

# Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

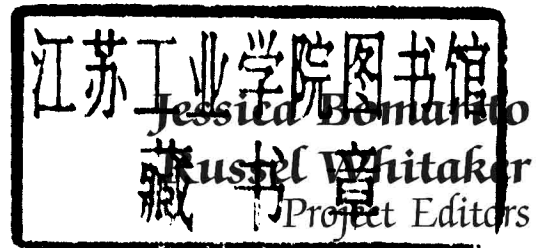
**NCLC**

**162**

Volume 162

# Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

*Criticism of the  
Works of Novelists, Philosophers, and Other  
Creative Writers Who Died between 1800  
and 1899, from the First Published Critical  
Appraisals to Current Evaluations*



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## Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism, Vol. 162

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# Preface

Since its inception in 1981, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC) has been a valuable resource for students and librarians seeking critical commentary on writers of this transitional period in world history. Designated an “Outstanding Reference Source” by the American Library Association with the publication of its first volume, NCLC has since been purchased by over 6,000 school, public, and university libraries. The series has covered more than 450 authors representing 33 nationalities and over 17,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical reaction to nineteenth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as NCLC.

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NCLC is designed to introduce students and advanced readers to the authors of the nineteenth century and to the most significant interpretations of these authors’ works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. By organizing and reprinting commentary written on these authors, NCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in NCLC presents a comprehensive survey of an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

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NCLC continues the survey of criticism of world literature begun by Thomson Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC) and *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC).

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the list will focus primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting



those works most commonly considered the best by critics. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
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# Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xiii

<b>Nikolai Gogol 1809-1852</b> .....	1
<i>Russian short story writer, novelist, playwright, essayist, and poet</i>	
<b>Harriet Jacobs 1813-1897</b> .....	134
<i>American autobiographer</i>	
<i>Entry devoted to the autobiography Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861)</i>	
<b>John Thelwall 1764-1834</b> .....	295
<i>English essayist, poet, novelist, and playwright</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 351

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 457

NCLC Cumulative Nationality Index 469

NCLC-162 Title Index 473

# Nikolai Gogol

## 1809-1852

(Full name Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol; also wrote under the pseudonyms V. Alov and Rudy Panko) Russian short story writer, novelist, playwright, essayist, and poet.

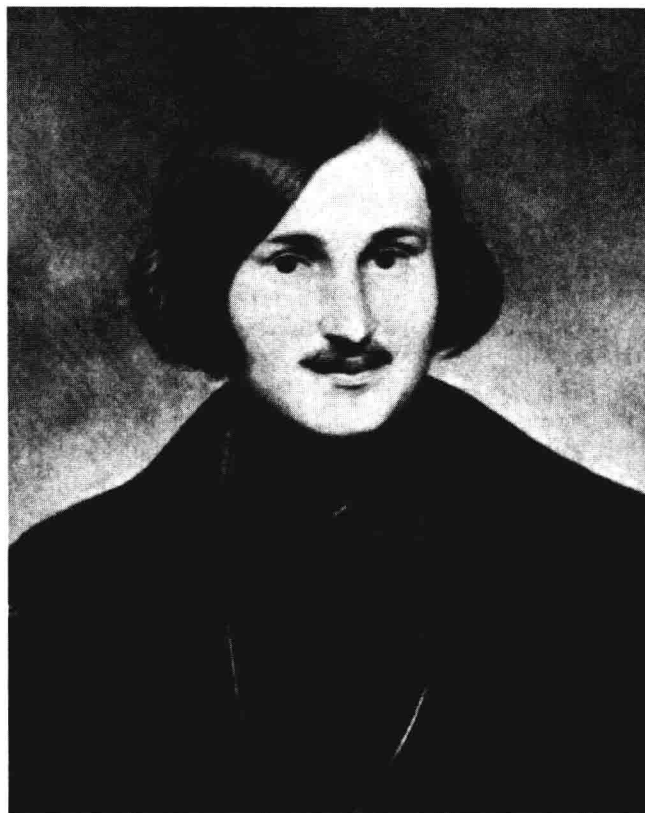
The following entry provides an overview of Gogol's life and works. For additional information on his career, see *NCLC*, Volumes 5, 15, and 31.

### INTRODUCTION

Gogol is widely regarded as the founder of Russian literary realism. One of the nation's first significant authors of prose, Gogol set out to capture the essential character of his country, employing an exuberant, poetic style to depict the diversity of its citizens, the complicated, often paradoxical nature of its government bureaucracy, and the omnipresent influence of Orthodox Christianity. Born and raised in Ukraine, Gogol moved to St. Petersburg, capital of Russia, in 1828. At the beginning of his career, Gogol emulated the oral storytelling traditions of his native Ukraine, and his early stories juxtapose everyday characters with sorcerers, witches, and other supernatural entities from Ukrainian folklore. As his art evolved, Gogol began to shift his focus toward urban life, and his most acclaimed stories, among them "Nos" ("The Nose") and "Shinel" ("The Overcoat"), offer biting commentary on the banality and superficiality of the St. Petersburg social hierarchy. Gogol's masterpiece, the unfinished epic novel *Mertvye dushi* (1842; *Dead Souls*), embraces the full spectrum of Russian life, mixing passages of expressive beauty and powerful insight with moments of coarse, often ridiculous humor. Gogol's innovative prose style and modern sensibility presaged the work of the great Russian authors of the late nineteenth century, notably Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Anton Chekhov, in addition to inspiring the Symbolist poetry of Andrey Bely and Aleksandr Blok in the early twentieth century. Gogol's influence can also be seen in the works of great modern writers such as Franz Kafka, Mikhail Bulgakov, Vladimir Nabokov, and James Joyce.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Nikolai Gogol was born in Poltava, Ukraine, on March 19, 1809, the eldest of six children. His father, Vasily Afanasevich Gogol-Yanovsky, was a landowner de-



scended from Cossack gentry who spent much of his free time composing poetry and plays. The Gogol household provided a dynamic, cultivated environment, and as a child Gogol encountered a range of interesting personalities, among them his grandmother, who regaled him with vivid, often horrifying tales from Ukrainian folklore. Gogol entered boarding school at the age of ten and later attended Nezhin Gymnasium, where he quickly showed himself to be aloof and sardonic, with little interest in his studies. His father's unexpected death in 1825 awakened something in Gogol, however, and when he returned to school that year, he became deeply involved with literature and theatre, discovering the works of Aleksandr Pushkin. Soon after earning his degree in 1828, Gogol moved to St. Petersburg, intent on a career in government. Shortly after arriving in the city, Gogol began publishing poetry in literary journals, and in 1829 he published the epic poem *Gants Kiukhel'garten* under the name V. Alov. The poem was a critical and popular disaster, and Gogol, disgusted,

destroyed all remaining copies of the work. After a brief sojourn in Germany, Gogol returned to St. Petersburg, where he secured a position with the ministry of the interior. Over the next year he also began to publish short fiction under a variety of pseudonyms, attracting the attention of several prominent members of the Petersburg literary elite, among them Petr Pletnev and Pushkin, with whom Gogol would become close friends. In 1831 Gogol published his first collection of stories, *Vechera ná khutore bliz Dikanki* (*Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka*). Although most critics dismissed the volume as unimaginative and crude, Pushkin championed the work, and word of Gogol's unique literary talents began to spread. A second volume of *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* followed in 1832. During these years Gogol abandoned his government aspirations to try his hand at teaching, first at the Patriotic Institute and later at the University of St. Petersburg, where he taught history. Although Gogol proved an engaging lecturer, his idiosyncratic scholarship and lack of discipline were at odds with the philosophy of the university, and he lost the appointment after only one year. By then, however, Gogol had begun to emerge as one of the leading young authors in St. Petersburg. In 1835 he published two popular works: *Arabeski* (*Arabesques*), a collection of diverse essays and stories, and the story collection *Mirgorod*. Although the books failed to sell many copies, they received high praise from critic V. G. Belinsky, who hailed Gogol as the equal of Pushkin. In 1836 Gogol's story "The Nose" appeared in Pushkin's journal *Sovremennik*. That year Gogol also produced his most famous stage play, *Revizor* (*The Inspector General*), which earned the praise of Tsar Nicholas I. The general reaction to the play proved overwhelmingly hostile, however, and shortly after the production closed Gogol fled Russia for Europe, settling in Rome in the spring of 1837. Over the next several years Gogol worked on his masterpiece, the epic novel *Dead Souls*. In 1842 he published part one of the work under the title *Pokhozhdeniia Chichikova, ili Mertvyie dushi*. That year Gogol also published his four-volume collected works, *Sochineniia*, which included a number of previously unpublished stories, among them "The Overcoat." In 1842 and 1843 two of Gogol's plays, *Zhenit'ba* (*The Marriage*) and *Igroki* (*The Gamblers*) premiered in Russia, although Gogol remained in Rome. During his last years there, Gogol continued to work on subsequent volumes of *Dead Souls*, but he was greatly dissatisfied with his efforts and burned several drafts of the work. At this point Gogol plunged into a deep spiritual crisis from which he never recovered. Plagued by guilt, fears of damnation, and persecution mania, Gogol spent the last decade of his life desperately trying to reconcile his life to the teachings of the Orthodox Church. Although he continued to write during these years, his works

were reactionary in nature and bore little resemblance to his earlier writings. In 1847 Gogol fell under the sway of the fanatical Orthodox priest Matvei Konstantinovskiy, who urged him to burn additional versions of the sequel to *Dead Souls*. Returning to Russia, Gogol soon renounced literature altogether and embarked on a program of spiritual mortification that would eventually kill him; he died on February 21, 1852, after a prolonged fast.

## MAJOR WORKS

Gogol's first significant publication, the story collection *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka*, appeared in 1831. A second collection of Ukrainian tales, *Mirgorod*, followed in 1835. Set in his native Ukraine, these early tales combine elements of traditional folklore with colorful depictions of the region's landscape and people. An intense battle between good and evil rages at the heart of many of the stories, in which Gogol's characters typically face supernatural forces they are powerless to control. In "Strashnaia mest'" ("A Terrible Vengeance") Gogol introduces an evil sorcerer into a Cossack community in Kiev, bringing together demonic elements of magic and violence with realistic, detailed descriptions of everyday Cossack life. Gogol also published his popular *Arabesques*, a collection of stories and essays, around this time. In these writings Gogol shifts his attention to life in St. Petersburg. The story "Nevskii Prospekt" ("Nevsky Prospect") explores the sexual obsessions of two young men, one an artist and the other a soldier, as they pass through the bustling Nevsky Prospect on a typical evening. Gogol sets the lives of the two men against the rich tableau of the city itself, with its diverse population of civil servants, army officers, artists, teachers, and foreign travelers. "Zapiski sumasshedshego" ("The Diary of a Madman") offers a portrait of an unassuming government clerk whose love for the daughter of his department chief eventually drives him into a fantasy world. The essays in *Arabesques* expound Gogol's views on a range of intellectual subjects, including art, medieval history, contemporary literature, and the geographical and cultural landscape of Ukraine. In 1836 Gogol achieved notoriety with his only important dramatic work, the comedy *The Inspector General*. Set in a small provincial town, the play exposes the superficiality and absurdity of the Russian social class structure. When rumors begin to circulate that a government inspector is arranging a secret visit to the town, the townspeople set out to discover the inspector's identity, eventually concluding that he is disguised as a petty clerk staying at a local inn. When the clerk comprehends their mistake, he sets out to take full advantage of their hospitality, eventually abscond-

ing with the mayor's daughter. The play alienated many theatergoers, among them a number of prominent government officials, because of its implicit indictment of Russian bureaucratic life. In the second half of the 1830s Gogol published a number of new stories in prominent literary magazines and journals. In stories such as "The Nose," Gogol once again parodies the foolish pride of the typical Russian civil servant. "The Nose" also marks a radical departure from Gogol's earlier work, however, both in its absurd comedy and in its liberal, often impenetrable use of symbolism and images. In many ways "The Nose" serves as a statement on the mutability of language itself and represents one of Gogol's most distinctively modern works. Gogol's most famous work, *Dead Souls*, appeared in 1842. In this epic novel, described by Gogol as a "poema," the author's lyrical genius and keen grasp of the absurd achieve their most eloquent expression. The plot revolves around an ambitious former government official named Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov who travels to a provincial Russian town to seek his fortune. He quickly becomes friends with a number of prominent officials and landowners, presenting himself as a worldly, and wealthy, man. Although he leaves a favorable impression on the townspeople, Chichikov in fact possesses little in the world beyond his elaborate traveling trunk, his carriage, and his two servants. Chichikov soon begins to acquire "dead souls"—serfs who have died since the last national census—from the local landowners, in the hope of establishing a reputation as a prominent landowner himself. Through Chichikov's travels across the countryside, Gogol builds on various impressions of the Russian people and geography, in the process creating an elaborate portrait of the Russian national character, at once satirical and deeply moving. Indeed, the book's specious lyricism ultimately serves as a vast metaphor of Russia itself. In 1842 Gogol also published *Sochineniia*, a four-volume collection of his writings, which includes the short story "The Overcoat." Widely regarded as a masterpiece of Russian realism, "The Overcoat" revolves around Akakii Akakiievich, a nondescript petty clerk whose efforts to obtain a new overcoat ultimately lead him to his doom. Gogol's portrait of the dehumanized civil servant represents a distinct break from earlier Russian fiction and in many ways foreshadows the central themes of twentieth-century modernism.

### CRITICAL RECEPTION

Gogol's early short stories attracted a great deal of critical attention upon their original publication. The younger generation of Russian critics, in particular Belinsky, hailed the author for both his keen satirical eye

and his innovative prose style. One of Gogol's most famous early champions was Pushkin, who regarded Gogol's work as a significant step forward for Russian literature. Gogol remained popular among many contemporary critics until late in his career, when his increasing religious fanaticism, coupled with the appearance of the reactionary tract *Vybrannye mesta iz perepiski s druzyami* (1847; *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*), alienated many of his supporters. Gogol's critical reputation began to enjoy a renaissance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when prominent Russian scholars like Vasily Rozanov, Vasilii Vasil'evich Gippius, and Victor Vinogradov began to publish studies of Gogol's oeuvre. These critical perspectives argued that Gogol anticipated many of the central narrative techniques and themes of modern Russian literature. Of works written in English, Vladimir Nabokov's *Gogol* provides biographical details of the author, while also providing insights into his distinctive prose style. Many critics have discussed Gogol's major themes in relation to other great works of Western literature, comparing his writings with Dante's *The Divine Comedy* and Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. In the past several decades some scholars have examined the intimate relationship between Gogol's prose and nineteenth-century conceptions of Russian identity, while others have pointed to the author's deft use of irony as a means of undermining the autocratic authority of Nicholas I. More recently, critics have explored the subtle ways in which Gogol manipulates language to imbue his work with multiple, often contradictory meanings.

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### PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Gants Kiukhel'garten. Idilliia v kartinakh* [as V. Alov] (poetry) 1829  
*Vechera ná khutore bliz Dikanki*. 2 vols. [as Rudy Panko; *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka*] (short stories) 1831-32  
*Arabeski* [Arabesques] (essays and short stories) 1835  
*Mirgorod* (short stories) 1835  
*Revizor* [*The Inspector General*] (play) 1836  
*Mertvye dushi* [*Dead Souls*] (novel) 1842  
 \**Sochineniia*. 4 vols. (short stories, plays, and novel) 1842  
*Zhenit'ba* [*The Marriage*] (play) 1842  
*Igroki* [*The Gamblers*] (play) 1843  
*Vybrannye mesta iz perepiski s druzyami* [*Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*] (essays and letters) 1847



*The Works of Nikolai Vassilyevich Gogol Found After His Death* (sketches) 1855

*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*. 14 vols. (short stories, novels, plays, poetry, and essays) 1937-52

*Letters of Nikolai Gogol* (letters) 1967

\*Includes the novel *Taras Bulba*, which had appeared in much shorter form in Gogol's short story collection *Mirgorod*.

## CRITICISM

### Vasily Rozanov (essay date 1894)

SOURCE: Rozanov, Vasily. "Pushkin and Gogol."<sup>1</sup> In *Essays in Russian Literature: The Conservative View: Leontiev, Rozanov, Shestov*, edited and translated by Spencer E. Roberts, pp. 357-68. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1968.

[In the following essay, originally published in 1894, Rozanov offers an idiosyncratic interpretation of *Dead Souls*, arguing that the work signified a drastic departure from the writings of Aleksandr Pushkin, notably in its innovative use of irony to create a radical new portrait of life in Russia.]

In the early chapters of my essay on Dostoevsky's *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, I had occasion to touch on Gogol's creative work, and in particular on his attitude toward reality, which, instead of repeating itself in our later writers, aroused their opposition. This thought encountered in our respected critic Mr. Nikolayev<sup>2</sup> several objections specifically intended to determine more accurately the significance of Gogol's personality and also of his creative work. Despite all that has been said on both sides, much still remains unclear and debatable about the subject itself; therefore, it seemed to me proper and not without interest to draw the reader's attention to it once again.

First of all, I consider it my duty to specify that I did not have Pushkin in mind when I said that not until the literature of a much later period (Turgenev, Count Tolstoy, et cetera) did living people make their appearance for the first time. I said this only in connection with Gogol himself, and not with what lay behind him. But about Pushkin, below; let us now return to the point of the matter.

### I

Gogol is the progenitor of the ironic mood in our society and literature. He created the form and the type into which all our thoughts and feelings already have been flowing for several decades, while forgetting their origi-

nal and natural direction. Ideas that he never expressed and feelings that he never aroused, but which sprang up long after his death, were all, however, formed according to one definite type, the source of which is in his works. Ever since we have had these works before us, everything that is not in Gogol's spirit has had no strength; and vice versa, everything that is in harmony with it, no matter how weak it inherently is, has been growing and acquiring strength. The spiritual life of an historically developing society took a sharp turn in his personality, after which, it went irresistibly in one path downhill, destroying some concepts and forming others, but all of them always of the same type. What was the significance of that turn? This question is answered, in particular, in Gogol's relation to Pushkin.

My critic compares them and finds them "equal." But, above all, they are heterogeneous. They cannot even be compared, and by generalizing under the single concept of "beauty" and "art," we completely lose sight of their inner relationship, which later developed in life as well as in literature, once they became an inseparable part of it. The versatile, many-sided Pushkin is the antithesis of Gogol, who moves in two directions only: one of intense and aimless lyricism, which withdraws upward to the realm of fancy; the other of irony, which is directed toward all that lies below. But in addition to this antithesis of form, or of outer contours, their creative work is also antithetical in its very essence.

Pushkin is, as it were, the symbol of life: he is all movement, and because of this, his creative work is so diverse. Everything that lives attracts him, and in approaching everything, he loves and incarnates it. His words are never unrelated to reality; they cover it, and by means of it become images and contours. It is he who is the *real founder of the Natural School*,<sup>3</sup> for he is always true to man's nature and true to his fate as well. There is nothing intense about him, no morbid imagination, no false emotion whatsoever.

Thence the individualism of his characters, which can never be reduced to general types. A type in literature is already a defect; it is a generalization—that is, a certain alteration of reality, albeit a very subtle one. People do not form types; they simply live in reality, each one his own particular life, each one bearing within himself his own purpose and significance. It is precisely this—man's inability to merge his person with that of another—which distinguishes him from all else in nature, where everything is grouped into genera and species, with only the local population being indivisible. Art should not touch this principal treasure in man—and in Pushkin, it does not touch it. Of our recent writers, only Count Lev Tolstoy was able to achieve this, and then only to an imperfect degree: as a result, he is considered the greatest representative of naturalism in our literature. But we must not forget that all this was already inherent in Pushkin, but for some reason or other, it went unnoticed.

At any rate, it is the surest sign in works of art that the life that has been transferred from reality has been preserved. But it is not only as an "incarnator" that Pushkin sets the norm for a correct attitude toward reality: his poetry contains directions as to how art itself, once it has embodied life, must act in reverse on it. In this action, there must be nothing accelerative or formative: poetry merely clarifies reality and warms it; it does not alter, distort, or deflect it from the tendency already embedded in the vital nature of man himself. It *does not hinder* life—and this, too, is due to the fact that it has none of that morbid imagination which often creates a second world above the real one and then tries to adapt the first world to the second. Pushkin teaches us how to experience purer and nobler emotions; he cleans away all the "scale" that has accumulated on the spirit, but he does not impose any stifling form on us. And in loving his poetry, each person remains *himself*.

All this also makes his poetry the ideal for a normal, healthy development. In it are placed directions, which, if followed, will never divert life from its course, no matter how complex it becomes; it will become fuller, more diverse, and finally more profound: but from this, it will not lose either its former unity and integrity or its composure and serenity. Something different will be understood by it, and something different will be accomplished by it from what was understood and accomplished by it in Pushkin's time; but nothing that is understood by it will trouble the soul, and nothing that is accomplished by it will be ugly in its movements.

## II

But then Gogol appeared. Although we do not distinguish types in the psychological development of people, we group everything of genius in creative art into a whole. And, in general, we think that it is not disassociated, but that it is inwardly harmonious, and that one part strengthens the other. But this is not so: only a genius can be harmful to another genius, especially a genius of a different or an opposite type. We know very well how Gogol began to grieve after Pushkin's premature death. At that time, *Dead Souls* was already taking shape in him, but it had not yet appeared, and the person who could have counterbalanced it with his later works was no longer alive. Without a doubt, the full mystery of genius is unknown even to its possessor: but the fact that he senses its power and knows its limits is clear. If we, after opening *Dead Souls* at random, do not hurry off to take care of some necessary business, but continue to turn page after page, it is obvious that the wonderful author of this book himself knew what a force was coming into the world with him. And he, the bearer of this force, was now alone. He knew—he could not help knowing—that he would expel Pushkin from the consciousness of the people, and along with him, everything that his poetry bore within itself. This was

the origin of his anxiety, and it increased as the chapters of *Dead Souls* began to appear. In letters to friends, he tried to learn the impression that had been made on them. He asked what sort it was, but he himself remained stubbornly silent about the meaning of his poem. His rapidly spreading fame was of no interest to him. He withdrew deeper and deeper into himself, and the tone of his letters became more and more troubled and strange. One can say of genius more than of anything else that its center and direction lie in "other worlds"; but the person who is its personal bearer, nevertheless, sees and knows this direction, although he is helpless to interfere with it. Gogol burned the final chapters of *Dead Souls*, but even those that managed to come out distorted the spiritual countenance of our society by depicting it in an entirely different way from the one in which Pushkin had begun to depict it.

Why is it that one genius of equal merit is supplanted by another?<sup>4</sup> The explanation for this lies in the very essence of their heterogeneous creative work and in the particular effect each has on the soul. If we simultaneously open *Dead Souls* and *The Captain's Daughter* or "The Queen of Spades" and begin to compare them and to study the impression they make on us, we immediately notice that the impression made by Pushkin is not as stable. His words and scenes enter the soul like a wave, and, after refreshing and agitating it, they recede, again like a wave: the mark made by them on our soul closes and heals. On the contrary, the mark made by Gogol remains fixed; it neither grows nor diminishes. As it was originally, so it remains forever. How Sobakevich deliberately errs in drawing up his list of dead souls, or how Korobochka fails to understand Chichikov—all this we remember in detail, even though we have read it only once, and a very long time ago at that; but what actually happens to Herman in the card game—in order to recall that, we must once again open "The Queen of Spades." And this is even more surprising if we take into account the continual sameness of *Dead Souls* and, on the contrary, the originality and romantic nature of Pushkin's scenes. Where then is the secret of this peculiar power of Gogol's creative work, and at the same time, of course, its essence? Let us turn to the first page of *Dead Souls*:

His arrival caused no commotion in the town whatsoever, and was not accompanied by anything in particular; only two Russian peasants standing at the door of the tavern, opposite the hotel, made several remarks, which related, however, more to the carriage than to the person in it. "Look at that," said the one to the other. "What a wheel. What do you think, would that wheel make it to Moscow if it had to, or wouldn't it?" "Sure it would," answered the other. "Well, I don't think it would make it to Kazan." "No, it wouldn't make it to Kazan," answered the other. With that, the conversation ended. Furthermore, when the carriage drove up to the hotel, it passed a young man in white duck trousers, exceptionally tight and short, and a frock

coat with claims to fashion, beneath which was visible a shirt front fastened with a Tula pin in the shape of a bronze pistol. The young man turned around, looked at the carriage, caught hold of his cap, which the wind had almost blown off, and then went his way.

If we closely examine the flow of this speech, we see that it is lifeless. It is a waxen language in which nothing stirs, in which not one word pushes forward or wants to say more than is said by any of the rest. And no matter where we open the book, no matter which humorous scene we hit upon, we everywhere see this same dead tissue of language in which all the figures being portrayed are wrapped as if in their common shroud. And from this it follows that the thoughts of all these figures do not continue, that their impressions do not connect with each other. The figures all stand motionless, with the features they had when the author left them; they do not continue to grow—neither within themselves, nor in the soul of the reader on whom the impression is made. Hence the indelibility of this impression: it does not close, it does not heal, because there is nothing there that can grow. It is dead tissue, which will always remain in the reader's soul in the same form in which it was originally introduced there.

None of this was understood about Gogol, and he was considered the founder of "The Natural School," that is, a school whose writers supposedly *reproduce* reality in their works. It is only to this naïve assertion that my negative remarks apply, and their corroboration can be found in all the reminiscences of Gogol recorded by his friends: "In January, 1850," writes S. T. Aksakov, "Gogol once again read us the first chapter of *Dead Souls*. We were struck with amazement: the chapter seemed even better, as if it had been written anew. Gogol was very pleased with this impression and said: 'That's what it means when a painter has given the final touch to his picture. The corrections, apparently, are most insignificant: *a word cut here, one added there, one shifted in still another place*, [my italics], and everything turns out differently. Then one should publish, when all the chapters have been given the finishing touch.'"

The word "picture," that is, something *painted*, was evidently placed here by mistake: it is not a painter's brush or paints, filled with variety and life, which reproduce the variety of another reality; it is rather a *mosaic of words*, the one attached to the other, the secret of which was known to Gogol alone. Not only in our literature, but in world literature as well, he stands the lonely genius, and his world is unlike any other. He alone inhabited it. And for us to enter that world, to connect it with our life, or even to judge our life by the huge wax picture molded by this wonderful craftsman, would mean to attempt suicide.

In this picture, there are absolutely no live people: they are tiny wax figures, but they all make their grimaces

so cleverly that we have long suspected them of actually moving. But they are motionless. Examine once again the excerpt quoted above: the cap is the only living person there who wants to live, and even it is restrained just in time. It is the author who moves their feet forward, turns them around, asks, and answers for them: they are incapable of doing it for themselves. And this is not at all because they are stupid; stupidity is the second thing here, it goes without saying, that results from the lifelessness. Recall Plyushkin: he is indeed an amazing character; but certainly not because of the original way in which he was conceived, but because of the original way in which he was executed. Right beside him stands the Avaricious Knight,<sup>5</sup> a living person from head to foot; a man who knows both what art is and what crime is, and this alone does he dominate with his passion. You can fear him, you can hate him, but you cannot help respecting him: he is a person. But is Plyushkin really a person? Can this word be applied to anyone with whom Chichikov had his talks and dealings? Like Plyushkin, they all came into this world in a special way having nothing in common with a natural birth. They were made from a waxen mass of words, and the secret of this artistic method of production was known only to Gogol. We laugh at them: but, remarkably enough, it is not the spirited laughter with which we respond to something we encounter in life and then reject or struggle against. Gogol's world is a world that has oddly withdrawn from us into the distance, a world which we observe through a magnifying glass. We are amazed at much that is in it, we laugh at it all, and what we have seen we never forget; but we never have anything in common with it, or anything that connects us with anyone we have seen in it, and not only in a positive sense, but in a negative one as well.

My critic points to the lofty, moral side of Gogol. Indeed, it cannot be valued too highly: what he decided to do had never been done by anyone else in history. We said earlier that the direction and source of genius least of all lie in the will of its individual possessor. But this person *can be fully aware of his genius*; he can *ap-praise it* for other people and for the future. Gogol *stifled his genius*. Is that not evidence enough of what it was?

### III

Thanks to Pushkin's characters and thanks to recent literature, all of which has been trying to rehabilitate Pushkin while struggling against Gogol, this genius will die out sooner or later in our life as well. And, indeed, his irony for all living things has repeatedly caused the most ardent enthusiasm to grow cold. Recall Dostoevsky's speech at the Pushkin Celebration: at a moment of such ecstasy, of such enchantment on the part of everyone, he fell as if mowed down, when Gogol's



corpses were flung at his feet. Hence the painful vexation with which he answered Professor Gradovsky.<sup>6</sup> He realized that no matter how much more he might say, that no matter what dialectics he might resort to, none of this would be clear, but that those everlasting corpses were clear to everyone, and along with them, the truth that man can only despise his fellow man. And indeed everything in his polemic has been forgotten; no one remembers the details of the argument, but very likely everyone remembers the idea that in the old days, people of noble spirit had nowhere to go except to gypsy camps in order to escape the living corpses that inhabit the city. But the same thing could be said about every period: Gogol's unforgettable characters have separated people with an insurmountable barrier which forces them not to seek each other out, but to flee from each other; not to seek shelter, the one near the other, but to withdraw from each and every one. His rapturous lyricism, the fruit of an overtaxed imagination,<sup>7</sup> has caused everyone to love and respect only one's own dreams, and at the same time to feel a revulsion for all that is real, particular, and individual. All that lives no longer attracts us, and for that very reason, the whole of our life, our characters, and plans have become so filled with the fantastic. Read "**Nevsky Prospect**," that amazing combination of the coarsest realism and the most morbid idealism, and you will understand that it was the prologue inaugurating a chain of events that made a very sad story. Great people live according to their psychological make-up, which disintegrates into the psychological make-up of millions of other people, from which tangible facts are then, of necessity, born.

*Tranquillity*—that is what we need most of all. There is no serenity in our consciousness, no naturalness in the expression of our emotions, no simplicity in our attitude toward reality. We are excited and alarmed, and this excitement and alarm reveal themselves in the consciousness of our actions and in the confusion of our thoughts. Given such a state, further development can reach great heights; but at the same time, it will never be a normal, healthy development.

Gogol indeed stands on the path to this natural development, which is not so accelerated, but which will definitely rise to greater heights. He stands on the path to it, not so much by virtue of his irony and lack of confidence in and respect for man as by virtue of the complete cast of his genius, which has become the cast of our soul and our history. His imagination, with its wrong attitude toward reality, and its wrong attitude toward fancy as well, has *corrupted* our hearts and *disrupted* our lives, after having filled both of them with the deepest of suffering. Surely we must admit this. Surely we are not so depraved already that we have begun to love real life less than the play of shadows in a mirror?

Fortunately, there are features in Gogol's creative work itself from which we can finally determine its essence.

We shall return to specific fact to clarify all that has been said and to strengthen it to the point where it will apparently be invincible. By a certain inverse irony that ridicules the wisest of people, two child characters have been included in Gogol's skillfully executed poem. They are the famous Themistoklius and Alcides, unlike anything in the child's world, either real or poeticized. Surely we can imagine that *they* are pure and fine, and that they as yet have none of that "carnalization" of the spirit, about which Mr. Nikolayev speaks. And yet they are dolls, pitiful and ludicrous, like all the other figures in *Dead Souls*. Doesn't that plainly reveal to us the nature of the rest of the poem as well? "Suffer the little children to come to Me," said the Savior. Even He did not look on them with a condemning eye, but held out his arms and drew them to Him; just as He rebuked and instructed, but never ridiculed, the "carnal" in spirit. How, then, can we speak of a "religious height" in the light of which the famous satirist judged people? If it is a height, then it has nothing in common with the one from which Christ looked on man, where his Gospel and cross lie, and toward which, of course, nations must head in fleeing from all that delusively glitters at them from the opposite side—fortunately always from very different points.

#### Notes

1. Apropos of Govoruka Otrok's article, written under the pseudonym Yu. Nikolayev: "Something about Gogol and Dostoevsky."
2. Later, apropos of the opinion I had expressed about Gogol, there appeared in our periodicals several more articles, part of which are of value. However, their general shortcoming lies in the fact that they do not at all examine either the nature of Gogol's creative work or my remarks about it.
3. All the italics in this essay are Rozanov's. [Tr.]
4. The idea that Pushkin was ousted from the living consciousness of our society by the criticism of the sixties is completely unjust and degrading to his memory: *he was no longer being read* when this criticism appeared, and precisely for this reason, it was comprehensible to everyone. Just when did he *cease* to be read?
5. In Pushkin's little tragedy by the same name. [Tr.]
6. A. D. Gradovsky (1841-1889), a professor of law. He attacked Dostoevsky for ignoring the political reasons for the Russians' desire to "wander" and their lack of roots, two things Dostoevsky had stressed in his Pushkin Speech. Although Pushkin had indeed depicted the first Russian wanderer in Aleko, he had not, Gradovsky said, reproduced the gloomy world that these wanderers had rejected. That was done by Gogol—the great re-