

# (Mis)interpreting Nikolai Gogol

SLA 412

Spring 2021

Zoom class: Mondays and Wednesdays, 11 AM – 12:20 PM

Lev Nikulin

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Office hours: Wednesdays 12:30-1:30 and by appointment



Sergei Alimov, Illustration for "The Nose"

"If you are interested in "ideas" and "facts" and "messages," keep away from Gogol."

- Vladimir Nabokov, *Gogol*

"Oh, don't believe this Nevsky Prospect!"

- Nikolai Gogol, "Nevsky Prospect"

Canonical authors risk being rendered lifeless and boring through interpretation, but the endlessly elusive Ukrainian-Russian writer Nikolai Gogol resists this ossification through the experimental, intricate, frequently surprising, and often absurdist elements of his prose. This course will introduce students to the works of Gogol and their interpretations, and students will be encouraged to develop their own readings grounded in the texts; with an author like Gogol, this can produce the most exciting and unexpected results. The course will follow a roughly chronological format, and we will end with Gogol's afterlife in images, animation, film, and music.

All materials will be provided in English.

Course requirements: 4 short response papers, participation, one in-class presentation, midterm paper, final paper

**Grade calculation:**

1. Participation (includes weekly classes and forum posts): 30%
2. Two 10-minute in-class presentations: 20%
3. Two short response papers (~1 p): 10%
4. Midterm (4-5 p): 15%
5. Final paper (8-10 p): 25%

**Due dates:**

1. Presentations: on assigned date
2. Short response papers: by Dean's Date (May 5)
3. Midterm: Friday, March 12<sup>th</sup> (prior to Spring Break)
4. Final paper: by Dean's Date (May 5)

**Communication/organization:**

I have tried to streamline this course so that everything you will need is located on as few platforms as possible. You will need access to the following: Zoom, video/webcam, Blackboard, and Google. **Our main hub for everything will be the Google Drive course folder linked here:**

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Qt-fFHXQFOSU\\_G2HJp-QzfdpwCYw01-z?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Qt-fFHXQFOSU_G2HJp-QzfdpwCYw01-z?usp=sharing)

Any texts outside of the two re

(Please don't post anything from this folder anywhere public!)

**Calendar:**

**Week 1: Introduction: Dreams, Imagination, and Lies**

Mon., Feb. 1: Introduction, "The Carriage"

Wed., Feb 3: "A Bewitched Place"  
Vladimir Nabokov on Gogol, excerpts (in course folder)

**Week 2: *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka***

Mon., Feb. 8: "May Night, or the Drowned Maiden"  
"The Lost Letter"

Wed., Feb. 10: "St. John's Eve"  
*Russian Devils and Diabolic Conditionality in Nikolai Gogol's Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*, Christopher Putney, excerpt

**Week 3: Vanities of Vanities**

Mon., Feb. 15: "The Old-World Landowners"  
Wed., Feb. 17: "The Story of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich"  
"Ivan Fedorovich Shponka and His Aunt"

**Week 4: Gothic Gogol**

Mon., Feb. 22: "The Terrible Vengeance"  
*Gothic*, Fred Botting, excerpt  
Wed., Feb. 24: *Viy*

**Week 5: Imagining Ukraine**

Mon., March 1: *Taras Bulba*, Chapter 1-6  
Wed., March 3: *Taras Bulba*, Chapter 7-12  
*Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism*, Edyta Bojanowska, excerpt

**Week 6: Petersburg Specters**

Mon., March 8: "Nevsky Prospect"  
"The Semantic Construction of the Void," Renate Lachmann  
Wed., March 10: "The Overcoat"  
"How Gogol's Overcoat Is Made," Boris Eichenbaum

**[SPRING BREAK: MARCH 13-16]**

**Week 6.5 (SHORT WEEK): Visual Gogol**

Wed., March 17:     *The Overcoat* (Yuri Norstein)  
                          *The Terrible Vengeance* animated film

**Week 7: Noses and Nonsense**

Mon., March 22:     “The Nose”  
                          Kathleen Scollins, *Acts of Logos in Pushkin and Gogol*, excerpt

Wed., March 24:     “Diary of a Madman”

**Week 8: Satire**

Mon., March 29:     *The Government Inspector*

Wed., March 31:     *The Government Inspector*, continued  
                          *The Government Inspector* (1952), excerpts

**Week 9: *Dead Souls* I**

Mon., April 5:        *Dead Souls*, Chapters 1-3

Wed., April 7:        *Dead Souls*, Chapter 4-6  
                          Polemics around *Dead Souls*: excerpts from reviews and articles by  
                          Belinsky, Shevyrev, Aksakov.

**Week 10: *Dead Souls* II**

Mon., April 12:      *Dead Souls*, Chapter 7-9  
                          *Designing Dead Souls*, Susanne Fusso, excerpts

Wed., April 14:      *Dead Souls*, Chapters 10-11  
                          Andrei Belyi, *The Mastery of Gogol*, excerpt  
                          *Dead Souls* (1984), excerpts.

**Week 11: Gogol after Gogol**

Mon., April 19:      *The Case of “Dead Souls”* (2005), dir. Pavel Lungin, excerpts.

Wed., April 21:      *Gogol: The Beginning* (2017)

**Week 12: Conclusion**

Mon., April 26:      Conclusion

**MAY 5: DEAN’S DATE. ALL WORK DUE**

**Accessibility:**

I aim to prioritize accessibility in this course and commit to working towards making this course as accessible as possible for all students. The first component of this is adherence to university policy on accessibility and disability:

Any student needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to present authorization from the Office of Disability Services (ODS) ([ods@princeton.edu](mailto:ods@princeton.edu)).

Requests for academic accommodation for this course must be made at the beginning of the semester (or as soon as possible for newly approved students) and at least two weeks in advance in order to arrange for it. Please make an appointment to meet with me in order to maintain confidentiality in addressing your needs.

I also recognize that students have accessibility needs that may not be covered by ODS requirements. If there is an adjustment that will improve your ability to engage with the course material or class discussion or improve your experience of this course, please do not hesitate to let me know and I will do my best to work with you so long as the solutions we come up with do not jeopardize academic standards, fairness, or your overall experience of the course. If you notice an accessibility issue in my course design, please also feel free to reach out and let me know (even if the issue does not concern you personally) – accessible design is a work in progress, and input is valuable.

**Academic Integrity:**

You are encouraged to consult with your peers and with me regarding your ideas for essays, but your submitted written work must be your own. You must cite any sources (books, articles, websites, videos, etc.) that have contributed to your work. Please review Princeton's policy on Academic Honesty.