to a severe régime of fasting.

DAVID MAGARSHACK was born in Riga, Russia, and educated at a Russian secondary school. He came to England in 1920 and was naturalized in 1931. After graduating in English literature and language at University College, London, he worked in Fleet Street and published a number of novels. Since 1948 he has mainly been working on translations of the Russian classics. For the Penguin Classics he has translated Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Devils*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*; *Oblomov* by Goncharov; and *Lady with Lapdog and Other Tales* by Chekhov. He has also written biographies of Chekhov, Dostoyevsky, Gogol, Pushkin, Turgenev and Stanislavsky; and he is the author of *Chekhov the Dramatist*, a critical study of Chekhov's plays, and a study of Stanislavsky's system of acting.

NIKOLAI GOGOL

# DEAD SOULS

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

DAVID MAGARSHACK

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# INTRODUCTION

THE origin of *Dead Souls*, Nikolai Gogol's greatest masterpiece, presents no difficulties to the literary historian. It is the final catastrophe that overtook it and its author that provides perhaps the most puzzling problem of literary history, for it raises the fundamental question of an author's personal involvement in his work, of how far, that is, a creative artist's outlook on life can impinge on the lives of his heroes without leading, as in Gogol's case, to insanity and suicide.

Gogol spent about eight years, from 1834 to 1842, on the writing of the first part of *Dead Souls*, and about ten years, from 1842 to 1852, on the writing of the ill-fated second part. The third part which, according to Gogol, should have crowned his magnificent literary edifice of vice turned into virtue, was never even begun. The subject of the novel was suggested to Gogol by Alexander Pushkin. 'He [Pushkin] presented me with his own subject,' Gogol wrote in his *Author's Confession*, 'which he wished to make into some sort of a poem and which, according to his own words, he would not have given to anyone else. This was the subject of *Dead Souls*.' Gogol must have begun writing the novel some time towards the end of 1834, for long before his departure from Russia in June 1836, he had read, as he declared later in one of his 'Letters apropos of *Dead Souls*', the first chapters of the novel to Pushkin, who 'grew gloomier and gloomier and at last cried, Good Lord, how sad is our Russia!' It is doubtful whether anything of those chapters has been retained in the final version of the novel. For Gogol revised everything thoroughly when he sat down to his work on the novel in Switzerland in the autumn of 1836 and later on in Paris between November 1836 and February 1837. Most of his work on *Dead Souls*, though, was done in Rome in the autumn and winter of 1837 and the first half of 1838. The following account, given by Gogol himself to some friends in Moscow, shows how he wrote at least parts of the novel:

This is the sort of thing that happened to me. I was travelling one July day between the little towns of Genzano and Albano. Half way between

those towns is a miserable little inn, standing on a small hill, with a billiard table in the main saloon, where people are constantly talking in different languages and the billiard balls never cease clicking. I was writing the first volume of *Dead Souls* at the time and never parted from my manuscript. I don't know why, but I felt like writing as soon as I entered the inn. I ordered a small table to be brought and sat down in the corner of the saloon. I took out my manuscript and, in spite of the noise made by the rolling balls, the rushing about of the potboys, the indescribable din, the smoke, the close atmosphere, I became completely lost to the world and wrote a whole chapter without stirring from my place. I consider this chapter the most inspired in the whole novel. In fact, I have seldom written with such inspiration.

It is a pity Gogol never revealed what chapter it was, but it might well have been the sixth chapter describing Chichikov's visit to the miser Plyushkin. Indeed, according to an account left by Pavel Annenkov, the literary historian and memoirist who acted as Gogol's amanuensis in Rome when he was revising the novel in 1841, it was that chapter that Gogol dictated 'with a feeling of particular elation', accompanying his dictation with 'proud and imperious' gestures. Annenkov writes:

At the end of this remarkable chapter, I was so excited that, putting the pen down on the table, I said frankly, 'I think, Nikolai Vassilyevich, this chapter is a real work of genius!' Gogol gripped the manuscript in his hand and said in a thin, hardly audible voice: 'Believe me, the others are not worse.' But raising his voice at the same moment, he went on: 'Do you realize we've still lots of time before dinner. Come, let's have a look at the Gardens of Sallust, which you haven't seen yet, and we may as well knock at the door of Villa Ludovisi!' From the beaming look on his face and his proposal, one could see that the impression made on me by his dictation gave him great pleasure. This showed itself even more when we went out into the street. Gogol had taken an umbrella in case of rain and as soon as we turned to the left of the Barberini palace into a deserted lane, he burst into a gay Ukrainian song and then broke into a dance and began twirling the umbrella over his head with such abandon that in two minutes it flew off, leaving only the handle in his hand. He picked it up quickly and went on with the dance. It was in this way that he expressed the gratified feelings of an artist.

Gogol was never in doubt about the sensation *Dead Souls* would produce on its publication in Russia. As his work on the novel pro-

ceeded, its theme took on more and more grandiose proportions in his mind. At first he began writing it, as he admits in his *Author's Confession*,

without forming any definite plan in my head. I simply thought that the droll project which Chichikov attempts to carry out [that is, the purchase of dead serfs or 'souls' whose names still appeared on the census and who could therefore still be mortgaged] would naturally lead me to the invention of all sorts of characters; that my bent for laughter would of itself create a large number of comic episodes, which I intended to intersperse with moving ones. But at every step I stopped myself with the questions: Why? What is it all for? What should such a scene and character express? You will ask what is one to do when such questions occur to one. Get rid of them? I tried to, but I found it impossible to get rid of them. ... I saw plainly that I could no longer write without a clearly defined plan, that I must first of all explain to myself the purpose of my work, its absolute usefulness and necessity, as a result of which the author himself would be filled with a genuine and powerful love for it. ...

It seems pretty clear, therefore, that while his creative imagination held him under its spell, Gogol was not worried about the ultimate purpose of his novel, but that when his inspiration left him, which happened quite often, especially during the latter part of his work on the novel, these questions returned to haunt him with nightmarish insistence. He tried to get rid of them by travelling all over Europe. He came to regard 'the open road' as a cure-all for all his mental ills, but the thought of the final aim of his work never deserted him for a moment. Three weeks after leaving Russia in 1836 he wrote to the poet Zhukovsky: 'I swear that I shall do something no ordinary man could do. I feel a lion's strength in my soul....' Again, writing to the same correspondent from Switzerland, he declared in a reference to *Dead Souls*: 'If I do this work as it ought to be done – oh, what an enormous, what an original subject! What a heterogeneous crowd! The whole of Russia will appear in it. It will be the first decent thing I have written. It will make my name famous.' But quite soon the fact that the whole of Russia would appear in his novel was no longer enough to satisfy him. He was getting more and more convinced of his messianic mission to save Russia and he began to regard *Dead Souls* as the means Providence had given him for accomplishing this task. 'I see quite clearly,' he wrote to a close friend in Moscow from

Rome in March 1841, 'God's holy will: such ideas are not humanly inspired. A man would never think of such a subject!'

The first part of *Dead Souls* already contains hints of how Gogol hoped to fulfil his mission of saving Russia. Indeed, he felt that Russia herself was looking up to him (as he declares towards the end of the first part) 'with eyes full of expectation', and that there was some mysterious connexion between her and him. Brooding over the fate of mankind in general and of his countrymen in particular, he was puzzled by man's perverse habit of straying from the road which lay wide open before him and which, if he followed it, would lead him to 'a magnificent palace fit for an emperor to live in', and of preferring instead to follow all sorts of will-o'-the-wisps to the abyss and then asking himself in horror, Which is the right road? Which is the way out? Still more puzzling was the amazing way in which every new generation laughed at the mistakes of its forebears and in the end followed a path that led to the same abyss. Gogol hoped, therefore, that by revealing the mysterious substance that he believed lay buried deep in the Slav soul and by introducing 'colossal figures' in his novel and letting it follow 'a grandiose lyrical course', he would 'widen the horizon' and, by stopping the bolting *troika* from rushing no one knew whither, save Russia from the predicament in which she found herself. This hope was itself a will-o'-the-wisp which brought Gogol to the abyss into which he finally precipitated himself. At the time of the publication of the first part of *Dead Souls*, however, and indeed up to the last moment he believed in it, though, fortunately, it was too late to reshape the first part of the novel in accordance with his fantastic dream.

If anything was capable of bringing Gogol down to earth from the clouds in which he seemed to have lost himself in the search for the key of what he considered to be 'the riddle of his existence', it was his encounter with the censors from whom he had to obtain permission for the publication of the first part of his novel. He was, as usual, in dire financial straits and any delay in the publication of *Dead Souls* spelt disaster to him. Immediately on his arrival in Moscow from Italy in January 1842, he sent the novel to the censors, who flatly refused to pass it, chiefly, it seems, on the ground that its title *Dead Souls* showed, as one learned censor expressed it, 'that Gogol was taking up arms against immortality'. Gogol, therefore, sent the manuscript of his novel to the Petersburg censors, who at once took objection to

Gogol's blisteringly satirical *Tale of Captain Kopeikin*. Gogol was therefore obliged to revise the Tale thoroughly so as to put the blame for his misfortunes on Kopeikin and not on the authorities. (In this translation Gogol's original version of the Tale is given.) The Petersburg censors also insisted that the title of the novel should be altered to *Chichikov's Adventures or Dead Souls*, to which Gogol agreed. The novel, or 'poem' as Gogol preferred to call it, using the word 'poem' in the sense of an epic narrative, was published on 2 June 1842. Although its reception was as enthusiastic as Gogol expected, he was not particularly impressed by its success himself. He regarded it, as he wrote to a friend, merely 'as a pale introduction to the great epic poem which is taking shape in my mind and which will finally solve the riddle of my existence'. To the poet Zhukovsky he wrote three weeks after the publication of his masterpiece: 'I have revised it thoroughly since the time I read the first chapters to you, but for all that I cannot help feeling that it is quite insignificant when compared to the other parts which are to follow. It reminds me of the front steps of a palace of colossal dimensions hastily constructed by some provincial architect.' In the second part, as he hints at the end of the first part,

> people will catch the sound of other hitherto untouched chords and get a glimpse of the untold riches of the Russian soul, of a man endowed with divine valour or of a wonderful Russian girl ... possessing all the wondrous beauty of a woman's soul, full of generous instincts and self-sacrifice. And all the virtuous men of other races will seem as dead beside them as a book is dead beside the living word. And Russian emotions will rise up ... and everyone will see how deeply what merely skims over the surface of the nature of other nations has sunk into the Slav nature. ...

The difficulties of building this 'palace of colossal dimensions', in which 'the untold riches of the Russian soul' should be housed, became apparent to Gogol as soon as he sat down to write the second part of *Dead Souls* after he had again left Russia for Italy on 4 June 1842. 'Several times', he later wrote in his *Author's Confession*, 'I sat down to write and could produce nothing. My efforts almost always resulted in illness and suffering and, finally, in such attacks that made me give up my work for a long time.' He decided that before he could carry on with his work on the novel and bring about the spiritual regeneration of a crook like Chichikov, he had to undergo a

spiritual regeneration himself. But the austere regime of prayer and fasting he imposed on himself sapped his health and, of course, hindered rather than helped the work on his novel. In reply to inquiries from his friends, he declared that 'the subject of *Dead Souls* has nothing to do with the description of Russian provincial life or of a few revolting landowners. It is', he went on in the prophetic vein which he was beginning to use more and more in his correspondence, 'for the time being a secret which must suddenly and to the amazement of everyone (for as yet none of my readers has guessed it) be revealed in the following volumes. ...' His inability to reveal this secret, however, drove him into a state of nervous collapse by the beginning of January 1845, and at the end of June he burnt all he had written of the second volume of *Dead Souls*. For the next seven years his resumed work on the second part of the novel was laborious and painful. He had to drag out each word as though by a pair of pincers, he complained to a friend. But at last the second volume was finished and he read different chapters of it to his friends. Unfortunately, he had fallen under the influence of a religious fanatic, a priest of most obscurantist views, who regarded his literary work as an abomination in the eyes of the Lord. The priest, Father Matthew Konstantinovsky, apparently demanded that his disciple should destroy the second volume of *Dead Souls* and atone for his sin of writing the first volume by entering a monastery. After a tremendous inner conflict, Gogol decided to carry out Father Matthew's wish and burnt the complete second part of his novel on the night of 24 February 1852. He then took to his bed, refused all food, and died in great pain nine days later, on 5 March 1852.

All that remains, therefore, of the second volume of *Dead Souls* is a number of various fragments of four chapters and one fragment of what appears to be the last chapter. These were found after Gogol's death and seem to belong to an early draft of the novel. Some idea of what the first chapters of the completed second part were like can be gathered from an account left by Leo Arnoldi, a brother of Alexandra Smirnov, a former lady-in-waiting and the wife of a high Russian official and one of Gogol's closest friends. Arnoldi was present at one of Gogol's readings at his sister's country house. The first chapter of the second part of *Dead Souls*, he writes in his reminiscences, ended with General Betrishchev's loud laughter. The second chapter contained a description of a day at the general's country house. Chichikov

stayed to dinner at which, besides Ulinka, there were two more persons: a taciturn Englishwoman, Ulinka's governess, and a Portuguese gentleman. Nothing particular happened at dinner. The general kept cracking jokes and Chichikov ate with great relish. Ulinka looked sad and pensive, her face growing animated only at the mention of Tentetnikov's name. After dinner the general played chess with the Portuguese gentleman and then with Chichikov, who showed his usual shrewdness by first making it very hard for the general and then allowing himself to be mated by him. Pleased with having defeated so strong an opponent, the general invited Chichikov to call on him again together with Tentetnikov. On his return to Tentetnikov's estate, Chichikov told the young man that Ulinka seemed to be pining for him and that the general was very sorry to have insulted him and intended to pay a call on him and apologize for his rudeness. Tentetnikov, however, was so glad of the opportunity of seeing his Ulinka again, that he insisted on visiting the general himself and making it up with him. Chichikov of course approved his decision and confessed to Tentetnikov that in his attempt to bring about a reconciliation between him and the general he had told the general that he, Tentetnikov, was writing a history of the generals who had taken part in the campaign of 1812. Chichikov implored Tentetnikov not to deny the story he had made up on the spur of the moment and in good faith. Next followed a description of Tentetnikov's arrival with Chichikov at the general's country house and Tentetnikov's meeting with the general and Ulinka. According to Arnoldi, the description of the dinner that followed was one of the best parts of the second volume. In the course of it, the general referred to the book Tentetnikov was supposed to be writing and, to avoid humiliating Chichikov, Tentetnikov pronounced a panegyric on Russia in which he emphasized the need of all classes of the population to unite in their feeling of love for their country, a feeling which they had displayed in so remarkable a fashion during the war of 1812. Betrishchev, of course, was so deeply moved by Tentetnikov's speech that he forgot the ill-feeling he bore towards him, and as for Ulinka, she was so filled with adoration for the young man that she at once decided to marry him. After visiting her mother's grave, she went to see her father and asked him to give his consent to her marriage to Tentetnikov. After demurring for some time, the general at last gave his consent and as soon as he heard of it, Tentetnikov, Arnoldi writes, 'beside himself with

happiness, leaves Ulinka for a moment and runs into the garden. He wants to be left alone with himself: his happiness is choking him! Here,' Arnoldi goes on, 'Gogol had two wonderful lyrical pages. A hot summer day, at midday, Tentetnikov alone in the dense, shady garden, and all around him profound stillness. The garden was painted with the brush of a great master, every branch of the trees, the broiling heat, the grasshoppers in the long grass and all the insects, and at last what Tentetnikov himself was feeling, happy, in love, and his love reciprocated. I remember vividly,' Arnoldi writes, 'that this description was so powerful, so full of colour and poetry that it took my breath away.' Tentetnikov burst out crying from sheer happiness and at that very moment Chichikov appeared in the garden and, taking advantage of Tentetnikov's overwrought condition and his declared desire to do anything for the man who had been instrumental in bringing about his engagement to Ulinka, proceeded to tell him the story of his fictitious uncle to whom he had to prove that he owned three hundred serfs before he could become his heir. 'What do you want dead souls for?' replied Tentetnikov. 'I'm quite willing to let you have three hundred living ones. You can show the deed of purchase to your uncle and we shall then destroy it.' Chichikov stared at him in amazement. 'Aren't you afraid,' he asked, 'that I might deceive you and ...' But Tentetnikov did not let him finish. 'Doubt you?' he exclaimed. 'I who owe you more than my life?' Thereupon they embraced and Chichikov accepted Tentetnikov's offer with alacrity. Next day General Betrishchev, who was not sure how his aristocratic relatives would react to the news of Ulinka's engagement to a comparatively poor landowner, consulted Chichikov who offered to go and visit his relatives in order to convey the news to them in his best diplomatic manner.

This is all that Arnoldi could remember of Gogol's reading, but his sister, to whom Gogol had read nine chapters of the second part, told him of another character in the novel, an 'emancipated' society woman of over thirty-five who had spent her youth at court in Petersburg as well as abroad. Like Platonov in the extant fragments of the second part, she is bored with life. The two of them meet in the provinces and their meeting seems a great stroke of luck to them. They become attached to one another and mistake this feeling for love. But their happiness is only of short duration, for they soon realize that there can be no question of genuine love between them,

that, in fact, they are no longer capable of love, and so they become even more bored with life than ever.

These few incidents perhaps help to bridge the gap between the four chapters of the second part, but as recounted by Arnoldi they do not amount to much. In fact, no final judgement of the completed second volume of *Dead Souls* can be based on what has come down to us of it. The idealized landowner Kostanjoglo and the even more idealized government contractor Murazov are not living men at all but simply pegs on which Gogol hangs his naïve ideas on the complex social and political problems of his time. No less nebulous a figure is the governor-general who apparently is quite ready to forgive both Chichikov, who forged a rich woman's will, and the officials, who aided and abetted him, on the ground that injustice could not be rooted out by punishment and that the only way of restoring the reign of justice in Russia was to appeal to the inbred sense of honour which, according to Gogol, resided only in a Russian's heart. The only living characters of the second part are Chichikov and the gormandizer Petukh, but even they are merely pale reflections of the remarkable characters in the first part.

Nothing perhaps shows up the utter unreality of Gogol's attempt to effect a lasting reconciliationd ngs Gogol had so land economic forces in Russia so much as the favohis genius, have merfdom, of which he himself was in favour, was finally abolished into eight years after his death. The 'secret' which into to be showsed by the two subsequent volumes of *Dead Souls* and the conversion of Chichikov and even Sobakevich into shining himself s of virtue, everything, in fact, that Gogol the moralist had set his heart on and thet Gogol the creative artist had found so difficult to achieve, has proved to be an idle dream, while the things Gogol had so little use for at the end of his life, the creations of his genius, have made his name famous far beyond the borders of Russia. The 'souls', the serfs on which the whole of the Russian economy in Gogol's time was based, are today truly 'dead', while the superb gallery of characters he created in his novel have achieved immortality as universal human types.

D. M.