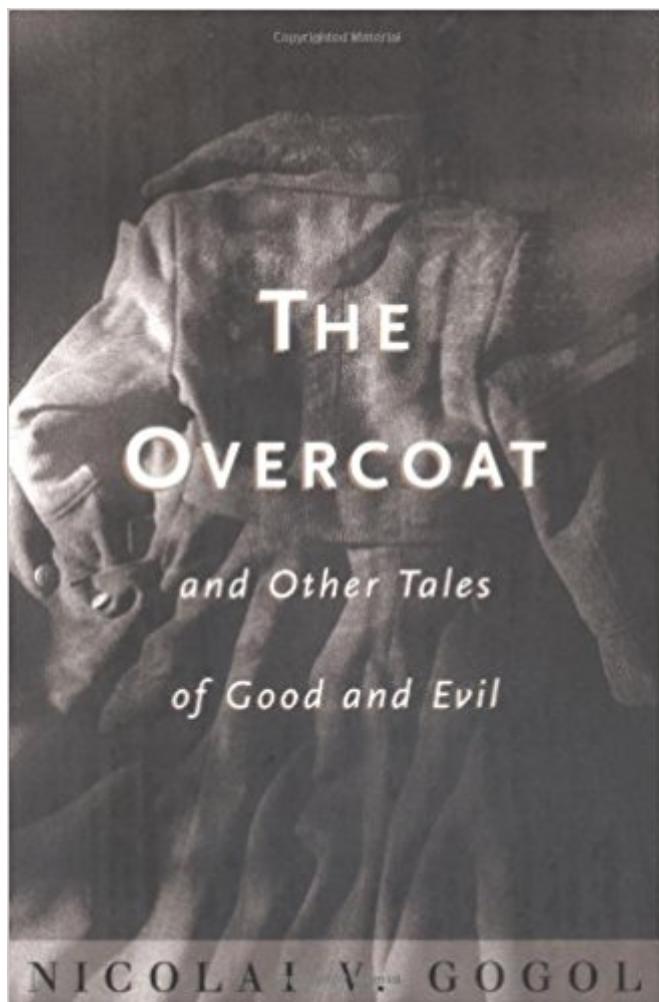


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# The Overcoat And Other Tales Of Good And Evil



## Synopsis

With the publication of "The Overcoat" in 1842, Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852) inaugurated a new chapter in Russian literature, in which the underdog and social misfit is treated not as a figure of fun or an object of charity, but as a human being with as much right to happiness as anybody else. The compassion, simplicity, and gentle humor with which he treats the poignant quest of a hapless civil servant for the return of his stolen overcoat—and the fantastic yet realistic manner in which he takes revenge on his nemesis, the Very Important Person—mark "The Overcoat" as one of the greatest achievements of Gogol's genius. The five other "Tales of Good and Evil" in this superb collection demonstrate the broad range of Gogol's literary palette in his short fiction: the fantastic, supernaturally tinged "The Terrible Vengeance," the comic portraiture of "Ivan Fyodorovich Shponka and His Aunt," the tragic moral realism of "The Portrait" and "Nevsky Avenue," and the rampaging satire and absurdism of his send-up of Russian upper-class stupidity, "The Nose." The stories offer the reader the perfect introduction to the imaginative genius of Gogol, which was to flower so triumphantly in his masterpiece, *Dead Souls*.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852) was a novelist and political satirist. The author of *Dead Souls* and *The Overcoat*, he was one of Russia's greatest writers.

These short stories written in the mid- 1880's by this prolific Russian author who's fast-rising to the

top" above others in this era (read forward) has me hooked>>> can hardly wait to read his "masterpiece" novel DEAD SOULS. Love the way he goes from lusciously smooth story teller to very the most amusing narrator in the same paragraph and /or same sentence: I hear the voice of Alfred Hitchcock with his asides and amusing intros. By the way, any "violence" is so minimal I do not ever remember it.

This book includes "The Overcoat" and "Taras Bulba" and "The Terrible Vengance" and "The Portrait" and "Nevsky Avenue." It has also been published as "The Overcoat and other stories of good and evil." David Magarshack is an excellent translator. "Taras Bulba" has been published as a novel by itself and is worth the price of this book alone. It is a short novel of a violent but honorable family of Cossacks in the fifteenth century when the cossacks were fighting a two-front but sporadic war against the Turks to the south and the Poles and Swedes to the north. This is especially interesting today because these are Russians defending the Ukraine about 600 years ago! This story is not for children. "The Terrible Vengence" is even more violent. This one is "R" rated. Gogol is a great writer. His stories don't drag but they sometimes can shock the reader. I enjoyed every story except "The Portrait" which started off great and became very disappointing as it progressed. I was really upset over the degeneration of that story because the beginning was so good. "The Overcoat" is Gogol's best story. So I won't say anything else about "The Overcoat" other than READ IT! I think it is one of the best stories I have ever read. This is not a great book for happy endings, or even for happy stories. But it is engrossing, absorbing, extremely well written and well translated. It is fitting that the book ends with "The Overcoat" because that is the story with the most satisfying conclusion.

Russia has produced some great literary geniuses

This is a classic was written long enough ago to make the writing style and the English difficult. Dark stories.

My favorite Gogol. Wish I had never read it so I could read it again and again for the first time.

The story I chose is "The Nose" by Nikolai Gogol. It is a satirical short story that is included in the book "Tales of Good and Evil" which was first copyrighted in 1957. The story itself was written between 1835 and 1836. There is a

special feature included in the “Tales of Good and Evil” book, which is an introduction talking about Nikolai Gogol. The author chose to write an absurd story about a person’s nose falling off to emphasize power dynamics and how they can, at times, look ridiculous. The story is written from the third person point of view, because it speaks about each character and gives the reader a look into their thoughts and actions that would not be seen in first person point of view. I believe that the author was trying to convey his beliefs about the political structure and ranks in Russia without outright stating his opinion. The general field/genre is surrealism as well as satire. The story fits into both because of the content. Surrealism is defined as bridging reality and imagination together, which is shown by the nose manifesting in a loaf of bread and leaving Kovalyov’s face. Satire is defined as exposing or critiquing people’s vices or stupidity, and through the story, Gogol’s opinion of Russian social structure is shown through Kovalyov and Yakovlevich. The intended audience for Gogol was probably any Russian who knew about Peter the Great’s Table of Ranks, but it can be translated and used in any society with social ranks. Kovalyov was named a Collegiate Assessor because it is the eighth rank in the Table, and comes with hereditary nobility. This means that Kovalyov’s heirs would instantly be an eighth rank as well. The author’s style seems to be informal, because it was originally written for friends. The words used in the story are not hard to understand and I think most people could read this story with no issues and no outside sources to look up words. The story is split into three parts (I, II, III) and all chapters begin with the character waking up. This can make the reader question if all of it is a dream or if it is a very absurd reality. This book made me realize that sometimes social rankings and social classes are unnecessary. If someone is doing a good job, they should be recognized for it regardless of how much money they have or if their family comes from royalty. I would recommend this book to others because it is a quick read and won’t take days to get through. It is also comical but it makes you think and consider the type of society you live in. The themes are identity and masculinity, shown through Kovalyov, and society and class, also shown through Kovalyov and his nose. The general subject matter is a man who takes great pride in himself, and loses something very important to him, therefore causing him an immense amount of embarrassment and shame. He watches the body part he lost succeeding in life, even doing better than he was doing. Eventually, everything returns to normal, but his attitude during the time of loss changed greatly. The thesis Gogol is trying to prove is that social ranks are not always as important as people make them seem. Gogol supports the thesis by giving descriptions of the characters and allowing the reader to form their own decisions about them. Kovalyov’s nose is

very important to him, because when it is gone he acts as if his soul has left his body. When he is trying to publish his advertisement, he says it is „about my own nose, which is the same as about myself“ (217). This touches on Kovalyov’s masculinity because a lot of men associate masculinity with having male anatomy, and this is how they would feel if they woke up one morning and it was gone. A nose has somewhat of a phallic shape, so this comparison can easily be seen. Kovalyov also avoids women when his nose is missing, something he has never done before. This can also be paralleled to losing male anatomy, because he forgets how to flirt and suddenly does not want to talk to women anymore. He used to be very confident, because of his rank and because he kept himself clean cut. When he is talking to the clerk at the newspaper company, they seem to be competing about their masculinity. The clerk offers Kovalyov snuff, which can only be used when the person has a nose, and Kovalyov reacts in a very offended manner. Gogol is constantly mocking the vanity of society because Kovalyov acts like a completely different person when his nose is not on his face. His vanity is shown on page 225 when he goes to the doctor in an attempt to reattach his nose. He says „How am I to remain without a nose?“ and „I know lots of people of good social position.“ These statements show how much importance he places on his nose and how embarrassed he is without it. The doctor attempts to reassure him by saying „I assure you that without a nose you will be as healthy as with one.“ This can be compared to society trying to reassure males that their masculinity is still valid regardless of what they wear or what they like to do. In summary, part I begins with a barber named Ivan. He wakes up and decides he wants a loaf of bread, and when he cuts it in half, he finds a nose. He instantly recognizes the nose because it belongs to one of his customers, Kovalyov. He tries to get rid of the nose due to the fear that someone will blame him for cutting it off. He goes for a walk and ends up throwing the nose off a bridge, and he is caught by a police official. He denies doing anything and offers the policeman free shave twice or three times a week. Part II begins with Kovalyov waking up and looking for a pimple that he saw on his nose the night before. Instead of finding the pimple on his nose, he finds that he does not have a nose at all and he decides to go right to the chief of police. On his way to the police station, he runs into his nose and has a conversation with it. He finds that his nose is a fifth rank, a State Councillor. He is ashamed and embarrassed that his nose is a higher rank than him, and he rushes to a newspaper office to publish an advertisement for his missing nose. The clerk laughs at him and informs him that they cannot publish any more absurd articles, and upon Kovalyov proving that his nose is actually missing, agrees to publish it. Kovalyov then goes to the police inspector. The police inspector tells him that he came at a terrible time and

pays no mind to him. Kovalyov heads home, and after a little bit, a police officer shows up at his door and informs him that they have found his missing nose. He identifies it and takes it home with him, and despite several attempts, cannot reattach his nose to his face. He goes to the doctor, who tells him that he will be just as healthy without a nose. Kovalyov refuses to believe this, and rumors of his missing nose spread around the town. People gather just to see him, which can be compared to bullying just because someone in society is different. He wakes up the next morning, in the beginning of part III, and his nose is back on his face. He continues with his everyday routine and life, but he now always has a smile on his face and even once stopped in a shop to buy something, which he did not usually do before his nose had disappeared and reappeared on his face. This short story, through Kovalyov losing his nose, shows how masculinity can be fragile. Gogol also mocks the importance society places on external appearance and how vain people can be. The final chapter of the story focuses on Kovalyov waking up to find his nose back on his face, and going about his day as he normally would. This makes the reader question if the entire story was a dream, because Yakovlevich woke up to find the nose in his bread, Kovalyov woke up to find his nose missing, and next time he wakes up, his nose is back. Gogol also mocks the social classes and ranks by ranking the nose higher than the person it came from. This seems absurd, but it shows that ranks are all man-made and unimportant. Overall, the story was good and makes the reader think and question a lot. I would recommend it to people if they want a comical yet meaningful read. I would give it four out of five stars.

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