The Government Inspector Study Guide

The Government Inspector by Nikolai Gogol

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Introduction

The Government Inspector, by Nikolai Gogol, has also been translated into English under the titles *The Inspector General*, and *The Inspector*. The written play was brought to the attention of the Tsar Nicholas I, who liked it so much that he insisted on its production. *The Government Inspector* premiered at the Alexandrinsky Theatre, in Saint Petersburg, in 1836. The tsar, who was among the first to see the play, was said to have commented that the play ridiculed everyone—most of all himself.

The plot of *The Government Inspector* hinges on a case of mistaken identity, when a lowly impoverished young civil servant from Saint Petersburg, Hlestakov, is mistaken by the members of a small provincial town for a high-ranking government inspector. The town's governor, as well as the leading government officials, fear the consequences of a visit by a government inspector, should he observe the extent of their corruption. Hlestakov makes the most of this misconception, weaving elaborate tales of his life as a high-ranking government official and accepting generous bribes from the town officials. After insincerely proposing to the governor's daughter, Hlestakov flees before his true identity is discovered. The townspeople do not discover their mistake until after he is long gone and moments before the announcement of the arrival of the real government inspector.

The Government Inspector ridicules the extensive bureaucracy of the Russian government under the tsar as a thoroughly corrupt system. Universal themes of human corruption and the folly of self-deception are explored through this drama of Russian life. The governor's famous line, as he turns to address the audience directly, "What are you laughing at? You are laughing at yourselves," illustrates this theme, which is summed up in the play's epigraph, "If your face is crooked, don't blame the mirror."

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Author Biography

Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol, named after Saint Nikolai, was born in 1809, in the small town of Velikie Sorochintsy, in the Ukraine, then part of Russia. His parents, Maria Ivanovna and Vasily Afanasevich Gogol-Yanovsky, were landowners. Gogol enrolled in the High School for Advanced Study in Nezhin, in 1821, where his classmates, observing his various physical and social peculiarities, nicknamed him "the mysterious dwarf." In school, he developed an interest in literature and acting. In 1825, when Gogol was sixteen years old, his father died. In 1828, Gogol arrived in Saint Petersburg, intent on becoming a civil servant. Obtaining a disappointingly low-level, low-paying post in the government bureaucracy, Gogol focused his ambitions on writing.

His very first publication, in 1829, was mostly ignored; it was given scathing reviews by the critics who did, however, make note of it. Humiliated and discouraged by this reception, Gogol purchased all the remaining copies of his work and burned them. After an equally unrewarding stint at a second government post, Gogol began teaching history at a girl's boarding school in 1831. *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka*, Gogol's two-volume collection of stories derived from Ukrainian folklore, was published in 1831 and 1832. The collection was instantly well received. Gogol soon gained the attention of Aleksandr Pushkin, Russia's leading literary figure, who provided him with ideas for two of his most important works.

In 1834, he began a position as assistant professor of medieval history at Saint Petersburg University. Gogol quickly proved himself a resounding failure as a professor, in part because he was not sufficiently knowledgeable in his subject, and left this post after only one year. During that year, Gogol, while generally neglecting his teaching duties, published two books of short stories, *Mirgorod* and *Arabesques*; a collection of essays; as well as two plays, *Marriage* and *The Government Inspector* (also translated variously as *The Inspector General*, and *The Inspector*). *The Government Inspector* was brought to the attention of the tsar, who liked it so much that he requested the first theatrical production, which was performed in 1836.

Gogol, reacting to heavy criticism by the government officials his play lampooned, declared that "everyone is against me" and left Russia. He spent the next twelve years in self-imposed exile. During this time, Gogol traveled extensively throughout Europe, staying in Germany, Switzerland, and Paris, eventually settling primarily in Rome. After Pushkin died in 1837, Gogol inherited the mantle of the leading Russian writer of the day. Gogol's literary masterpiece *Dead Souls* and the first edition of his collected works were published in 1842. In 1848, he returned to Russia, settling in Moscow.

Gogol became increasingly preoccupied with religious concerns, eventually taking council from a fanatical priest who influenced him to burn his manuscript for the second volume of *Dead Souls*. Gogol died at the age of forty-two in 1852 as the result of a religious fast.

Plot Summary

Act 1

The play is set in a small town in provincial Russia, in the 1830s. Act 1 takes place in a room in the governor's house. The governor has called together the town's leading officials—including the judge, the superintendent of schools, the director of charities, the town doctor, and a local police officer—to inform them that a government inspector is due to arrive from Saint Petersburg. The governor explains that this government inspector is to arrive "incognito" with "secret instructions" to assess the local government and administration of the town. The governor, in a panic, instructs his officials to quickly cover up the many unethical practices and general corruption of the local town authorities. The brothers Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky, two local landowners, rush in to inform the governor and his officials that they have seen the government inspector staying at the local inn. As the governor is leaving to greet the "Very Important Person" at the inn, his wife and his daughter, Marya, enter, asking about the inspector.

Act 2

Act 2 takes place in Hlestakov's room at the inn. Ossip, the middle-age servant of Hlestakov, muses that his master, a young man of about twenty-three years, is a government clerk of the lowest rank, who has lost all of his money gambling, and is unable to pay his bill for two weeks' food and lodging at the inn. The governor enters, assuming that Hlestakov is indeed the government inspector. He offers to show Hlestakov the local institutions, such as the prison, whereupon Hlestakov thinks he is being arrested for not paying his bill. The confusion continues, however, until the governor invites Hlestakov to stay at his home, and the young man goes along with this apparent generosity without understanding that he is being mistaken for someone else.

Act 3

Act 3 takes place in the governor's house. The governor's wife and daughter are eagerly awaiting the arrival of the government inspector. Hlestakov and the governor enter, the governor having given him a tour of the hospital and a hearty meal. Finally catching on that he is being mistaken for a high-ranking government official, Hlestakov launches into an elaborate fantasy of his luxurious and privileged life in Saint Petersburg. When Hlestakov retires to his room in the governor's house, the governor's wife and daughter bicker over which of them he was flirting with.

Act 4

Act 4 also takes place in the governor's house. The governor sends in each of his town officials to give Hlestakov as much money as he asks of them. The governor hopes this

bribe money will keep Hlestakov from reporting them to the officials in Saint Petersburg. Hlestakov makes the most of this opportunity, asking each man for increasingly extravagant amounts of money. When they have all left, Hlestakov writes a letter to his friend, Tryapichkin, in Saint Petersburg, describing the situation for the sake of amusement. A group of local shopkeepers arrive to speak to Hlestakov regarding the extensive corruption and bribery that takes place on the part of the governor. When they have left, Hlestakov proceeds to flirt with Marya, the governor's daughter; however, the minute she leaves the room, he flirts with the governor's wife. But, when Marya walks in to find Hlestakov pleading his love to the governor's wife, he immediately proposes marriage to her (Marya). When the governor enters, he does not initially believe Hlestakov has proposed marriage to his daughter, but he is soon convinced. At this point, Ossip enters, having made plans for Hlestakov to leave the town as quickly as possible, before his deception is discovered. Hlestakov tells the governor and his wife and daughter that he is leaving town for only a few days, but he will return soon to marry Marya.

Act 5

Act 5 continues in the governor's house. The governor and his wife boast of the luxurious and privileged life they will lead in Saint Petersburg once their daughter has married this high-ranking official. The postmaster arrives, having intercepted and read Hlestakov's letter to his friend in Saint Petersburg, revealing that he has deceived the entire town, and cheated them out of large sums of money. Calling himself an "idiot," the governor wonders that he could have been so foolish as to mistake the young man for "an illustrious personage." At this point, the governor turns to the theater audience and utters the famous line, "What are *you* laughing at? You are laughing at yourselves." Just then, a gendarme (a soldier who serves as an armed police force) enters with the announcement that the real "inspector authorized by the Imperial government" has arrived, and awaits the governor at the inn. The play ends with a famous "tableau vivant," in which each character remains frozen in a posture of surprise and fear upon the announcement that the real government inspector has arrived.

Act 1, Scenes 1, 2, and 3

Act 1, Scenes 1, 2, and 3 Summary

This satirical Russian comedy tells the story of what happens when the Mayor and several other self-important officials of a small Russian town mistake a small-time con artist for an important government official. Hypocrisies are exposed and foolishnesses revealed as the officials offer increasingly extravagant gifts in order to placate and impress their visitor at the same time as the visitor becomes more reckless in his greed.

Scene 1 - The first act is set in a room in the Mayor's home. Several town officials have gathered for a meeting, including the Mayor, the Judge, the Warden of Charities, the Inspector of Schools, the Chief of Police, and the District Physician. The Mayor tells the others some unpleasant news - the town is to be visited by a government inspector. As the officials react with shock, the Mayor reads a letter from a friend in which he warns the Mayor of the inspection. The friend also refers to the idea that everyone is guilty of the occasional little sin, and suggests the Mayor and his officials take precautions. The officials discuss possible reasons for the inspection, including the possibility that the country is about to go to war, but the Mayor advises them to turn their attention to what they need to do to pass the inspection. As he issues specific directions to each official, he refers to the little sins (like taking bribes) his friend mentioned in the letter, says he's making arrangements to cover them up, and adds that he thinks they're mitigated by the fact that he attends church.

Scene 2 - The Postmaster runs in, eager for news about the arrival of the Inspector. The Mayor takes him aside, saying he's heard complaints about how he treats the shopkeepers, and adding that he suspects someone is spreading lies about him. He asks the Postmaster to steam open all the letters that go through the post office to find out whether anyone is sending mail that they should not send. The Postmaster says he does that anyway, because he is curious about what people are doing in their lives, and the Mayor asks whether he has heard anything about the Inspector's visit. The Postmaster says that he has not. The Judge, who has been eavesdropping on this conversation, tells the Mayor and Postmaster to be careful, offers the Mayor one of his new puppies as a "gift," and suggests they go hunting soon. The Mayor tells him he's got too much on his mind to even think about hunting.

Scene 3 - Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky come in, interrupting and contradicting each other as they tell how they met in the market, heard about the visit of the Inspector, and went searching for more information. They recount how they were having lunch in an inn, encountered a young man whom the Innkeeper told them is an official from St. Petersburg. They say the Innkeeper also told them that the official has been there for two weeks, that he never leaves the inn, and has everything charged to an expense account. They then suggest that the young man is the inspector. The Mayor panics at the thought the inspector has already been in town for two weeks, referring to the filthy the streets, and the fact that a soldier's widow has been publicly flogged. He and the

officials debate the best way to proceed, finally concluding that the best thing to do would be to go and pay a friendly, informal call. The Mayor sends an assistant to fetch the Chief of the Police as the Judge, the Warden of Charities, the Inspector of Schools, and the Postmaster run off to get their offices clean and organized.

Act 1, Scenes 1, 2, and 3 Analysis

This play is a satire, a genre of comedy in which the habits, traits, or value systems of an individual or group are exaggerated in order to point out their foolishness. The target of the satire in this play is government corruption and hypocrisy, with the various small town officials representing any official or politician who says one thing in order to create a positive impression but is, in fact, doing something quite different, either out of laziness or a desire to maximize power or income. All the officials here, most particularly the Mayor, are vividly portrayed examples of just such individuals, and all define by their actions throughout the play a secondary characteristic of those who practice such corruption - the determination to do whatever it takes to preserve their position. As a result of this determination, the style of action later in the play veers into that of farce, a genre of comedy in which characters act in increasingly desperate ways in order to preserve their status quo. The result of this shift in style is a more clear definition of the play's thematic point about the selfishness and foolishness of such behavior and attitudes, a thematic point still relevant today. Even though the play was first performed over one hundred and seventy years ago, it is very easy to see the self-serving, self-protective behavior of the officials of this town reflected in the similar behavior of the politicians and government officials of today.

It must be noted that the action of the act is continuous, and that there are no breaks between the scenes. The structure of *The Government Inspector* is built on what are called "French Scenes," the beginnings and endings of which are determined by the entrances and exits of characters. In other words, when a new character comes into a scene, a new scene begins. Likewise, after a character has left a scene, another new scene begins. It is interesting to look at the point at which French scenes begin and end to determine what changes about the action, intent or content of each scene with the entrance of each character. For example, in Scene 3, Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky come in with their story of the young man at the inn, news of which sends the plot in a different direction - from this point on, the action is less concerned with worrying about the inspector and more with how to cope with his presence. The dramatic point of the French-ness of Scene 2 appears later in the scene, when the Mayor tells the Postmaster to continue to steam open all the letters going through the post office. This foreshadows the play's climactic moment four acts from now, in which the Postmaster, who has done exactly what the Mayor has told him, reveals the truth about the identity of the so-called government inspector.

A second piece of foreshadowing occurs in the Mayor's passing reference to the beating of the Soldier's Widow. This foreshadows the appearance of the widow later in the play when she comes to complain to the inspector about how she's been treated. A third

piece of foreshadowing is the Mayor's reference to the shopkeepers, who themselves appear with complaints about the Mayor's behavior in Act 4, Scene 10.

Act 1, Scenes 4, 5, and 6

Act 1, Scenes 4, 5, and 6 Summary

Scene 4 - The Assistant returns, and the Mayor asks where the police lieutenant is. The Assistant tells him the lieutenant is drunk. The Mayor panics and gets ready to leave for the inn to greet the Inspector. Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky argue over which of them gets to ride with the Mayor in his carriage and which has to run behind. As they argue, the Mayor comments that his sword-of- state has not been properly cleaned and repaired. He also complains about the shopkeepers, and tells the Assistant he had better behave himself since he knows how frequently the Assistant steals things.

Scene 5 - The Chief of Police appears, reporting that he's done as ordered and started his men cleaning the streets. He and the Mayor argue about how the Lieutenant could have been allowed to get drunk, and then the Mayor issues instructions on the way to make the town look as if it is clean and productive, and on making sure all the policemen and civic employees are happy. He calls out to God how miserable he is, and promises to light a huge candle in God's honor if the situation works out, saying that he will steal wax from every candle-maker in town to make it. In his frantic haste, he puts on a hat-box instead of a hat. The Chief of Police tells him what he has done and the Mayor rips the box off, issuing more instructions on ways that the corruption of the town is to be hidden, and the manner in which the police are to behave.

Scene 6 - As the Mayor, the Chief of Police, and the Assistant run off, Anna and Maria hurry on, anxious to hear the news about the inspector. From offstage, the Mayor shouts that he does not have time to talk, and Anna becomes angry with Maria, saying that if Maria was more organized, they would have been able to hear more news. Maria tries to calm Anna down, but Anna is having none of it, saying Maria was too busy thinking about the Postmaster to pay attention to anything else and complaining that all she thinks about is men. She tells Maria to run behind the Mayor's carriage, find out where he's going, and run right back and tell her.

Act 1, Scenes 4, 5, and 6 Analysis

Already the action of the play is moving into an almost farcical higher gear, as the Mayor's panic drives him to make increasingly bizarre demands of his officials, make increasingly silly mistakes, such as putting on a hatbox instead of a hat. Perhaps most importantly, the Mayor's panicked actions reveal how foolish and hypocritical he truly is. This point is illustrated most clearly by the way he talks about stealing wax in order to make a giant candle with which to thank God for his deliverance from the Inspector. It's clear at this point that the play has increased the breadth of its thematic point, warning that even those who say they're faithful and religious can't truly be trusted. It becomes possible in this moment to see even more of a resonance with today's society, in which

professions of faith and religious belief are sometimes masks for unscrupulous, selfish, immoral behavior.

The play's portrayal of hypocrisy appears in another aspect in the character of Anna, who, it becomes clear later in the play, is guilty of exactly the same kind of man-obsession of which she accuses her daughter. The play's satirical target broadens further to include sexual hypocrisy as well as political hypocrisy, suggesting that what the play is really about is an attack on two-facedness and pretense in general, as opposed to the specific situation of politicians and government.

Act 2, Scenes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7

Act 2, Scenes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 Summary

Scene 1 - Act 2 is set in Khlestakov's room at the inn. Osip lies on the bed, complaining in soliloquy about how hungry he is and how badly he has been treated. He talks sarcastically and angrily about how Khlestakov always wants more and better than what is available, and says that St. Petersburg is the only place where they could live a good, respected life. He refers to the way Khlestakov refuses to work and always goes through the money sent to him by his father too quickly, indulging himself in fancy dinners and cab rides rather than spending money wisely. He also talks about how Khlestakov manipulates others into supporting him, adding that he only works for the government as a lowly civil servant.

Scene 2 - Khlestakov comes in, angry that Osip has been lying on his bed and telling him to go down to the dining room and order lunch. Osip refuses, Khlestakov becomes angry, and Osip tells him that not only is the Landlord refusing to feed them and give them credit, but he is also threatening to report Khlestakov to the Mayor to have him put in jail. Khlestakov again orders Osip to go and ask for food. Osip says he is going to send the Landlord up to talk to Khlestkov and goes out.

Scene 3 - In soliloquy, Khlestakov complains that he is hungry. He also says that he lost all his money when he was cheated in a card game, and complains that none of the shopkeepers of the town will give him any credit.

Scene 4 - Osip returns with a Waiter, who tells Khlestakov he's under orders from the Landlord to not serve him any more. Khlestakov pleads with the Waiter to try to make the Landlord understand he has to eat, and the Waiter goes out, followed by Osip.

Scene 5 - Again in soliloquy, Khlestakov tries to figure out what he'll do if the Landlord refuses. He rejects the idea of selling his clothes, fantasizes about what would have happened if a friend in St. Petersburg had rented him a carriage as he promised to do, and complains that the town is low class.

Scene 6 - Osip and the Waiter return with food, and the Waiter says the Landlord told him to tell Khlestakov that this will be the last time that he will do so. Khlestakov quickly starts eating, complaining all the while about how little food there is and how bad it is. The Waiter starts to take it away but Khlestakov continues to both eat and complain, giving the remains of his soup and his roast to Osip. The Waiter clears away the dishes and goes out, followed by Osip.

Scene 7 - Khlestakov complains that he feels as though he hasn't eaten anything. Osip returns with news that the Mayor has arrived. Khlestakov panics, believing that the Landlord has already spoken to the Mayor and that the Mayor has come to arrest him.

He says that he cannot go to prison and resolves to try to intimidate the Mayor into not arresting him.

Act 2, Scenes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 Analysis

This series of brief scenes introduces the character of Khlestakov, the young man at the inn who Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky spoke of earlier, and who the Mayor is about to mistake for the government inspector. There are two essential purposes here. The first is to explain why Khlestakov behaves as he does later in the play, taking advantage of the Mayor and his officials. The reasons are first that he is hungry, and secondly that he is a con man, journeying throughout the country making his living by manipulating others into giving him food, money, shelter, and clothes. The second purpose of this section is to show that Khlestakov and the Mayor are essentially the same sort of person. It is already been shown that the Mayor is prepared to go to almost any lengths to preserve his position, and in this sequence it's seen for the first time that Khlestakov is prepared to do the same thing. Later in the play, his greed for a high and easy life drives him to make increasingly outrageous demands, expanding the play's satirical target yet again.

There have been glimpses of political hypocrisy in the Mayor and his officials and of sexual hypocrisy in Anna's behavior. At this point, there are indications of social hypocrisy in Khlestakov. Social hypocrisy is the hypocrisy of those who are of relatively low status in terms of class, birth, education or employment, but pretend to be of higher status in order to gain control, influence or sustenance. While it's true that Khlestakov just wants to eat, his hypocrisy is still plain; he isn't prepared to be who he is, so he pretends to be someone else to get what he thinks he deserves. In other words, he wants the good life but isn't prepared to work for it.

Frequently in this section, and indeed throughout the play, the theatrical device of the soliloquy is employed. A soliloquy is a speech in which a character speaks aloud his thoughts, feelings and reactions, letting us in on his state of being in a way that might not otherwise be clear. There's little or no deep or profound meaning in the soliloquies here, as there might be in the soliloquies of a character like Hamlet. There is, however, the opportunity for further insight into who Khlestakov is and why he is that way than there might be if the soliloquies didn't exist. The reason this insight is important, particularly at this point in the action, is so that it is clear from the outset that Khlestakov is not the dreaded government inspector. Rather than creating suspense about whether the corruption of the Mayor and his officials will be discovered, there is instead, a sense of suspense as to whether Khlestakov will be discovered, and just how far the Mayor and the others will go to protect their positions. This perspective allows the action to become both ironic and increasingly farcical.

Act 2, Scenes 8, 9, and 10

Act 2, Scenes 8, 9, and 10 Summary

Scene 8 - The Mayor comes in, followed by Dobchinsky. The Mayor and Khlestakov see each other, freeze in fear, and stare at each other for some time. It's evident that they're each terrified of what he thinks the other is going to do. After a moment, the Mayor recovers and introduces himself. Khlestakov quickly protests that he fully intends to pay his bill and blames the Landlord for being difficult and for giving him bad food. The Mayor apologizes for the Landlord's behavior, saying there's always fresh food available and offering Khlestakov more pleasant quarters. Khlestakov refuses, saying he believes the Mayor is talking about prison and saying he's a government official from St. Petersburg. In an aside, the Mayor misinterprets Khlestakov's fear as anger, and assumes the reason he is angry is that the shopkeepers have gotten to him first. Khlestakov becomes angrier, the Mayor begs that he not ruin him, and Khlestakov again refuses to go to different quarters.

The Mayor blurts out that he's truly not to blame for any wrongdoing, saying he only did what he did because of inexperience and poor pay, and adding that any bribes he took were only little ones. He also mentions the sergeant's widow, suggesting that anyone who told Khlestakov that she was beaten is lying. Khlestakov wonders what he's talking about, and says again all he wants to do is pay his bill and go. In an aside, the Mayor reacts as though he believes Khlestakov is a clever politician and manipulator. He again offers Khlestakov nicer accommodation, saying it is his duty to assist all visitors. This leads Khlestakov to ask for a loan of two hundred rubles, which the Mayor gives him. The implication is that he is giving Khlestakov, who he believes to be the government inspector, a bribe to ignore his "little sins."

Khlestakov promises to repay the loan. In an aside, the Mayor reveals his relief that Khlestakov took the bribe, and that he handed Khlestakov four hundred rubles. Khlestakov orders Osip to fetch the waiter. As Osip goes out, Khlestakov invites the Mayor and Dobchinsky, who has been watching the conversation nervously, to sit down. In an aside, the Mayor comments that he needs to play along in order to find out what Khlestakov, whom he still thinks is the Inspector, wants. He then tells Khlestakov that he and Dobchinsky just happened to be passing by, found out Khlestakov was at the inn, and stopped in to welcome him, saying flatteringly that it is his duty as a mayor and as a Christian to treat guests well. Khlestakov thanks him for the loan, admitting that he didn't know how he was going to pay his bill.

The Mayor asks where Khlestakov will go next, referring in an aside to how smoothly Khlestakov is lying. Khlestakov explains that he's traveling only because his father has demanded to see him, and the Mayor comments again in an aside on how smooth a liar he is. As Khlestakov talks about how miserable life is away from St. Petersburg, the Mayor talks about how awful the room is and then invites Khlestakov to stay in his home. Khlestakov accepts the invitation with delight, and the Mayor says how glad both

he and his wife will be to have such an important visitor. He then expresses his hope that Khlestakov doesn't think he's trying to flatter him, and Khlestakov says he's grateful for sincerity in anyone and that he can't stand hypocrites.

Scene 9 - The Waiter and Osip return. When Khlestakov asks for his bill, the Waiter says he already has one. As they argue over how much the bill actually is, the Mayor dismisses the waiter and says he will take care of it. The Waiter goes out.

Scene 10 - The Mayor offers to take Khlestakov on a tour of the town and its institutions. When Khlestakov accepts, the Mayor sends Dobchinsky out with two messages, one for Anna and one for the Warden of Charities, telling them to get ready. As he writes the messages, the Mayor speaks in aside of his plans to get "the inspector" drunk and find out why he's there. As he gives the messages to Dobchinsky, Bobchinsky, who has been eavesdropping, falls into the room, bringing the door with him. The Mayor angrily shoves him out the door, and then ushers Khlestakov politely out of the room.

Act 2, Scenes 8, 9, and 10 Analysis

An aside is a theatrical device allowing the audience to hear a character's inner thoughts, feelings, and reactions. The difference between an aside and a soliloquy is that an aside is generally spoken directly to the audience while there are other characters on the stage, with the understanding that the other characters cannot hear it. A soliloquy, on the other hand, is spoken when a character is alone on stage. Asides are most often used to reveal the truth of what a character is feeling or thinking, what's really going on underneath the words, expressions and actions he's displaying. In other words, asides function as a way to reveal what lies behind the character's public face, something that the Mayor's asides do quite clearly here. It's interesting to note in this case how they also illustrate a thematic point. Because an audience is aware of what he is truly thinking and planning even while he is trying to charm and placate the man he thinks is the inspector, his thematically relevant hypocrisy is revealed in greater detail.

Khlestakov, by contrast, is simply telling the truth, perhaps for the first time in his adult life, and interestingly enough, is handed hundreds of rubles, the Russian currency. In this moment, there is a glimpse of another aspect of the play's thematic point that, even in the face of hypocrisy and lies, honesty exists and is rewarded. That being said, it's shown later in the play that Khlestakov, in taking advantage of the situation and manipulating the Mayor and the other townspeople into giving him more and more money, is as much of a hypocrite as the Mayor. He is prepared to be honest as long as it gets him what he wants, but later in the play, honesty goes out the window when he realizes that he is able to get more than he needs by being someone other than who he is. This is apparent at the end of this section, as Khlestakov goes along with what he must understand, on some level, is a huge misunderstanding. It also becomes apparent in the middle section of Act 3 that Khlestakov is all about posturing and pretense. All of this makes Khlestakov's comments about how much he loathes hypocrisy and is grateful for honesty both ironic and very funny.

The reason Khlestakov does what he does is simple - he got money once, and as far as he's concerned there's no telling how much more he'll get if he goes along for the ride. A key point to remember, however, is that he doesn't know that the Mayor and the other officials think he's an inspector - he only thinks they're foolish and gullible, behaving with a strange kind of subservience that he can't help but enjoy. In this way, the play's layers of confusion and misunderstanding, in truly farcical fashion, continue to pile up with increasingly comic, and ironic, consequences.

Once again, the appearance of the soldier's widow and of the shopkeepers is foreshadowed by the Mayor's reference to them.

Act 3, Scenes 1, 2, 3, and 4

Act 3, Scenes 1, 2, 3, and 4 Summary

Scene 1 - Act 3 takes place in the same room of the Mayor's home as Act 1. As Anna and Maria wait for news, Anna complains again that they would know much more about the situation if only Maria had not delayed them. Maria tells Anna to be patient, and says she sees someone coming. Anna says she is imagining things, but then sees about whom Maria is talking. They argue over the identity of the messenger, Anna shouts for him to hurry, and when he gets closer, she demands that he tell her the news. She then comments angrily that he is not going to say anything until he is inside.

Scene 2 - Dobchinsky comes in, and Anna complains that he has been slow in coming back to tell her what is going on. Dobchinsky protests he came back as soon as he could, tells her that the man at the inn is in fact the Inspector, and says with pride that it was he and Bobchinsky who figured out his identify. He goes on to recount the events in the room at the inn, saying the Mayor and the Inspector have gone to visit the hospital and will soon be at the house. After commenting that anyone has the right to be nervous about the inspector's visit, Anna demands to know what he is like. Dobchinsky describes him as young, but says he speaks like someone much older, and has quick and watchful eyes. Dobchinsky also relates feeling quite uneasy around him. He then hands Anna the note written by the Mayor. At first, Anna is confused, reading something about caviar and pickled herring, but Dobchinsky explains that the Mayor wrote his note on the first piece of paper he could find. Anna finds the Mayor's real note and reads it aloud, learning that he wants her to prepare the guest bedroom. She calls for Mishka, who comes in and receives orders from Anna on what is needed from the shops and how to set up the bedroom. Mishka goes out and Dobchinsky soon follows, saying he needs to keep an eye on the inspection.

Scene 3 - Anna and Maria discuss what they're going to wear when they meet the Inspector, with Maria offering perceptive comments on what looks good on Anna and what doesn't and Anna refusing to hear them. They go out to get dressed.

Scene 4 - Mishka comes in and tidies the room. Osip comes in carrying Khlestakov's trunk. Mishka asks whether "the general" is coming soon, and after some confusion over who Miska is referring to, Osip says that he will be there very soon and asks for some food. Mishka says all that's available until "the general" shows up for his dinner is plain food like cabbage or a meat pie, and Osip says that's fine. Together they carry out the trunk.

Act 3, Scenes 1, 2, 3, and 4 Analysis

The essential purpose of this sequence of scenes is to define the character of Anna, the mayor's wife. It becomes clear as the result of her treatment of her daughter and her

servants that she's just as greedy for power and control as her husband. It's also clear, however, that she's not nearly as good as he is at disguising it; she's clearly very aggressive. This means that on one level there is no hypocrisy in Anna's character. She is what she is and wants what wants. It is only when she comes face to face with Khlestakov that it is revealed just how much of a sexual hypocrite she actually is, insisting that her daughter behave one way while she herself behaves in exactly the opposite way.

Aside from seeing Anna's temper and negative attitudes towards her daughter and other people, Anna's character is also defined by the contrast with the character of Osip. Even though Osip goes along with the misunderstandings about his master's identity, he is revealed as a relatively simple character with simple goals. This is indicated by the way he is content with simple food, which makes it clear that he is only going along with the misunderstanding about his master's identify because he feels it is the best way to get something to eat. In short, all he really wants is what he needs. This idea is reinforced by the moment in Act 3 Scene 10, in which Osip admits in an aside that the only reason he lies is so he can get food. That being said, he is not completely immune to temptation. This later scene reveals that Osip, like his master, gives in to greed. As a result, the play makes a secondary thematic point - that no one, even people like Osip who have plain goals and needs, is able to resist the lure of more than is necessary.

Act 3, Scenes 5 and 6

Act 3, Scenes 5 and 6 Summary

Scene 5 - The Mayor and Khlestakov come in, followed by the other officials. Khlestakov talks about how impressed he was with the hospital and saying that no-one in any other towns he visits ever shows him anything. The Mayor says in other towns, officials are too busy lining their own pockets to do their jobs well, set a good example and take care of visitors. Khlestakov talks about how much he enjoyed his lunch, which conversation reveals was served in the hospital and which leads the Warden of Charities to talk about how things have improved immensely in all the charitable institutions since he took charge. This in turn leads the Mayor to talk about how difficult his job is, how many things he's responsible for improving, and how that improvement is its own reward, saying he doesn't care for medals or awards or decorations. In an aside, the Warden of Charities comments on how hypocritical the Mayor is being.

Khlestakov asks what there is to do for fun in the town. The Mayor comments in an aside that he knows what Khlestakov is really asking and then says aloud that there is no gambling in the town at all. The Inspector of Schools comments in an aside that the Mayor won several hundred rubles from him while playing cards a few nights previously, and calls the Mayor a lying toad. Khlestakov mentions that he thinks there can be a lot of fun found in playing cards.

Scene 6 - Anna and Maria come in, and are introduced by the Mayor. Anna and Khlestakov pass increasingly flirtatious and boastful compliments back and forth, culminating with Khlestakov commenting on how much he misses life in St. Petersburg, the good relationship he has with his superior, and the fact that he turned down a promotion because he was happy in the position he had. He also says that he is often mistaken for someone more important, brags about the many magazines he has written for and the many plays he's created, listing several that were clearly written by someone else. It's clear in this moment that he's both bragging and lying. At one point Maria catches him in a lie, Anna accuses her of trying to make trouble, and Khlestakov manages to get out of it, turning the conversation in a long speech to the beauty and size of his house in St. Petersburg, the extravagant parties he throws there, and his political and social influence. The Mayor becomes so awestruck by everything Khlestakov has said that he can speak only in gibberish. Khlestakov becomes angry with him, but the Mayor recovers his speech and offers to show Khlestakov his room so he can have a nap. At first Khlestakov says he doesn't nap, but then changes his mind and goes out with the Mayor.

Act 3, Scenes 5 and 6 Analysis

At the core of the action in this section is the idea of creating a good impression. In the case of the Mayor and the other officials, they're all puffing themselves up and making

themselves appear proficient in their jobs than they actually are in order to preserve those jobs along with their influence in the town. There are several layers of hypocrisy here, not just the Mayor's. The Warden of Charities and the Inspector are both deeply hypocritical in their comments about the Mayor's hypocrisy. They have just done exactly the same thing in talking themselves up in order to curry favor with "the inspector." Here again, the play makes its thematic point about the foolish, self-deluded nature of hypocrisy. The point is reiterated in a later scene when Anna, the Mayor, and Maria all try to gain favor with "the inspector" through Osip.

In the case of Khlestakov, he too is trying to create a good impression by talking himself up, bragging about people he does not know, homes he does not have, jobs he does not work in, and influence that does not exist. He's doing exactly the same thing as the Mayor and the others for very similar reasons - he just wants money instead of power and safety. The difference between him and the Mayor is that he doesn't pretend to NOT want money. In other words, he's more of a liar than a hypocrite.

Act 3, Scenes 7, 8, 9, and 10

Act 3, Scenes 7, 8, 9, and 10 Summary

Scene 7 - Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky talk about how impressed they were with the Inspector, and rush out to tell others in the town. After they have gone, the Warden of Charities and the Inspector of Schools discuss that even though "the inspector" seems so pleased with them, they are still frightened of receiving a bad report. They too quickly run out.

Scene 8 - As Anna and Maria talk together about how attractive they found "the inspector," they argue over which of them he was more attracted to. Anna accuses Maria of deliberately making trouble, Maria says he was definitely looking at her more often, and Anna says he was only being polite.

Scene 9 - The Mayor comes in says that everyone in government embroiders things they say, but that, even if only half of what "the inspector" said is true, he's still very powerful and intimidating. Anna says she wasn't intimidated at all, but the Mayor angrily says she should be ashamed of herself, flirting with "the inspector" as though he was just another man. He admits that "the inspector" LOOKS like just another man, but the way he spoke and the way he acted gave him away.

Scene 10 - Osip comes in. Anna asks whether "the inspector" is all right, and when Osip says he is resting, the Mayor asks whether Osip has been well fed. He says he has, and when Anna asks whether kings and princes often visit "the inspector," says in an aside that he will go along with the misunderstanding in order to eat more. When he says that yes, his master is visited by important people, Anna and the Mayor begin to compete for his attention, with the Mayor asking what kind of master "the inspector" is and Anna asking questions about his rank and status and the eye color he prefers. As the Mayor tells Anna to be quiet, Osip mentions that, on their travels together, "the inspector" is always asking how well Osip has been treated. The Mayor gives Osip a tip, and Anna tells him to come to her room because she too has something to give him. Maria tells Osip to kiss the inspector for her, leading the Mayor to hurry both women out of the room. As they go, the Mayor begins to ask Osip a question ...

Scene 11 ... but is interrupted by the arrival of the Assistant from Act One, who reports that everything the Mayor demanded has been taken care of. The Mayor tells Osip to go and take care of the inspector, saying he can have anything in the house that he wants. After Osip goes, the Mayor tells the Assistant to stand outside the front door and not to let anyone in, particularly the shopkeepers. He demonstrates that he wants anyone who shows up uninvited to be made to leave, then sends the Assistant out, and goes out himself.

Act 3, Scenes 7, 8, 9, and 10 Analysis

In this scene, it's apparent that the Mayor is anxious about how he might be treated in "the inspector's" report, since he is a kind of servant to him and depends on the inspector's whims and beliefs for his security. In fact, there is a parallel here in the relationship between the Mayor and "the inspector" to the relationship between Osip and Khlestakov. The future of both Osip and the Mayor depend upon the way that "the inspector" is treated. Another aspect to this parallel is that both Osip and the Mayor are hypocrites, pretending to be something that they are not in order to get more than what they deserve. Osip is, in fact, becoming more like his master Khlestakov every minute, taking advantage of this situation without remorse or conscience, purely out of greed. Anna, meanwhile, is becoming more like the Mayor, and both are becoming increasingly irrational as they become increasingly desperate for attention and favor from "the minister." Not only is the play's sense of farce, or desperate action, increasing - the play's thematic point is being made in broader and broader terms as the characters' actions and reactions become more extreme and more foolish.

Act 4, Scenes 1 and 2

Act 4, Scenes 1 and 2 Summary

Scene 1 - Act 4 continues the setting in the Mayor's house. The Judge, the Warden of Charities, the Inspector of Schools, the Chief of Police, the Postmaster, Bobchinsky, and Dobchinsky come in, all arguing about how best to present themselves to "the inspector." They discuss whether they should slip him a bribe, but the Judge says it's too dangerous - he might take it the wrong way. The Judge proposes that they disguise the bribe as a donation. Meanwhile, the Warden suggests that they should not approach "the inspector" as a group, but rather one at a time, speaking privately with him so no one else can hear what is said, and get the wrong idea. They argue over who should go first, but before they can decide, they hear Khlestakov coming, and shove at each other in their haste to get out the door before he discovers them.

Scene 2 - Khlestakov appears, hung-over from all the wine the Mayor gave him the day before. As he wakes up, he speaks in soliloquy about how easy life is for him here, how nice it is to be on the receiving end of generosity that has no ulterior motive, and how both Anna and Maria are pretty enough to have affairs with.

Act 4, Scenes 1 and 2 Analysis

The essential function of these two brief scenes is to lay the foundations for the increasingly farcical action of the following section, as one by one, the officials come in to ingratiate themselves with the Inspector, and Khlestakov takes advantage of their increasing desperation with increasing greed. His comment about generosity is an ironic foreshadowing of what's to come, while his comment on the attractiveness of the two women is also a foreshadowing of their conflict over him in the latter part of this act.

Act 4, Scenes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7

Act 4, Scenes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 Summary

Scene 3 - The Judge comes in and introduces himself. As he makes small talk with Khlestakov, asides reveal how nervous the Judge is and how uncomfortable he is with the idea of giving "the inspector" money. He becomes so nervous that he accidentally drops some money on the floor. Khlestakov asks whether he can borrow it, saying his journeys have left him without cash and promising to pay it back when he gets to his estate. The Judge says that he is glad to serve the authorities in any way, and asks if there are any questions he can answer. When Khlestakov says there are not, the Judge goes out. Khlestakov says the judge is a nice fellow.

Scene 4 - The Postmaster comes in and introduces himself. After some small talk about how pleasant life is in a small town, Khlestakov wonders in an aside whether he might be able to get money from the Postmaster as well and gives him the same story about how his travels have left him without cash, and that he would like to borrow some, and will pay it back. The Postmaster hands over three hundred rubles and asks whether he can answer any questions or concerns. Khlestakov says he has none, the Postmaster goes out, and Khlestakov lights a cigar, commenting on how the Postmaster is also a good fellow.

Scene 5 - The Inspector of Schools comes in and introduces himself. Khlestakov offers him a cigar, and in his nervousness, the Inspector lights the wrong end. Khlestakov jokes that cigars are one of his weaknesses, and women are another, teasing the Inspector about what kind of women he finds attractive. The Inspector becomes uncomfortable and finds it difficult to speak. Khlestakov mentions that there seems to be something in his eyes that always makes people uneasy, and then tells the same money story that he told to the Judge and the Postmaster. The Inspector hands over three hundred rubles, Khlestakov thanks him, and the Inspector goes out, muttering in an aside that he hopes Khlestakov won't want to visit the schools.

Scene 6 - The Warden of Charities comes in, introduces himself, and after some small talk regarding the excellent lunch they had at the hospital the day before, he whispers negative gossip about the Postmaster, the Judge, Dobchinsky and the Inspector to Khlestakov. Khlestakov asks him to put it all in writing, saying he likes having something scandalous to read when he's bored. After more small talk, this time about the Warden's children, Khlestakov again tells his money story and asks to borrow four hundred rubles. The Warden gives it to him and goes out.

Scene 7 - Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky come in and introduce themselves as important landowners. Khlestakov abruptly asks to borrow a thousand rubles. Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky search their pockets and come up with sixty five. As Khlestakov takes the money, Dobchinsky asks for his help in legalizing his illegitimate son's birth and name. Khlestakov says he will do what he can, and then asks Bobchinsky if he can do

anything for him. Bobchinsky asks that the next time "the inspector" sees the Czar to just tell him he exists. Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky apologize for burdening Khlestakov, and go out.

Act 4, Scenes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 Analysis

There are several noteworthy elements in this sequence of scenes. It is important to remember that the officials have no idea who Khlestakov truly is - they still think he is the inspector. It is also important to remember that Khlestakov does not know that they think this of him. He only knows that they are gullible and easily taken advantage of. In other words, the action of this scene is built on a foundation of misunderstanding, the traditional foundation of farcical comedy.

The first noteworthy element here is Khlestakov's mounting greed, illustrated by the way in which the amount of money he asks for repeatedly increases, and by the way in which he becomes more and more aggressive as he asks for it, climaxing in his outrageous and abrupt demand of a thousand rubles from Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky. The second noteworthy element is the way the officials are differentiated even though they are all doing essentially the same thing - the Judge seems troubled by his conscience, the Postmaster is flattered to have someone listen to his opinions, the Inspector is simply nervous, and the Warden becomes surprisingly aggressive in undermining the other officials. It's evident that he intends to make himself look good by making the others look bad, a habit he seems to have picked up from the Mayor. A third noteworthy element is the effective use of the French Scene convention, which clearly defines a pattern of behavior, which in turn builds both momentum and comic tension.

The fourth, and perhaps most noteworthy element in this section, is the moment when the action is driving forwards. At this point in the play, there is a sudden shift in tone, taking us out of the realm of farce and into a moment of human vulnerability. This shift in tone occurs when Bobchinsky makes his request that Khlestakov tell the Czar that he exists. Up to now everyone, including Dobchinsky, has come to Khlestakov with the hope that he can, and will, do something to either maintain or increase their status. It could be argued that Bobchinsky's request to be remembered to the Czar is the same thing. It can also be argued, however, that in this one moment all farce, pretense, hypocrisy and lies are jettisoned so that it becomes possible to hear the voice of a man who only wants to be known to exist - a simple, fundamental human desire.

The naked vulnerability of this request is not only powerful in its own right, but serves to define by contrast the essential shallowness and selfishness of the other characters. It would be interesting to see a production of this play to find out how a director and actors would interpret this moment, particularly how deeply emotional and/or humble Bobchinsky is when he makes his request, and how Khlestakov reacts. Does he allow himself to be moved by the request, or does he just toss it off as being just as selfish as the requests of the others? It seems likely that in the context of the play's theme, the latter reaction would be more appropriate. In other words, the play's thematic points

about shallowness and hypocrisy are made even more clear if, in the face of a simple, humble request, Khlestakov behaves just as shallowly as he always does.

Act 4, Scenes 8, 9, 10, and 11

Act 4, Scenes 8, 9, 10, and 11 Summary

Scene 8 - In soliloquy, Khlestakov finally understands that the officials seem to have mistaken him for an important official. He realizes that a journalist friend in St. Petersburg might make a funny article out of what happened and calls to Osip to bring him pen and paper. As he waits, he counts his money and when he discovers he has over a thousand rubles, he resolves to have another rematch with the man who took all his money playing cards. (This man was first referred to in Act 2 Scene 4.)

Scene 9 - Osip comes in, and Khlestakov sits down and begins writing. Meanwhile, Osip tries to persuade him to leave town while they've still got money and no one has figured out who they are. Khlestakov says he wants to stay for at least another day. Osip says the townspeople will find out the truth eventually, and reminds Khlestakov that his father will be angry if he in not home soon. Khlestakov agrees, and tells Osip to make arrangements for the rental of a carriage. As Khlestakov finishes his letter, Osip shouts out the door for a servant to take the letter to the post office and to arrange for a carriage. Voices are heard from outside - people clamoring to see "the inspector." Khlestakov tells Osip to show them in.

Scene 10 - A group of shopkeepers comes in and is evidently the people the Mayor has been repeatedly referring to throughout the play. They detail, at length, the ways that the Mayor abuses them. They explain that he forces them to house soldiers in their shops, steals cloth to make clothes for his wife and daughter, insists on having gifts presented to him on every special occasion, and threatens flogging and imprisonment to ensure good behavior. The shopkeepers offer "the inspector" gifts as tokens of their hospitality. Khlestakov says he never accepts bribes, but that he does accept loans. The shopkeepers offer him five hundred rubles, and he takes it. The shopkeepers again offer their gifts and even though Khlestakov says again that he does not accept bribes, Osip takes the gifts, along with the string with which the gifts had been wrapped. Khlestakov assures the shopkeepers that he will do his best for them, and ushers them out. Women's voices are heard offstage, and Khlestakov asks that the women outside be allowed in to see him.

Scene 11 - The women come in, introduce themselves, and claim the Mayor has abused them. One of them, a Locksmith's Wife, say the Mayor sent her husband into the army after the families of other men bribed the Mayor to overlook them. She talks at length about how miserable a man the Mayor is and seems willing to talk much longer, but Khlestakov shows her out. The next woman is the sergeant's widow, who was mentioned earlier in the play. She reveals that the Mayor had her beaten because she was mistaken for one of the women causing a public quarrel in the marketplace. Khlestakov says that he will do what he can and the Widow hints that if the Inspector could spare any cash she would be grateful. Khlestakov abruptly tells her that she can

go. More voices are heard outside, petitions for support are handed in through the window, and Khlestakov protests that he doesn't want to hear any more.

Act 4, Scenes 8, 9, 10, and 11 Analysis

The fundamental purpose of this series of scenes is to define Khlestakov's greed in even more vivid terms. Yes, he agrees with Osip that it is time to leave, but there is a clear sense that he is doing so reluctantly, and that he wants to continue his deception for every penny that it is worth. It is interesting to note the way in which he reacts to the women who petition him for help; he does not ask for money and comes across as being somewhat dismissive of their concerns. In fact, Khlestakov becomes downright curt when the Widow hints that she could use some cash, if he can spare any. This is the clearest indictment yet of Khlestakov's character. He has over a thousand unearned rubles in his pocket, but cannot spare any, even for someone who seems to have suffered a profound injustice. The fact that Khlestakov and the Mayor treat the widow in the same way reinforces the idea that they are essentially the same at the core of their characters.

An important piece of foreshadowing occurs in this scene when Khlestakov writes his letter, because the letter plays an essential role in the play's climax in Act 5.

Act 4, Scenes 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16

Act 4, Scenes 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 Summary

Scene 12 - Maria comes in, immediately becoming nervous and flustered at being in the presence of such a great man as "the inspector." Khlestakov flirts with her and compliments her, using extravagant language that Maria says must be the kind of talk men use in St. Petersburg. When he persists in his compliments, Maria says she has to go, but then sits down. She tries to make casual small talk, and when he speaks in increasingly romantic tones, she becomes flustered. When Khlestakov sits close to her, she moves away. He sits closer, she moves away. He moves closer, she pretends to watch a bird. He kisses her shoulder, and she says he has gone too far. He tries to apologize, and she starts to leave. Khlestakov finally protests that he loves her, falling to his knees to beg her forgiveness.

Scene 13 - Khlestakov is still on his knees as Anna comes in, demanding to know what's going on and shouting for Maria to leave. After Maria has run out in tears, Anna expresses surprise at Khlestakov's behavior. In an aside, Khlestakov reveals that he finds Anna just as attractive as he finds Maria, and then aloud speaks just as romantically to Anna as he did to Maria. Anna pretends to not understand, saying he must be talking about her daughter. Khlestakov protests that he is talking about her, speaking even more romantically even though she protests that she is a married woman.

Scene 14 - Maria rushes in with news of the Mayor, but does not say what she came in to say because she is so shocked by the sight of Khlestakov on his knees and flirting with her mother. Anna loses her temper and calls Maria childish and ill-behaved. Maria begins to cry as Anna becomes angrier, accusing her of being stupid. Khlestakov asks her to be reasonable and not condemn their love. Anna cannot believe that it is her daughter who Khlestakov is attracted to, and again becomes angry, saying it's all Maria's fault that their guest is debasing himself. She then threatens to withhold her blessing of their relationship. Maria protests that she'll behave herself.

Scene 15 - The Mayor rushes in, revealing that he knows the shopkeepers and the women have been there, and urging "the inspector" not to believe them. Anna tells the Mayor that there are more important things to think about, and tells him that Khlestakov has asked Maria to marry him. The Mayor says he cannot believe it. Khlestakov and Anna both say that it is true, and Khlestakov threatens to kill himself, saying that when he is dead the Mayor will end up in court to explain his death. The Mayor pleads with him not to kill himself, says again that he is not a bad man, and that everything is happening so quickly that he's completely confused. Anna demands that he give Maria and Khlestakov his blessing and he does, still protesting that he is innocent of all the shopkeepers' charges. When he sees Khlestakov and Maria kissing, he jumps up and down excitedly, saying it's his lucky day.

Scene 16 - Osip comes in, saying the horses and carriage are ready to leave. When the Mayor reacts with surprise, Khlestakov says he'll be back in a day or two, and kisses Maria goodbye. The Mayor asks whether Khlestakov needs a little money, recalling that he said earlier that he was broke. At first Khlestakov says he's fine, but then says he could do with a little more, and asks for four hundred rubles. The Mayor gladly gives it to him, and Khlestakov cheerfully bids goodbye to everyone as he goes out. The others follow him, and voices are heard from offstage as Khlestakov gets into the carriage. The coachman settles him in, and the Mayor asks again when he'll be back. Khlestakov tells him that he will return in a few days, and goodbyes are shouted.

Act 4, Scenes 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 Analysis

This section functions on several levels. The first is to set up the action of Act 5, in which it becomes clear how much investment the Mayor and his family place in the power they believe Maria's marriage will bring, how profoundly their dreams and ideals collapse when they discover the truth, and how vengeful the Mayor becomes as a result. The second is to illustrate again how shallow and manipulative Khlestakov is, as the action points out that he does not care which of the women he becomes involved with as long as he's able to manipulate, take advantage of, and presumably get money from one of them. This point is illustrated further by the scenic structure, with the convention of the French Scene pointing up the similarity of Khlestakov's behavior with the different women. A third level of function can be found in the way Anna's sexual hypocrisy is more vividly defined than ever. She accuses her daughter of behaving in the way that she herself behaved earlier, and would probably behave again if she had the chance. Once again, the breadth and scope of the play's satire is revealed. A final level of function is illustrated in the way both the Mayor and Anna are shown to be even more eager for advancement and influence than first portrayed. This aspect to their characters and the story is developed further in Act 5.

Act 5, Scenes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7

Act 5, Scenes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 Summary

Scene 1 - The setting continues in the Mayor's home. The Mayor, Anna and Maria come in as the Mayor talks about what a fine catch Khlestakov is. Anna says she knew from the start, and the Mayor has a long speech saying that, because of his daughter's excellent marriage, no one in the town will be able to tell him what to do again. He shouts outside to one of the guards, telling him to fetch the shopkeepers. He continues to talk about how much power he now has, and asks Anna whether she wants to keep living in their little town or move to St. Petersburg. Anna says she wants to move, and the Mayor fantasizes about the excellent job he's going to have once he gets there. He imagines himself as a general, Anna reminds him that from now on he's going to be spending his time with high class people, and then they both talk about how wonderful the food will be.

Scene 2 - The Shopkeepers come in, and the Mayor speaks to them angrily and in crude language, saying their power is ended now that his daughter is engaged to the Inspector. He talks at length about how much power he has and how stupid the shopkeepers are and the shopkeepers apologize, but the Mayor remains angry, refusing to accept the apology. The shopkeepers plead to be spared, but the Mayor says all he can do is hope that God forgives them, and then expresses his hopes for a collection of excellent wedding presents for his daughter. The shopkeepers go out.

Scene 3-6- The Judge, the Warden of Charities, a collection of civil servants and their families, Bobchinsky, Dobchinsky, the Inspector of Schools and his wife all come in, offering their congratulations to the Mayor, to Anna, and to Maria.

Scene 7 - The Chief of Police comes in and offers his congratulations. The Judge asks how the arrangement was made. Before the Mayor can say much more than say "the inspector" proposed, Anna goes into great and romantic detail about how he formally asked for Maria's hand. Maria says it did not happen that way at all, and Anna tells her rudely to be quiet. Anna then tells the crowd about the compliments "the inspector" paid her and relates that he actually wanted to marry her and not but realized she was already married and transplanted his affections to Maria. The Mayor says "the inspector" threatened to kill himself if the marriage wasn't allowed, and all the others react with shock. As they offer more congratulations, the Mayor and Anna explain that "the inspector" has gone to visit his family but will be back in a couple of days. There are more shouts of congratulations, but this time they are interspersed with insulting cries of disgusts from the Warden of Charities and a few others. Anna and the Mayor brag about how important they will be once they move to St. Petersburg, and in asides, the Judge and the Warden reveal how foolish they think the Mayor is. After his aside, the Warden asks the Mayor whether he will still remember them all once he is in his new job. Other officials begin to ask him to use his influence in high places to help them and the town.

Anna tells him that he should not make any promises, leading some of the wives to refer spitefully to how nasty she is.

Act 5, Scenes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 Analysis

This section prepares the way for the climax in the following section, illustrating the way the Mayor and Anna quickly and greedily consolidate their personal and political power. This is illuminated by the way that the Mayor mercilessly bullies the shopkeepers, and the manner in which Anna translates compliments paid to Maria into compliments paid to her. It is also illustrated by the way that the Mayor and Anna both accept, with fake humility, the congratulations of the people of the town, and the way that they both brag, with increasing arrogance, about how important they are going to be. In short, to use an old saying, they are riding for a fall - a fall that comes in the play's climactic scene that immediately follows. This sense of structure, of dramatic tension building with increasingly outrageous intensity towards a sudden, revelatory climax, is typical of farcical comedies, and functions well here and in the following scenes to make the thematically-related point that self-delusional hypocrisy is actually a fragile thing, and can be easily undermined or destroyed.

Meanwhile, the play makes its thematic comments on hypocrisy and selfishness not only through the action but also through the asides and comments of the other characters. Not only do these comments further define what is happening onstage, they also reinforce the previously discussed widespread nature of hypocrisy, as the Warden of Charities and the Judge, among others, add their voices of praise to those of the community at large and then turn around and tell us what they really think.

Act 5, Scene 8

Act 5, Scene 8 Summary

The Postmaster rushes in with news that "the inspector" wasn't an inspector at all. Excited conversation reveals that the Postmaster did exactly what he was asked (Act 1 Scene 3), steamed open all the letters going through the post office, discovered the letter Khlestakov wrote to his friend, read it, and rushed straight over to the Mayor's house with the news. The Mayor takes him to task for opening the letter of such an important person and refuses to believe what he's saying, adding that once he's in his new position in St. Petersburg, he'll have the Postmaster punished. The Postmaster reads the letter aloud, and it is revealed that Khlestakov wants his friend to write a newspaper article about the town, how foolish he thinks the townspeople are, and that he thinks the Mayor and all the other officials are ridiculously stupid. The Postmaster stops reading at the point when his name is mentioned, leading the Warden of Charities to grab the letter and continue reading it aloud from the point where the Postmaster is described as a drunk. As the Postmaster reacts angrily, the Warden, the Judge and the Inspector of Schools pass the letter around, each reading aloud negative comments about the others. Embarrassed, the Mayor demands that Khlestakov be pursued, but the Postmaster says that it is too late to catch him.

The Judge, the Mayor and the others comment sadly that they loaned Khlestakov so much money. The Mayor berates himself for being so foolish. When Anna reminds him "the inspector" and Maria are betrothed, he angrily tells her that the betrothal means nothing. He refers to his ruined reputation, speaks with frustration about how he'd like to ruin anyone and everyone who writes and publishes stories like the one about to be published about him, and wonders aloud, along with the others, how they could have all been taken in. The Judge suddenly turns the blame on Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky, saying they were the ones who first identified the stranger at the inn as the inspector. As everyone shouts at Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky, and as they shout to defend themselves, a Messenger comes in and shouts them all into silence, announcing that a government inspector has arrived and is waiting for them at the inn. The Mayor, the officials and all the others stand stock still, frozen in poses of comic shock.

Act 5, Scene 8 Analysis

This scene contains the play's climax - its highest point of emotion and dramatic action, and the point at which its thematic statement is clearest. The Mayor's temper is never more vicious, the Judge and the other officials are never more resentful, and Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky are never more frightened. At the same time, it's never more clear that the selfishness of the Mayor, his wife, and the other officials leads them to a deep inability to see the truth about themselves, revealed in the letter and in their seeking someone convenient to blame for the initial misunderstanding. They take no responsibility for who they are or what they've done, adding yet another layer of

meaning to the play's thematic point about the shallow, selfish nature of official hypocrisy.

With that in mind, when the Messenger comes in with the news that the real inspector has arrived, there is a definite sense that justice is about to be handed out, and deservedly so. It seems that the Mayor and the other officials are about to be confronted with personal and professional scrutiny, challenges to their behavior, and strict guidelines that they should have been living and working by long before. There is thematic value in these final moments as well, with the appearance of the Messenger suggesting that somehow, in some way, hypocrisy will ultimately be challenged with the truth of itself, faced with appropriate consequences, and ultimately ended. There is even the possibility of seeing Khlestakov as an agent of that challenge, and of what he does to the officials as being what they deserve for being so crooked and so willing to play the trading influence game. With that in mind, there is the possibility that Khlestakov's escape is his reward for, in effect, punishing the officials and exposing them to themselves. On the other hand, because the officials face justice, in the play's final moments there is also the suggestion that Khlestakov's escape from similar justice is only temporary. Perhaps he too, like all those who act out of selfishness, will one day be confronted with someone who cannot, and will not, accept his selfish, inappropriate behavior.

Bibliography

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Characters

Anna Andreyevna

Anna Andreyevna is the governor's wife. In his notes on the characters, Gogol describes her as "still tolerably young, and a provincial coquette," who "displays now and then a vain disposition." Her concern with appearance is indicated by the stage direction that "she changes her dress four times" during the play. The governor's wife flirts shamelessly with Hlestakov. When he informs her of his engagement to Marya, she approves, imagining the benefits she will enjoy in Saint Petersburg as a result of the marriage.

Bobchinsky

Bobchinsky, along with his brother Dobchinsky, is a landowner in the town. In his notes describing the characters, Gogol states that the brothers are "remarkably like each other." They are both "short, fat, and inquisitive . . . wear short waistcoats, and speak rapidly, with an excessive amount of gesticulation." Gogol distinguishes them by noting that "Dobchinsky is the taller and steadier, Bobchinsky the more free and easy, of the pair."

Dobchinsky

Dobchinsky, along with his brother Bobchinsky, is a landowner in the town. It is Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky who first see Hlestakov at the inn and mistake him for the government inspector. They immediately run to tell the governor that the government inspector has arrived, thus initiating the case of mistaken identity that propels the entire play.

The Governor

The governor of the town has the most to fear from the arrival of the government inspector because he has the most power of anyone in the town and is the most corrupt. In his notes on the characters, Gogol describes the governor as "a man who has grown old in the state service," who "wears an air of dignified respectability, but is by no means incorruptible." When Hlestakov announces that he has become engaged to the governor's daughter, the governor immediately indulges himself in fantasies of the luxurious, high status life he will enjoy in Saint Petersburg as a result.

Hlestakov

Hlestakov, also spelled Khlestakov, is a young man of about twenty-three. He is a government clerk of the lowest rank and is traveling through the small town accompanied by his servant, Ossip. Hlestakov has lost all of his money gambling and is unable to pay his food and lodging bill at the inn. The people of the town mistake him for the government inspector, who was set to arrive there incognito to check up on the workings of the local government. Hlestakov at first thinks the governor intends to arrest and imprison him for not paying his bill but eventually realizes that he is being treated as an honored guest of the town. Hlestakov makes the most of this opportunity, weaving elaborate lies about his life in Saint Petersburg, gorging himself at a feast they have provided, milking the local government officials for all of the bribery money he can, and offering a false proposal of marriage to the governor's daughter. Hlestakov leaves town just before a letter posted to his friend and revealing his chicanery is intercepted and read by the town's postmaster—who brings it before the governor. By this time, Hlestakov is far gone; he is out of reach of any revenge that the townspeople may have wished to exact upon him. Gogol insisted that the character of Hlestakov is not calculatingly deceitful but an opportunist, merely making the most of the case of mistaken identity into which he has fallen.

Marya

Marya is the governor's daughter. She and her mother rush to the inn to meet the reputed government inspector. She responds to Hlestakov's flirtations and accepts his marriage proposal. Hlestakov, however, flees the town, telling her that he will return in several days to get her, but he has no intention whatsoever of doing so or of following up on his proposal.

Ossip

Ossip is Hlestakov's servant. Gogol describes him as a middle-aged man who "is fond of arguing and lecturing his master." Gogol notes that Ossip is cleverer than Hlestakov and "sees things quicker." Ossip muses aloud to himself, informing the audience of Hlestakov's true identity and destitute financial circumstances. Ossip wisely hurries Hlestakov out of the town as soon as possible, fearing that his deception will soon be found out.

Postmaster

The postmaster is described as "an artless simpleton." He abuses his station by opening and reading the letters of others, occasionally keeping those that he finds most interesting. His role is minor, but key to the plot, because he intercepts Hlestakov's letter to his friend, which reveals that Hlestakov is not the government inspector.

Themes

Russian Bureaucracy

As was readily apparent to Gogol's contemporaries, *The Government Inspector* is a satire of the extensive bureaucracy of nineteenth-century Russian government. According to D. J. Campbell, writing in the forward to the *The Government Inspector*, Gogol once stated that "In the Government Inspector I tried to gather in one heap all that was bad in Russia." Through the regular practices of "bribery and extortion," according to Beresford in his introduction to Gogol's *The Government Inspector: A Comedy in Five Acts*, most public officials "tyrannized over the local population" of Russian towns. Beresford goes on to characterize Russia under the yoke of this vast bureaucratic system: "The whole of this immense empire was strangled by red tape, cramped by administrative fetters, and oppressed by a monstrous tyranny of paper over people." Nigel Brown in his *Notes on Nikolai Gogol's The Government Inspector* states that, in *The Government Inspector*, "Gogol was the first Russian writer to examine the realities of the official world in literature, exposing it to hilarious satire." In Gogol's play, Hlestakov, the young man mistaken for the government inspector, belongs to the lowest of fourteen possible levels within the hierarchy of the Russian civil service. The fact that he successfully poses as a public official occupying a much higher level in the bureaucracy thus demonstrates both the ignorance of the townspeople he has duped, and his own sense of self-importance. The chaotic atmosphere of the office of the governor in the opening scene immediately establishes the image of small town Russian bureaucracy as ridiculously inefficient and unprofessional. Nothing of any value seems to get accomplished by the masses of paper and the proliferation of characters holding official government titles. The lack of communication between the small town and the government center in Saint Petersburg also indicates that the Russian bureaucracy was so geographically extensive there was no means of regulating the behavior of civil servants or the effectiveness of local government offices.

Corruption

All of the public officials in the town are thoroughly corrupt. The judge "openly admits to taking bribes"; the postmaster indiscriminately opens and reads letters addressed to others; and the police are drunken, brawling, and given to flogging women. Most corrupt of all is the highest ranking official of the town, the governor: he regularly takes bribes, spends money allotted to the building of a church for his own purposes, and seizes money from the local shopkeepers. In satirizing the corruption within the Russian bureaucracy, Gogol addressed more universal themes of human corruption. Beresford asserts that the play is "an attack on all forms of moral depravity, of which bribery and corruption are but examples." Because of this universal theme, Beresford insists that, "Gogol's play is thus as relevant to the world of the twentieth century as it was to its own time, and it points to a perennial evil of civilized societies." In essence, according to

Lavrin stating in his book *Gogol*, "Gogol was really ridiculing a much wider field of rottenness than the officialdom he knew."

Deception and Self-deception

The Government Inspector is a story of deception and self-deception. The townspeople deceive themselves into believing that Hlestakov is the government inspector, whereupon Hlestakov takes advantage of the case of mistaken identity, further extending the deception to his own advantage. Hlestakov takes such a liking to his assumed role that he almost appears to be convinced by his own deception, imagining himself to be the venerable high official he pretends to be. The townspeople attempt to deceive the government inspector as to the true corruption within the local government, but find that they have only deceived and cheated themselves in the process. Beresford comments that Gogol made use of the plot motif of mistaken identity "to reveal a fundamental state of chaos in human life." Beresford continues,

It is no accident that the plot of most of his works hinges on a deception, because for him deception was at the very heart of things. He saw human beings as enmeshed in a web of confusion and deceptions, misled not only by appearances but also by their own delusions and lies.

Style

Russian Realism and Dramatic Comedy

Gogol has often been dubbed the "father of Russian realism." *The Government Inspector* introduced the principles of dramatic realism to the Russian stage. Lindstrom in his book *Nikolay Gogol* notes that "the need for greater realism in the theater" was "one of Gogol's most pressing concerns." Gogol consciously desired to counter the burlesque and sentimentality of popular Russian drama with a play that revealed everyday people in everyday life. Edward Braun in an introduction to *Nikolai Gogol: The Government Inspector* notes that Gogol believed modern drama "must reflect the problems of modern society," and therefore, "sought with his comedy to bring out the significance of everyday happenings." Gogol was thus dissatisfied with the initial production of *The Government Inspector* because the actors had failed to embody the principals of dramatic realism for which the play had been intended. Lindstrom explains that the actors of the day, "did not know how to interpret this new kind of comic realism and gave an appallingly bad performance." In the long run, however, according to Campbell, *The Government Inspector* "contributed a great deal to the evolution of the peculiar Russian realism in acting." Gogol's impact on dramatic realism is also a measure of the use of realistic dialogue in his plays. His lasting influence on Russian literature is in part due to the innovative use of colloquial Russian speech in his literary works. Brown observes that Gogol's plays were innovative in replacing the formal speech of written Russian with dialogue that is "alive with the quality of actual speech." Beresford likewise asserts that Gogol, in *The Government Inspector*, "incorporates . . . all features of everyday speech" in "dialogue such as had never been heard on the Russian stage before and has seldom been equaled since."

The Epigraph and Direct Audience Address

The play's epigraph, taken from a Russian proverb, reads: "If your face is lopsided, don't blame the mirror." This saying is echoed by a line toward the end of the play, whereupon the governor, having learned of his foolish mistake in believing Hlestakov to be the government inspector, turns directly to the audience, demanding: "What are *you* laughing at? You are laughing at yourselves." As a theatrical technique, this is called "direct address," because the actor breaks through the imaginary "fourth wall" of the stage to engage the audience directly in the world of the play. To a Russian audience of the 1830s, when the play was first performed, this line would have constituted a direct confrontation. Most audience members would have belonged to any one of fourteen official levels within the extensive Russian bureaucracy at the time. Because the play ridicules the incompetence and corruption of government officials, many critics and theatregoers were openly offended by it. Gogol's epigraph anticipates this response, warning the spectator that, if the play, like a mirror, reflects a "lopsided" view of Russian society, it is not the play, but the society, that is to blame.

The Tableau Vivant

Gogol placed special emphasis on the "tableau vivant" that ends the play. A "tableau vivant" is equivalent to what in cinema would be a "freeze frame"; the characters freeze for "almost a minute and a half" in a posture that reveals their response to the news that the real government inspector has just arrived. In the stage directions, Gogol specifies the exact posture and facial expression of each character on stage at this point. The governor stands "like a post, arms outstretched, head flung back"; the postmaster "has become a question mark addressed to the audience"; the superintendent of schools is "in a state of innocent bewilderment"; while those characters not specified stand "just like posts." In the notes that precede the printed play, Gogol, asserting that "the actors must pay special attention to the last scene," elaborates upon the mood and effect of the "tableau vivant": "The last word ought to give an electric shock to all present at once. The whole group ought to change its position instantly. A cry of astonishment ought to spring from all the women as though from one bosom." Gogol insisted that "Disregard of these instructions may ruin the whole effect." Victor Erlich comments in his book *Gogol* that this tableau vivant is a "moment of truth," in which, "The lightning which strikes dumb the cast . . . illuminates, in retrospect, the real nature and drift of the proceedings." Richard Peace notes that, in this final moment, "the characters await their fate like the motionless figures of a run-down clock, whose time has suddenly run out."

Historical Context

Censorship

Under the reign of Tsar Nicholas I, Russian writers suffered extremely strict censorship of all written material. In 1826, a statute on censorship, according to Beresford, "prohibited the publication of any matter that was deemed to disparage the monarchy or the church or which criticized, even indirectly, the existing order of society." The years 1848-1855, particularly, were referred to as "the age of terror by censorship." Brown describes the crushing power of these censorship practices on Russian society: "Penalties included warnings, rebukes, fines, confiscations of offending books or magazines, police supervision or detention in the guardroom of local military garrisons." Brown concludes that "It was a wonder that anything got into print at all." Braun states that "Genuine Russian masterpieces" of dramatic writing "were suppressed by a pathologically suspicious censor and were destined to wait over thirty years for their first public performances." Literary historians agree that, had it not been brought to the special attention of the tsar himself, who whimsically approved it, *The Government Inspector* would certainly have been censored from any theatrical production until many years later.

Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature

Despite, or perhaps in spite of, strict censorship under the reign of Tsar Nicholas I, Russian literature flourished in the nineteenth century. Unofficial manuscripts of literary and other written works could be obtained and dispersed among friends and acquaintances without knowledge of the censors. Beresford points out that

. . . despite the shackles of censorship, literature flourished under Nicholas I. Indeed by a curious paradox of history his reign, which was one of reaction and stagnation in most spheres of life, produced a great ferment of ideas and a remarkable burgeoning of literary talent.

Among such talents were Pushkin, Gogol, and Dostoyevsky. Before Gogol, Aleksandr Pushkin (1799-1837) was the leading Russian writer of the early nineteenth century. Pushkin's masterpiece is the novel *Yevgeny Onegin* (1833), a realistic portrait of Russian life, at all social levels, in both the major cities and the provinces. Pushkin befriended the young Gogol in Saint Petersburg, and is said to have suggested the topic for *The Inspector General* based on his own experience of being mistaken for a highranking government official while staying at an inn in a remote town. Pushkin died from a fatal wound incurred during a duel to save his wife's "honor." Gogol, while crushed by the loss of his friend's life, immediately inherited the mantle of leading Russian writer. Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881), who is among Russia's greatest writers, was greatly influenced by Gogol. Critics often recount the now legendary comment attributed to Dostoyevsky that, as Amy Singleton Adams in the *Dictionary of*

Literary Biography offers, all Russian realist writers had emerged "out from under Gogol's *Overcoat*." Dostoyevsky's greatest works include the novella, *Notes from the Underground* (1864), and four novels: *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1868-9), *The Possessed* (1872), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-80). Subsequent leading Russian writers of the nineteenth century include Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov.

Critical Overview

Gogol's lasting influence on Russian literature cannot be underestimated. According to Richard Peace in *The Enigma of Gogol*:

Gogol exerted an immense influence on the whole course of Russian literature and continues to do so to the present day. There is scarcely a later Russian writer who did not succumb in some measure to his magic, and in many cases (Dostoyevski, Chekhov, Ilf and Petrov) his influence was crucial. In this sense alone, to call Gogol the 'father of Russian prose fiction' is eminently justifiable.

Critics today almost universally agree on the comic and dramatic genius of *The Government Inspector*. Calling the play Gogol's "comic masterpiece," Erlich asserts that it is "by far the greatest comedy in the Russian language and one of the finest ever written." Campbell asserts that it is "perhaps the greatest comedy ever written for the Russian stage." Lindstrom concurs that "the total effect is one of tremendous dramatic power." Beresford comments that "*The Government Inspector*, a work of enormous comic power, with penetrating shafts of satire and a gallery of unforgettable characters, is the greatest play in the Russian language and one of the acknowledged masterpieces of world drama."

Because of extremely strict censorship under the reign of the Tsar Nicholas I, Gogol's play might not have been produced in his lifetime. However, the poet Zhukovsky brought the written play directly to the attention of the tsar, who liked it so much that he insisted on a production at the royal theater. *The Government Inspector* opened in 1836, with the tsar in attendance. Nicholas was said to have delighted in the production.

Popular and critical reception of the play, however, has been dubbed by several critics a "succes de scandale"—meaning that the play's popular success was inextricable from its controversial critical reception. While the tsar himself was not offended by the play's open satire of the Russian bureaucracy, the audience members, most of whom were themselves civil servants, took personal offense. Nigel Brown notes that, "it is virtually the first work of art to expose to ridicule aspects of the administrative and bureaucratic system of Tsarist Russia." As a result, Erlich observes, "The story of the reception of The Inspector General and of Gogol's subsequent reaction is almost as interesting as the play itself." He explains:

The initial impact was explosive. While the audiences' responses were mixed, hardly anyone remained indifferent. The bulk of the theater going public, especially the officials and the sycophants of the bureaucratic establishment, were displeased, indeed often scandalized, by the 'vulgarity' and 'coarseness' of the play, and by its slanderous, not to say subversive tenor.

Janko Lavrin explains that "The spectators enjoyed the piece, but they were cross with the author. For everyone saw himself personally insulted." Yet, "In spite of all the attacks on Gogol . . . the theatre was always crowded. For even those who disliked it could not

help enjoying it." Erlich notes, "The play was making an impact; it was the talk of the town, the focus of a lively and loud controversy," thus making Gogol, "one of the bestknown and most talked-about writers of his time."

Taken aback by the extensive negative reaction to the play, Lindstrom notes that Gogol wrote to a friend, "Everyone is against me." In self-defense, he published an article, "After the Theater," which recounted the overheard dialogue of theatregoers leaving at the end of the play. *After the Theater* was later expanded and published in book form in 1842. Lindstrom comments that, "Of little artistic merit, it is nevertheless a valuable record of Gogol's increasing insistence on the didactic role of literature and his need to explain his art in terms of moral and social philosophy." Gogol, however, was so traumatized by the controversy raised by *The Government Inspector* that he quickly left the country, remaining in self-imposed exile for the next twelve years. He revised the play extensively, publishing a new edition in 1842, which was not performed until 1888. Included was an epilogue entitled, "The Denouement of the Revizor," which attempted to justify the play's meaning by recasting it as a religious allegory. Erlich observes that "In this ponderous interpretation, the town . . . symbolizes the soul of man, the corrupt officials represent the base passions gnawing at it, while the Inspector serves as an embodiment of man's awakened 'conscience' or sense of guilt." Lavrin states unequivocally that "Such interpretation is of course ridiculous and entirely unconvincing."

Speaking to the lasting popularity and relevance of *The Government Inspector*, Beresford asserts:

The Government Inspector is a work of enormous scale, at one extreme an entertaining comedy of errors and, at the other, an illuminating drama of corruption. No single interpretation encompasses all its meaning. . . . It is a play of great originality, that contains the inexhaustible riches of all great art. Its theme is universal and it speaks to the eternal human condition. Its laughter is directed at what is essential and permanent in man. It transcends its own time and people, belonging to all ages and all peoples. It has justly earned for itself the name of immortal comedy.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

BOOKRAGS

Critical Essay #1

Brent has a Ph.D. in American Culture, specializing in film studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in the history of American cinema. In the following essay, Brent discusses cultural and historical references in Gogol's play.

There are a number of cultural and historical references pertaining to biblical literature and history, as well as ancient Greek mythology and history, in *The Government Inspector*, which may not be familiar to the reader. These references include: King Solomon from biblical history; Alexander the Great from ancient Greek history; the Elysian Fields from Greek mythology; the ancient Greek politician and speechwriter Cicero; and the Tower of Babel from biblical literature. An explanation of some of these references in terms of the central themes found in *The Government Inspector* will facilitate a greater appreciation of Gogol's play.

In act 1, as the governor and other local government officials discuss how to cover up the extent of their corruption, the judge asserts that he is not concerned about the government inspector, because the legal system is too confusing for anyone to comprehend anyway. The Judge states,

Well, I'm not worried. A person from Petersburg won't be interested in a mere district court. And if he does glance at some legal document, he won't understand it. Solomon himself couldn't understand our documents. I've been on the bench fifteen years, but, as for legal papers, I take one look and throw them in the wastebasket.

The Judge here refers to King Solomon, who is considered the greatest king of biblical Israel. King Solomon, the son of King David and of Bathsheba, is known today by information about him in the Bible. He is renowned for his military strength, his supposed skills as a great lover, his reputedly extensive harem of women (including 700 wives and 300 concubines), his construction of the famous Temple of Jerusalem, and his deep wisdom. The most famous example of his wisdom is described in a story in which two women held a dispute over who is the rightful mother to an infant; Solomon proposed cutting the baby in half, and then, based on each woman's reaction to the suggestion, determined who was the real mother.

In Gogol's play, the reference to Solomon is used to ridicule the Russian legal system. The judge states that even a man as wise as Solomon could not make sense of a single legal document in the Russian court. This comment contributes to Gogol's central theme in this play, which satirizes the Russian government bureaucracy as not only corrupt but also strangled with red tape.

In act 1, the governor calls together the leading town officials to discuss strategies for covering up the extent of corruption, incompetence, and inadequacy in the town's public institutions from the eyes of the government inspector—who is expected to arrive any day. The governor explains to the superintendent of schools that the history teacher will

be a problem if observed by the inspector. At one point in the play, the governor alludes to Alexander the Great during a conversation with the superintendent of schools:

And your history teacher. Clever fellow. I don't deny that. But the man lets his feelings run away with him. I heard one of his lectures. As long as he stayed with the Assyrians and Babylonians, it wasn't so bad, but when he came to Alexander the Great, I thought the house was on fire. He jumped up, took a chair, and smashed it on the floor. . . . Now I know Alexander was a very great hero, but why smash the furniture? The government had to buy a new chair.

Alexander the Great (356-323 BC), a Greek, was King of Macedonia from 336 to 323 BC. A military genius, he lead the invasion of Asia, conquering much of Asia Minor, and overthrowing the Persian Empire. Alexander greatly expanded the boundaries of his empire in the twelve years of his reign. He founded over seventy new cities and spread Greek thought and culture throughout much of Asia. After his death, at the age of thirty-three, lacking the force of his determination and charisma, the empire soon broke up into separate kingdoms.

In Gogol's play, reference to Alexander the Great demonstrates the incompetence and ineffectiveness of the Russian educational system. While most of the local government officials in the play suffer from not taking their jobs seriously enough, the history teacher demonstrates that he takes his job *too* seriously. The superintendent of schools says of the history teacher that he is prepared to give his life "in the cause of education," as if it were a revolutionary effort. The idea that the history teacher gets so excited over historical matters that he is inspired to smash a chair against the floor indicates his loose grasp on contemporary reality.

In act 1, while the governor and his fellow town officials are deliberating about how to prepare for the arrival of the government inspector, the postmaster enters. The governor instructs him to unseal and read every letter, to catch any "tattle tales," who may be writing to Saint Petersburg to complain of the town government. The postmaster assures him that he already opens and reads the letters, but "not as a security measure"; he explains that he does this because ". . . I'm curious. I like to know what goes on. It's fun, too. I even learn a lot. More than in the Moscow News." When the governor asks if he's read anything about the "Person from Saint Petersburg," meaning the government inspector, the postmaster responds: "Nothing about Petersburg. . . . You' d love some of the letters. . . . There was a lieutenant the other day, describing a ball. He compared it to Elysium: girls, bands playing, banners flying. . . ." Elysium, also called "the Elysian fields," or "the Elysian Plain," is, in Greek mythology, akin to the Christian heaven, a paradise to which heroes and those favored by the gods are sent after death.

The reference to Elysium in Gogol's play is significant in that it alludes to the play's motif of fantasy locations. Once Hlestakov figures out that he is being mistaken for an important person from Saint Petersburg, he weaves an elaborate web of fantasy describing the splendor and prestige of his life in the city. The inhabitants of the town are easily taken in by Hlestakov because of their own eagerness to imagine the far-

away city as a sort of paradise, in comparison to their own provincial surroundings. In act 5, after Hlestakov has insincerely) proposed to the governor's daughter, the governor fantasizes about his future life as the father-in-law of a high-level government official in Saint Petersburg; again, Saint Petersburg resembles a sort of paradise, or Elysium, in the fantasies of a provincial townsman. The postmaster's response to the governor also demonstrates his own simplemindedness, frivolousness, and ignorance of the severity of his corrupt abuse of a government office. While the other town officials are concerned with every detail that may be observed by the government inspector, the postmaster blithely engages in a frivolous description of a ball, completely unconcerned with the fact that he has illegally opened and kept for himself, a letter intended for someone else.

In act 4, the governor and his local government officials debate over who is to go first in approaching Hlestakov, whom they believe to be the government inspector, with the offer of a bribe. The director of charities volunteers the judge to approach Hlestakov first. The judge replies that the director of charities himself should approach the government inspector first, upon which the director of charities replies that the superintendent of schools should go first because he "represents education—enlightenment." The superintendent of schools, however, insists that he becomes completely tonguetied in the presence of authority. The director of charities responds that, in that case, it should be the judge, after all, who approaches Hlestakov first, because "When you open your mouth, Cicero speaks."

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC) was a Roman politician, lawyer, and writer, who became renowned for his powerful speeches and convincing argumentation. Reference to Cicero in Gogol's play is intended to exaggerate the judge's incompetence by means of contrast. The judge, a small-town, provincial government bureaucrat who knows more about hunting dogs than about the law, is compared to one of the greatest public speakers and masters of legal rhetoric in the history of Western culture. This reference builds upon a central theme of Gogol's play, which satirizes the general incompetence among Russian government officials and the general ineffectiveness of the Russian legal system.

In act 4, during a discussion in which the governor and his fellow local officials debate who is to go first in presenting the government inspector with an offer of bribery, the judge is targeted as the most likely candidate. After comparing the judge to Cicero, they continue to praise his speaking powers by insisting that "You can hold forth on the Tower of Babel!"

The Tower of Babel, according to the book of Genesis in the Old Testament, was built in Babylon after the flood. The story of the Tower of Babel is that the people of Babylon wanted to build a tower that would reach as high as the heavens. To defy this effort, God was said to have created a confusion of languages among the workers building the tower, so that they could not effectively communicate with one another and therefore had to abandon the construction of the tower. The dispersing of these people throughout the world is said to explain the diversity of languages among human cultures.

References to the Tower of Babel usually imply a nonsensical confusion of words. The Tower of Babel in Gogol's play echoes his central theme of the general ineffectiveness of the Russian bureaucracy. The implication is that the extensive web of bureaucracy, which made up the administrative arm of the Russian government, was so confusing and nonsensical that it was a virtual Tower of Babel—a mass of legal documents and verbiage that was ultimately meaningless and ineffective. Furthermore, the local government officials demonstrate their own confusion and ignorance over the meaning of words when they suggest that the Judge is such a skilled speaker that he can "hold forth," or present a powerful speech in a meaningless mass of words. As a mouthpiece for the Tower of Babel, which constituted the Russian bureaucracy, the judge is skilled at generating a mass of nonsensical verbiage upon a meaningless mass of legal documentation.

References to ancient Biblical and Greek history and culture in *The Government Inspector* function to elaborate upon a central theme of corruption, ineffectiveness, and incomprehensibility in the Russian bureaucracy under the reign of Tsar Nicholas I.

Source: Liz Brent, in an essay for Drama for Students, Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

The following essay by Daria Krizhanskaya, discusses Vsevolod Meyerhold's production of Revisor (The Inspector General) *and how his perspective informs the play as a satire and vehicle for Bolshevik enlightenment.*

On December 9, 1926, after nearly two years of extensive research and rehearsals, Vsevolod Meyerhold premiered his *Inspector General (Revizor)*. Though the production provoked a tempest in the Soviet press and was much discussed by the critics of both liberal and Communist bent, foreign—mostly American—witnesses had no doubt about its artistic value from the very beginning. Meyerhold had created a magnificent and somber spectacle which reflected his pre-revolutionary symbolist past, his tragic world view linked to the philosophy of Russian symbolism, and what appeared to be his apocalyptic warning concerning the future of humanity.

An analysis of newly available archive materials —rehearsal notes recorded by the director's assistants being the most important among them— reveals that the production was a synthesis of the director's aesthetic discoveries made in the pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods. Nevertheless, when placing *Revizor* in the context of Meyerhold's career, critics and historians usually pay scant attention to the essential qualities of the production—the mystical, the tragic and the phantasmagoric. Having dutifully noted them, most scholars then mysteriously leave them unexplained. For Louis Lozowick in 1930, *Revizor*, along with Meyerhold's productions of *The Death of Tarelkin* (1922) and *The Forest* (1924), represented the director's ongoing effort to revamp and reinterpret Russian classics. In 1965, Marjorie Hoover wrote that the production transformed Gogol's comedy of manners into a satire, though one with universally symbolic overtones. Konstantin Rudnitsky in 1969 emphasized "the aggressive power of the past" (i.e., the epoch of Tsar Nicholas II) as essential to the meaning of the production. He also mentioned strange "riddles" allegedly implicit in or suggested by the historical events of the middle 1920s— riddles that Meyerhold "heard" and attempted to reply to in his production. What stands behind this metaphor? What kind of riddles did Rudnitsky have in mind? Throughout his book, he never answers this question, probably because he could not answer it in print. Censorship and self-censorship were still a matter of necessity in the late 60s when Rudnitsky's groundbreaking volume was published in the USSR. By the time of Edward Braun's study in 1995, Revizor had become a synthesis of "realism, hyperbole and fantasy." However they characterize it, existing accounts of the production are descriptions rather than interpretations; most of them list *Revizor* under the neutral label of "revived classic."

This label derived from critics' convenient and uncomplicated linking of Meyerhold's aesthetics with Bolshevik cultural policies has some historical explanation. At the end of 1922, Lunacharsky, the People's Commissar for Enlightenment, concerned with the growth of purely formal experiments in Soviet art, publicly proclaimed the return to psychological literature with the slogan "Back to Ostrovsky!" Later, he explained what he meant:

We, modern playwrights, must observe the life around us sensitively, like Ostrovsky, and, unifying profound theatrical effect with precise, penetrating realism, we must present a constructive and explanatory mirrorimage of our times.

The quote reveals Lunacharsky's moderately positivistic aesthetics as well as the ideological imperatives of the time. The top party official in charge of Soviet culture was advocating a radical return to the Russian classics. Not yet an order, but a recommendation, this call has been interpreted by Meyerhold scholars as an obvious reason for Meyerhold's staging of Ostrovsky's *A Profitable Post* (1923) and *The Forest* (1924), Gogol's *Revizor* (1926) and Griboedov's *Woe From Wit* (1928). Yet, in the case of *Revizor* this historical coincidence appears to be the simplest part of the truth. A more complete—and complex—reading of the production would take stock of the internal logic of the director's development, viewed as a continuous trajectory from his first directorial efforts in 1903 to his *Revizor* in 1926, and would analyze both the external and internal influences exerting themselves on Meyerhold's artistic consciousness at the time.

Meyerhold and his assistants persistently claimed that *Revizor* was conceived as a condemnation of "not merely peculation in some miserable little town, . . . but the entire Nicholayan era together with the way of life of its nobility and its officials." Even in the "conversations with the actors," he repeatedly announced "his firm clinging" to the realistic theater and reiterated his point that "the grotesque ruins *Revizor*." As if casting a spell, he tried to convince everybody, including himself, that by embracing the ultimate good of realism, he would abandon the obvious evil of grotesque. Statements from his theater stressed the production's satirical spirit, directed against the Russian Imperial past, a satire in tune with the Bolshevik's cultural enlightenment program for the masses. Lee Strasberg's observation that "Meyerhold uncovers the social content of [any] play" accords with this interpretation only too well. Persuaded by Meyerhold's own declarations, Western scholars frequently forget that Soviet historical documents should not be taken at face value, even if they come from the recently opened post-Communist archives. Meyerhold was keen to manipulate the appropriate Communist vocabulary in the struggles on the "theater front." Most of his conceptual statements concerning the content, ideas, or genre of a production —whether as official speeches or rehearsal notes—must be thoroughly checked against his theater practice.

Interpreted as satire, or a mixture of realism and fantasy, or a revived classic, *Revizor* is rather carefully described but unsatisfactorily interpreted, even in the most trustworthy scholarly writings. But the problem of *Revizor* is contained within the larger problem of the position of Meyerhold vis-a-vis the 1917 October Revolution, which can only be approached with a full understanding of how Meyerhold's previous aesthetic discoveries coalesced in *Revizor*.

Rudnitsky, Braun and Leach, whose books represent the most influential approaches in contemporary Meyerhold scholarship, take it for granted that the director's creative life can be clearly divided into two periods: That of the prerevolutionary, "decadent," modernist Meyerhold, and that of the ardent Bolshevik who, inspired by the Revolution, served it with all his theatrical genius. Indeed, formal historical evidence speaks for this

obvious division: Meyerhold joined the party in 1918 and soon came into prominence with the Bolshevik regime, receiving the top artistic title, People's Artist, as early as 1923. Both Russian and foreign witnesses had no doubts about the nature of his postrevolutionary theater practice, with "its roots deep in our heroic, proletarian struggle."

With this evidence, and influenced by Rudnitsky, who was the first to bring the director's name back from Stalinist eclipse, most scholarship essentially reiterates the same argument: Meyerhold enthusiastically accepted the Great October, which gave him unprecedented aesthetic ideas together with fresh possibilities for their realization. Meyerhold's theatrical version of constructivism is considered purely a post-revolutionary achievement. Together with Malevich, Mayakovsky, and other avant-garde artists, Meyerhold devoted his genius to the propaganda of the Revolution and followed its cause "to the very limit." Typical of this prevailing view is Camilla Grey's description of these artists, who

joyfully plunged into the experiment, blissfully regardless of the physical and practical sacrifices involved. . . . It is difficult to believe that they were almost literally starving— . . . living conditions were reduced to the most primitive. They rode lightheaded on the surge of release and the sense of a new-born purpose to their existence; an intoxication drove them to the most heroic feats: all was forgotten and dismissed but the great challenge which they saw before them of changing the world in which they lived.

A seasoned artist in his mid 40s, Meyerhold hardly rode lightheaded. The most turbulent in his turbulent life, his relationship with the Revolution came out of numerous artistic and personal reasons, but not of a pure political intention to change the world. Both in the December 1905 Revolution, and the February 1917 Revolution, he remained politically unengaged, initiating his involvement with the Bolsheviks only when they came to power after the October uprising. Oliver Sayler, who spoke to Meyerhold in the winter of 1917/18, remembered that the director was reticent in their conversation about politics to the point that Sayler was unable to figure out where his political sympathies lay.

However, the image of a Communist artist changing the world for a just social order attracted scholars, especially Western ones, seeking to explain why some members of the left intelligentsia chose to collaborate with the Bolsheviks. The director's later troubles and his downfall at the end of the 30s were attributed to Stalin's embracing of totalitarianism and oppression. Thus, Meyerhold's creative biography offered a deceptively simple picture: until the late 20s, the "good Revolution" bestowed on its faithful artist creative freedom and practical benefits, but when it turned "bad," the artist fell as its martyr, shot down in the cells of the NKVD (a predecessor of the KGB). Taken to its logical conclusion, this claim led eventually to the still commonly held belief that Stalin and the degenerated Revolution together are to blame for the death of this great theater genius. Interpreted in this way, Meyerhold's tragic fate may too easily be used to illustrate the maxim about the Revolution that devours its own children.

Until the late 80s, for obvious political reasons, this was the only permissible way of viewing Meyerhold for Rudnistsky and other Soviet scholars. From the time of the thaw through Perestroika, they necessarily had to present him as an ally of Communism whose work met the crude standards of ideology—although only up to a certain point. For Western liberals it was—and still is—a chance to see the whole Revolution, or, at least, its first "righteous" decade, as an unparalleled explosion of new proletarian art and mass creativity. The speculations of the Communist leaders responsible for "cultural construction" (Lunacharsky, Bogdanov, and Kerzhentsev), official theater documents, Meyerhold's own political statements—all evidence that should be taken at the very least with a grain of salt—has kept Westerners enchanted with the myth of Revolution. This myth helps them to disregard such Bolshevik initiatives as The Red Terror, officially announced in 1918; the revival of the medieval practice of taking hostages; Dzerzhinsky's proclamation of "the infallibility" of Tcheka, which accompanied a mass liquidation of gentry, clergy, merchants, and members of the intelligentsia; and finally the grand opening of the first concentration camp in 1922. It was Trotsky, after all, who held that "terror is a most powerful political instrument," and that "the question of the form or degree of repression, is, of course, by no means one of 'principle.' It's a matter of expediency." And the "new freedom" celebrated in this kind of scholarship has nothing to do with the actual measures taken by the Bolsheviks, including the closing of newspapers and cabaret theaters "in view of their intolerable character" immediately after the October coup, and the expatriation of hundreds of the most prominent Russian scholars and philosophers in 1922. Aimed at erasing individuality, the real Revolution was destructive for Russian culture and Russian society from the very beginning.

The blooming proletarian art of the 20s was mainly created by non-proletarian groups and most certainly did not start from scratch right after October 1917. Moreover the theory which divides Russian art into two disconnected prerevolutionary and post-revolutionary epochs is lazy. Most artists were continuing to explore ideas found and formulated before 1917, during the so-called Silver Age of Russian culture. Tairov founded his Kamerny theater in 1914; at this time, Evgeny Vahtangov and Mikhail Chekhov were enjoying their first success under the auspices of the MAT First Studio, founded in 1913; Fyodor Komissarzhevsky staged his famous *Faust* in 1912; Nikolai Evreinov published his ideas on theatricalization of life between 1908 and 1913 (*An Apologia for Theatricality* in 1908, and a collection of essays, *Theater as Such*, in 1913); finally, the Futurists, Cubists, and Suprematists made their appearance with *The Victory Over the Sun* in 1915.

As for Meyerhold, his "new" and "revolutionary" constructivism emerged from his pre-revolutionary work in general and the experiments in his studio on Borodinskaya (1914-1917) in particular. The molding of his own theatrical methodology led to a liberation of the actor's art through the liberation of the actor's body from the structures of a weary psychological realism, which paradoxically corresponded to the general aesthetics of constructivism and the ideological thesis of shaping "a new man in a new world." A former student of Meyerhold's from the Borodinskaya Studio recalled that, during the production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold* (1922!), she thought she was seeing "something familiar"—namely, the visual realization of ideas the director was formulating during the last years of the Studio.

The scholarly fixation on Meyerhold the Bolshevik essentially renders him as nothing more than an artist who, after 1917, became a political director with a constructivist, or expressionist, or some other form of expression. This attitude regards the textual content of his work, i.e., the story, as "dressed up" in avant-garde garb, and thus fails to perceive the aesthetic integrity of the director's best productions. It separates the spoken text from the theatrical one, with its visual, audio, and plastic elements, and obscures a full understanding of Meyerhold's legacy. Suggesting that Meyerhold's principle achievement was in reflecting the burning problems of the day, this view sees his works as formed by external, objective causes that differed from one production to another. In fact, although Meyerhold did reflect his time, he did it more subtly, in a way which was modulated by his own cultivated past and his temperament. If Meyerhold accepted the Great October, it was out of the hope of having his own theater, founded with the blessing and unlimited financial support of the new power. "I don't give a damn about this or that political trend," he used to say before the revolution. "All I want to do is to save the theater." An artist first and foremost, he valued but one thing—to create freely; and he accepted the power that might seem to provide him with the desirable freedom. In the chaotic, hysterical days of the Revolution and the Civil War, he strove to find a niche where he could develop his artistic ideas and train his actors.

Under contract with the Imperial Theatres before 1917, he was unable fully to realize his theatrical ambitions. An influential group of august, veteran actors and top theater patrons were hostile to him and his innovations, and as a result, he never exercised unfettered artistic power on the Alexandrine stage. Sensation and scandal largely characterized his theatrical reputation. "A celebrity in the modern sense," as Paul Schmidt writes, Meyerhold provoked radical opinions, but the "patrician" critics —Kugel and Benois in particular—violently attacked his aesthetic principles. The ultra-right *New Time* did not hesitate to remind its readers of his supposedly Jewish origin. *Masquerade* became a target of a particular critical viciousness. Prepared for more than six years, it was presented on the eve of the February revolution. Its allegedly "mindlessly absurd luxury" and "arrogant wastefulness" outraged Kugel who envisioned "the hungering crowds," "shouting for bread . . . practically next door" to the theater. This temperamental description virtually defined a full range of accusations against Meyerhold as a reactionary and even "a Rasputin in theater."

Critics aside, he also did not acquire a loyal public. In regard to Meyerhold's relations with prerevolutionary spectators, a respectful Soviet critic of the 30s, Boris Alpers, was quite right when he wrote:

For a working class spectator, his art did not exist at all, as it was hidden behind the walls of inaccessible Imperial theaters. And by its very nature, it just couldn't be close to this spectator. . . . For the petty bourgeois intelligentsia, his works were too cold and too rational. . . . Gloomy sarcophaguses that Meyerhold constructed on the stage of Imperial Theaters caused . . . bewilderment and protests among the top Russian aristocracy. That cold, aesthetic pathos with which Meyerhold showed its masks and rituals . . . caused in it unnecessary anxiety.

Always intolerant of an artistic opinion different from his own, he became increasingly defensive and arrogant. The actors, he thought, failed his *Masquerade*—he detested the actors trained in the realistic tradition of the Russian theater. To exercise a new art, he felt he vitally needed new actors trained in his own artistic methods, as well as a theater of his own. Little by little, the idea of his mission—that is, the revolution in the theater— became intermixed with the idea of a revolution in the society. Any change was better for him than no change at all. Considering his conflicts with the old theater to be unresolvable, he longed for a storm that would smash the barriers to his own potential artistic benefits. As a fervent opponent of the old theater system, he came to the Bolsheviks within days of the October Revolution. As if having Meyerhold's case in mind, Kugel wrote in December of 1917 that "we traded Russia for a ticket to a theater gallery. . . . To reject reality for the sake of phantom theater of one's own imagination—that's the fundamental sickness of Russian mentality."

After 1917, political, personal, and aesthetic factors became so intertwined in the director's life that it is extremely hard to tease them apart. Even decisions about his personal life were frequently made according to artistic considerations. Establishing theater, not changing the world or enlightening the multitudes, was Meyerhold's ultimate goal. An artist-innovator, Meyerhold never saw the theater as a tool for something else; art of theater had for him its own meaning and value. In his book On Theatre, published in 1913, Meyerhold argues that an artistic revolution can come only from an artistic of genius, who is oblivious to the tastes and desires of the masses: "Some Wagner will overcome the sluggishness of popular mind for Bayreuth to emerge."

Clearly, then, this sophisticated, essentially apolitical director was not converted in an instant to the mission of producing art according to the needs, or tastes, of the masses. These tastes differed too much from his own. Somebody named Polosikhin, a proletarian correspondent, expressed a common proletarian opinion when he said: "[I] gave tickets [to one of Meyerhold's productions] to some of our broads [at the factory], and had to hide for a couple of days after that—they wanted to beat me up." Unlike Stanislavsky who was fascinated with the similarity between theater and life, Meyerhold sought to discover distinctions between the two, and speci fically explore what is immanent to theatrical recreations of reality. For Stanislavsky, life was the first reality, truer than theater; for Meyerhold, theater came first, universalizing life and making it larger.

It is sometimes suggested that Meyerhold exploited the Revolution to propagate his own theatrical reforms. But the issue appears to be more complicated now: He didn't calculate, but he did operate in a revolutionary atmosphere, changing his appearance and vocabulary as actors change their costumes. It is meaningless to accuse him of hypocrisy on these grounds—after all, he didn't change his essential morals and attitudes. Rather, he was a theater person from top to toe to such a degree that nothing but theater had any substantial meaning for him. In September, 1920, Meyerhold arrived in Moscow dressed B la Bolshevik in a soldier's gray coat, but a few years later this coat gave way to a fashionable suit from an expensive tailor.

For Meyerhold the artist, the circumstantial changes of everyday life comprised an external domain—whether it was the proletarian dictatorship, the Civil War chaos, or the society that later ended in fear and hatred. In 1917, the old life collapsed, a new one was born—for better or worse— and he used the cultural form's of this new life, with its new symbols, themes, myths, and vocabulary, to mold the artistic reality of his productions. What changed so drastically in 1917 was the raw material of life—its formulas—but Meyerhold's aesthetics were developing smoothly and consistently.

In his "political" productions in the early '20s, he would insert bulletins on the Civil War (as in *The Dawn*, 1920), or bring onto the stage Red Army detachments together with purely utilitarian objects such as real trucks and motorcycles (as in *Earth Rampant*, 1923). The latter Meyerhold dedicated "to the primary Red Soldier of RSFSR, Lev Trotsky." And yet one should not be misled by these deceptive details: Political statements masked aesthetic ideas; the social was an external form for the aesthetic. Moreover, the aesthetic task Meyerhold attempted to fulfill in these productions had nothing in common with propagandistic zeal.

Thus, the material became revolutionary on the surface—and the transformation of the material was interpreted as a shift in the artist himself. Meanwhile, the artist continued to develop the stage principles he discovered in the first years of Russian modernism. These principles were solely based on the concepts of "*teatral'nost*" and "*uslovnost*"—two terms frequently used in Russian theoretical writings from the Silver Age onwards—where "*teatral'nost*" translates as "theatricality" and "*uslovnost*" is usually rendered as "conditionality," "stylization," or even "conventionality." As Katerina Clark summarizes, *uslovnost* entails a recognition of the impossibility of mimesis, of representing or recreating reality in the theater and of the consequent necessity for conventions, forms unique to the theater and understood as such by audiences. Of major significance in understanding the nature of the theater, *uslovnost* is rooted in a clever observation of Alexander Pushkin made almost a century earlier:

Verisimilitude is still presumed to be the primary condition and basis of dramatic art. What if it were demonstrated that the very essence of dramatic art distinctly precludes verisimilitude? Where is the verisimilitude in an auditorium divided in two parts, one half of which is full of spectators?

Discovered in its new sense in *The Fairground Booth* (1906), theatricality—a miraculous self-revelation of stage and its essential quality which moves beyond style or spectacle —was the foundation of Meyerhold's methodology and an obsessive interest which defined his creative path over the thirty-six years of his career. Through symbolism, "conventionality," commedia dell'arte, traditionalism, constructivism, and the synthetic theater of the grotesque Meyerhold strove always to uncover the nucleus of theatricality. Unlike Stanislavsky, Meyerhold understood it not as a means for revitalizing a dull spectacle but as a specific theatrical language. The grammar of this language—stage time, space, and action—obeyed rules different from those in real life; and a person on stage acted differently from a person in reality. Action in the Meyerhold system was built around an interplay between the actors and the spectators, which emphasized the playful nature of the theater itself through the demonstration of theatrical conventions.

The goal of Meyerhold's method, this interaction was never intended to include the direct physical participation of the audience, but it relied on the audience's alert and liberated imagination. Thus, the audience, along with the author, the actor, and the director was considered an equal creator of any theatrical event; the principle of co-activity defined, in turn, notions of space and acting.

Hence the importance of the proscenium, an essential spot of Meyerhold's stage space, to which all the interrelated production elements were linked up. Already in 1913, in the introduction to his collection of articles entitled *On Theater*, Meyerhold wrote:

I, who got into directing in 1902, only by the end of the decade was fortunate enough to touch upon the mysteries of the Theater that are concealed in such primary elements as the proscenium and the mask.

More than merely a frame around the action, the proscenium was understood as a catalyst for the desired spiritual contact between actors and audience. As such, it required the absence of the curtain, which was indeed banned from certain productions of the Fellowship of the New Drama as early as 1906. In 1910 Moliere's *Don Juan* was almost entirely performed on a wide apron jutting out into the auditorium of the Alexandrine Theater. To emphasize the importance of this apron Meyerhold even introduced little blackamoors—the famous proscenium servants—to open the action and to place and remove accessories on the stage between acts.

However, much work was left to be done on the part of the actors. "Doing" instead of "being" became the major principle of Meyerhold's acting technique. The 19th-century focus on the actor who experienced something on stage was now abandoned. The actor was no longer expected "to emanate" feelings; instead, Meyerhold invented for each moment a specific bit of business for the actor based on movement and related to the whole as tile fragments within a mosaic, and it took the audience's creative imagination to perceive all the parts in the artistic totality. With allusions, cross-references, and reflections of all sorts, Meyerhold guided the imagination of his audience to keep the act of perception from being purely subjective.

Bodily movement was considered the core of the actors' "doing" in particular, and the essence of the actors' creative process in general. Convinced that movement *is* development and, therefore, the visual, stage analog of the dramatic action of the play, Meyerhold prioritized it early in his career. As he took his understanding of movement even further, he considered stage emotions and speech as a part of movement and attempted to organize their development in audio-visual ways as well. After the Revolution, when he finally got his own actors, the possibility of the old form of ill-conceived, irregular, movement on stage was completely excluded; the constructivist "apparatuses for playing" (used, for instance, in *The Magnificent Cuckold* and *The Death of Tarelkin*) revealed immediately any sloppy, or cliched gesture, thus celebrating the beauty of functional and expedient movement.

Having formulated this treatment of space and action before 1917, Meyerhold never betrayed it throughout his career. In April of 1917, at a debate entitled "Revolution, Art,

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War," castigating "the salient, passionless parterre where people come for a rest," Meyerhold asked rhetorically: "Why don't the soldiers come to the theater and liberate it from the parterre public?" In his book, Braun misinterprets this statements as proof of Meyerhold's political radicalism. However, the director was merely voicing once again his desperate desire to establish an interaction between the actors and the audience. He needed an audience different from what he had before, and one better unacquainted with all types of formal innovations than one contaminated with naturalistic preconceptions. Soldiers, nurses, or nuns, Meyerhold did not really care. Essentially, he remained the same artist who proclaimed as early as in 1913:

A theater that presents plays saturated in 'psychologism' with the motivation of every single event underlined, or which forces the spectators to rack his brains over the solution of all manner of *social and philosophical problems* [italics added]— such a theater destroys its own theatricality . . . The stage is a world of marvels and enchantment, it is breathless joy and strange magic.

The inner logic of Meyerhold's creative development happened to coincide for a brief moment with the grandiose myth of Revolution. This coincidence was the director's existential tragedy that ended with his physical extermination 23 years later. Back in 1917, however, the myth of Revolution legitimized those means that Meyerhold had already conceived on his own. At the same time, it served as an independent source of new imagery and models that Meyerhold could use for his explorations of theatricality. One of these models, in vogue during the first revolutionary years, was the mass spectacle, such as *Storming the Winter Palace*, staged in 1918 by Nikolai Evreinov. The participants in this repeated storming were supposed to be the same soldiers and workers who did it in 1917, but the Palace Square was decorated with gigantic painted backdrops that introduced a theatrical aspect to the spectacle—an aspect which had evolved directly from Evreinov's pre-revolutionary ideas about-the theatricalization of life. Having nothing to do with theater as an aesthetic phenomenon, Evreinov's ideas of recreation of events and emotions had more in common with a theater therapy that would purge people of their passions, whether individual or historical (those of an entire nation).

Yet *the theatricalization of life* and *theatricality* may be considered as counter-currents in the theater history of the 20th century—the former responsible for the extension of theatrical laws into real life, the latter revealing the heart of the theater event, though staying within the boundaries of traditional theater. Theatricality was, of course, Meyerhold's great fascination. Even in *Earth Rampant*, where Meyerhold put on stage real military detachments equipped with field telephones, motorcycles, and automobiles, he did not attempt to bring the mass spectacle into the proscenium theater. Emmanuil Beskin, who greeted with excitement "the destruction of theater" in this production, was quite wrong. In fact, Meyerhold was exploring how real objects would "behave" on stage when plunged into the magnetic field of total theater. Instead of using them merely as realistic props or decorative elements—as prescribed by the realistic tradition—he used them functionally in montage collisions with each other and in an interplay with a live actor—the method he later applied in *Revizor*.

The core of this method lies in the idea that, when placed in a complex stage context, even a simple object such as a chair acquires additional meanings—meanings which may not easily be expressed in words but which exist in relation to the principal meaning of the object, and to each other, most frequently in reciprocal tension. Adrian Piotrovsky referred to this phenomenon as an *objectified metaphor*, where "metaphor" stands for the system of meanings carried by a physical object, and, therefore, objectified. This tension plays into the theatrical system as an extra source of dramatic energy.

As argued above, the specific logic of theater action constituted the basis of Meyerhold's conception of theatricality. This playful, *non-veristic* logic might solely be expressed through rhythm and the pristine physical movements of the actor's body, accompanied by light, color, and sound. As it is by no means the logic of life-like sequences, this new logic calls for the paradoxical and unexpected. But the unfamiliar works on stage only when juxtaposed with the familiar, that is, when the director takes into consideration the audience's common expectations.

From this double-layered structure, in which the unfamiliar paradoxically estranges the familiar, Meyerhold's idea of the grotesque emerged. In effect the director held a special prism up to the eyes of his spectators; this prism contorts shapes and angles, mixes up polarities creating unexpected contradictions, and doesn't distinguish between low and high orders. The sacred and the profane, the beautiful and the ugly, the material and the spiritual —all categories are exploded. Quite early in his career, Meyerhold established the grotesque as a major component of his directorial method. Already in 1912, in the article *Balagan (The Fairground Booth)*, where he formulated an aesthetic platform for his early period of traditionalism, Meyerhold defined the grotesque as "something familiarly alien," "demonic in its deepest irony," seeking its realization in "mysterious hints, substitutions and metamorphoses." No doubt, this understanding of the grotesque is a modernized version of romantic irony seen in the works of Ludwig Tieck and E. T. A. Hoffman, which should be of no surprise to anyone who remembers that the symbolist movement in Russia, in which Meyerhold participated in his early days, adopted and rejuvenated many romantic concepts. On the other hand, Meyerhold's perspective on the grotesque is also predictive of contemporary aesthetics:

Grotesque does not know the low and the high . . . it mixes opposites, consciously creating sharp contradictions and playing with its own peculiarity. . . The most important feature of grotesque is a constant intention of the artist to take spectators out of one plane that they had just comprehended to another, which they did not expect.

That the grotesque synthesizes the opposites seems to be the most advanced aspect of Meyerhold's understanding.

Gradually, Meyerhold became convinced that the grotesque is intrinsic to the nature of theater art, that it is theatricality incarnate. In his brochure, *Amplua aktera (The Set Roles of the Actor's Art)*, written in 1922 together with V. Bebutov and I. Aksyonov, Meyerhold asserted:

[T]he theater, which is an unnatural combination of natural, temporal, spatial, and numerical phenomena, as such necessarily contradicts our daily experience and is by its very essence an example of the grotesque. Arising from the grotesquerie of the masquerade, it is unavoidably destroyed by any attempt to remove the grotesque from it and to base it on reality.

Analyzed microscopically, the grotesque provides essentially the same unresolved reciprocal tension of different meanings, whether this tension occurs between live bodies in space and props or between elements of stage design, between speaking voices and sound or light, or among all of them altogether. In fact, *tension through interaction* is a formula for Meyerhold's version of the grotesque, though it does not describe the particular emotional coloring of his vision.

That coloring was dark and lurid. Mixing the satirical and the tragic, Meyerhold's productions frequently abandoned harmony, optimism, and joy in favor of restlessness and anxiety. A "dark genius," as Yuri Elagin named him, Meyerhold generally created his works out of twisted forms and shadows, suggesting the presence of an ineffable menace, treading the invisible line between the material world and some other. Although all of these elements represent the basic philosophical concepts of Russian symbolism, the grotesque was innate in Meyerhold's own temperament as well. Describing the director's temperament, Kugel observed after his encounter with the young Meyerhold:

his face is not cheerful. He doesn't have enough complacency to laugh, enough peace of mind to be humorous, enough tranquillity and modesty to rejoice. His face is unquiet and uneasy, as if he is startled by life and its enigma.

Emerging, perhaps, from a sensation that a demonic presence is surely concealed beneath the familiar surfaces of common things and events, this anxiety, along with an eagerness to overcome it, haunted Meyerhold throughout his life.

It is now agreed among most contemporary recent Russian scholars that except for seven out of 36 creative years, Meyerhold's art did not reveal its essentially dark nature. This short seven year period extends through the years of Red Terror and War Communism (roughly, 1918-1922) and ends in 1925 with the staging of *Teacher Bubus*. With *Bubus*, critics contemporary to Meyerhold, started to speak about the return of the artist who had staged *The Fairground Booth* and *Masquerade:*

The tempo of stage action was slowing, anxiety began to fill the space, and the sense of the downfall of high culture . . . recurred as an inner theme in his productions. . . . [Critics] found the chorus in the tragicomedy *The Warrant* "frightening," and envisioned apocalyptic shadows in *Revizor*. In *Woe to Wit* (1928), the piano music played by the man of culture set him apart from the devouring herd of victors. *Commandarm 2* (1931) seemed to be a requiem to those who perished in the legendary times [times of the Civil War]. *The Introduction* (1933) depicted the collapsing, soulless state and the helplessness of a creative individual within it; it was ostensibly set in Germany, but why then did the despair seem so vivid? *Krechinsky's Wedding* dramatized a prevalent

horror . . . *The Lady of Camellias* (1934) took the impossibility of living according to human feelings, or of living in general, to its ultimate, tragic end.

In the end, the grim aspect of the grotesque worked its way back up to the surface of Meyerhold's productions. Ironically, his natural predilection towards such a world view was not dissipated by the reality of the Bolshevik state; rather, it was strongly supported by it. After all, this was a state in which the phenomenon of people disappearing in broad daylight was accepted by the general populace as a matter of course. Described by Mikhail Bulgakov in *Master and Margarita* (although with a lighter and more humorous touch) this reality ceased to be defined in terms of causality and linearity. The logic of common sense helped neither to understand nor to survive it; only the absurd and the eerie grotesque could adequately express it. Life was becoming merely its own empty shell; invisible forces had reduced human beings to the condition of interchangeable mannequins. Having passed through an explosion of hysterical activity from 1917 to 1920, the country was slipping into the lethargy of horror.

These were the very "riddles" of the time that Meyerhold heard and expressed theatrically in his 1926 *Revizor*, and that Rudnitsky was unable to explore fully in his book. The absurdity of modern existence, together with a universal and inevitable doom, pervaded the dark space of *Revizor* and froze the mask-like faces of its characters. It manifested itself in inexplicable doppelgangers and shadows shuddering in the candlelight. The production narrated a story about the living dead, with their empty eyes and cold, distilled eroticism; passions of the flesh were still alive but the needs of soul were long dead. The image of "swinishness in graceful guise"—ugliness and beauty synthesized—became the visual formula of this production, which absorbed naturalistic trends, symbolic motives, grotesque acting based on biomechanical training, and constructivist conceptions, into a sweeping theatrical whole.

Source: Daria Krizhanskaya, "Meyerhold-Revisor-Revolution," in *Theatre History Studies*, Vol. 20, 2000, pp. 157-70.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, author Ronald LeBlanc explores Gogol's gastronomic motif in The Inspector General *and examines the play's metaphorical use of eating for power and pleasure.*

The subject of gastronomy—as it touches upon the significance of what, how, and why man eats— has begun to receive increasing attention in recent years, during which time quite a number of books on the history of food and drink have appeared. Scholars, moreover, have demonstrated a heightened interest lately in the anthropological aspects of this topic. Since eating is a human activity that by its very nature encompasses a social, a psychological, as well as a biological dimension, the depiction of fictional meals in literature allows this ritualistic event to be transformed into a narrative sign with vast semiotic possibilities—not only within the world of the literary work itself (intratextually) but also within a broader cultural context (extratextually). It is not surprising, therefore, that some literary critics have begun to focus their attention quite scrupulously upon the culinary and gastronomical aspects of prose fiction. These so-called "gastrocritics" have examined the various roles played by food and fictional meals in the works of such diverse authors as François Rabelais, Jean-Baptiste Molière, Alain-René Lesage, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Marquis de Sade, Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Gustave Flaubert, Anton Chekhov, and Lev Tolstoi.

It is perhaps only natural and appropriate that these studies should gravitate toward French literature, since the French have traditionally regarded Paris as the culinary capital of the universe and considered themselves to be inherently fine judges of good taste. Well beyond the borders of France, however, there lived in the nineteenth century a writer from the Ukraine whose obsession with food— both in his own personal life and in his verbal art— is nearly without historical parallel. That writer is, of course, Nikolai Gogol' (1809-1852), perhaps the most famous gourmet and gourmand in all of Russian literature, a man whose preoccupation with the taste of the food he ate and the quantity of the meals he consumed was legendary even in his own day. From his own correspondence as well as from the testimony of acquaintances, we discover that Gogol' was a "true gastronome," who possessed, in addition to a passion for sweets and desserts, a fondness for Italian macaroni, an item which he insisted on serving up in large, generous portions for his Russian friends. These culinary interests were so serious, in fact, that Sergei Aksakov was led to exclaim that "if fate had not made Gogol' a great poet, then he would most certainly have become an artistchef." Indeed, the correspondence of Gogol' is replete with lengthy enumerations of his dining experiences in Europe, especially in Rome, where he first discovered the joys of pasta. Gogol' wrote at great length in his letters not only about the culinary aspects of eating, however, but also about the alimentary aspects as well, giving detailed descriptions of the various digestive ailments that plagued him throughout his later life, especially the hemorrhoidal condition that (so he claimed) eventually affected even his stomach. In fact, Gogol' began to complain so frequently about his stomach, the organ which he once referred to as the "most noble" in the human body, that his friends complained that they themselves were "living in his stomach." There is indeed a cruel irony implicit in the fact that this

notorious gourmand quite possibly died from inflammation of the stomach and intestines due to inanition (*gastroenteritis ex inanitione*). "In the months preceding his death," explains Vladimir Nabokov, "he had starved himself so thoroughly that he had destroyed the prodigious capacity his stomach had once been blessed with."

The widespread presence of food and drink in the prose of Gogol' was surely a result, at least in part, of the author's own personal gastronomical obsessions and was noted with obvious disapproval by contemporary critics. They repeatedly complained of the "Flemish" quality that such scenes of eating and drinking imparted to the works of Gogol' and several other prose writers from the Ukraine. If nineteenth century Russian critics were apt to assail this use of food and drink in prose fiction as a rather crude and improper violation of artistic decorum, modern critics have preferred to examine the many interesting uses to which an inventive writer, such as Gogol', put gastronomy in his works—whether it be as a way to create a bucolic image of his native Ukraine, to provide local color, to reflect social and religious customs, to reveal the personality of characters, or simply to provide comic effect. Indeed, an entire book has been written on the subject of food and drink in Gogol's works, Alexander Obolensky's *Food-Notes on Gogol* (1972), and Natalia Kolb-Seletski has contributed an article on "Gastronomy, Gogol, and His Fiction." Both these critics roam so broadly across the wide range of the writer's oeuvre in their examination of his use of gastronomical motifs, however, that neither explores at any great depth the semiotics of food and eating within individual works by Gogol'.

It is my intention in this article to restrict my inquiry to *The Inspector General* (1836), a text I have chosen primarily because the gastronomical motifs within it are so prominent. Jan Kott, in a brilliant review of the play, observed that "in no other of the great comedies is there so much talk about eating." My aim is to focus specifically on how the act of eating in this play progresses from a somewhat narrowly "mimetic" to a more broadly "symbolic" function once the actual physical hunger of the play's main character is satisfied. From the moment Khlestakov is fed, eating begins to operate according to one of the two different semiotic codes that Ronald Tobin, in an illuminating study of Moliére's *L'Ecole des femmes*, has delineated as an opposition between *manger*, or eating as power and violence, and *goûter*, or eating as pleasure. The Mayor, who has mistaken Khlestakov for a powerful inspector general, simply projects the wrong semiotic code (*manger*) upon him and thus "feeds" the hero out of a fear of being "eaten" himself. The Mayor, in other words, subscribes to Norman Brown's dictum that to live, psychoanalytically considered, is "to eat or be eaten." The hedonistic Khlestakov, on the other hand, subscribes to the semiotic code of *goûter*, for he indulges an appetite for food—just as he indulges a commensurate "taste" for women, cigars, boasting, and even writing— mostly for the pleasure it brings him. "Khlestakov's philosophy," as Vasilii Gippius bluntly puts it, "is that of vulgar epicureanism." In *The Inspector General*, as we shall see, the act of eating ultimately becomes identified with the act of writing, since both activities come to reflect the two main semiotic codes operative within the play. The fear that literature (as *lecture*) inspires in the Mayor at play's end and the pleasure that Khlestakov derives from literature (as *écriture*) mirror the gastronomical opposition between *manger* and *goûter* that underlies the structure of this text.

We can find various purposes for the plethora of gastronomical motifs in the play. At the rudimentary level of story line, food and eating fulfill what we might call a "structural" role in *The Inspector General*, generating the initial occurrences of mistaken identity in acts 1 and 2 and thus advancing what meager plot there is in the play. Critics, such as Kott and Obolensky, have already documented quite thoroughly this basic structural role of food and eating in *The Inspector General*, but it might prove helpful to review it briefly here. It begins in act 1 when Bobchinskii, who wishes to tell Dobchinskii the news that an inspector general is expected in town at any time, meets his friend "near the stall where hot cakes are sold." Dobchinskii, however, has already heard this disturbing piece of news from Avdotiia, the Mayor's housekeeper, when she was fetching "a small keg of brandy" from Pochechuev. Bobchinskii and Dobchinskii set off together for Pochechuev's house, but en route Dobchinskii's stomach starts to make a ruckus. "I have not eaten a thing since morning," he complains, "and my stomach is grumbling like an earthquake." They decide to stop at the hotel restaurant since Dobchinskii has heard that a shipment of fresh salmon has just recently been delivered there. It is at this same hotel, while they are in the midst of eating the fresh salmon, that Bobchinskii and Dobchinskii first see Khlestakov, mistaking him for an inspector general because, among other things, he runs up a large restaurant bill at the hotel (which he does not pay) and he looks so observantly at their food—staring right into their plates of salmon as they sit there dining. Only an inspector general, they assume, would inspect the local food so carefully, a sentiment echoed a short while later by another townsperson, the director of charities, who voices concern that the bad smell given off by the food at his hospital might ruin an inspection. "Throughout all the corridors," he tells the Mayor, "the smell of cabbage is so bad that you have to hold your nose."

The causal connection between food and the mistaken identity foisted upon Khlestakov by the townspeople continues in act 2, scene 8, where we witness the hilarious initial confrontation between the hero and the Mayor. Khlestakov, who assumes that the Mayor has come to arrest him for his failure to pay the restaurant bill he has run up, blames the innkeeper for serving him such terrible food and for trying to starve him to death by refusing him service: "The beef he gave me is as tough as a log, and the soup—God knows what he threw in there, I should have thrown it out the window. He tried to starve me to death for days on end. . . . The tea tastes strange: It smells like fish rather than tea." The Mayor, who fears that Khlestakov is indeed the inspector general, finds his worst suspicions confirmed by these words. Who else but an inspector general, after all, would complain so vociferously about the food and the service at the local hotel restaurant? The scene closes with the Mayor, who is now thoroughly convinced that this mysterious visitor is indeed the inspector general, setting off together with Khlestakov for dinner at the hospital. There they will consume a delicious meal of fish (*labardan*) and wine, a repast that will not only satisfy Khlestakov's hunger but also loosen his tongue and whet his appetite for other pleasures. Just before leaving for the hospital, however, the Mayor, who wishes to warn his wife beforehand that the inspector general will soon be coming to visit their home, hastily scribbles off a note to her on the only available piece of paper: Khlestakov's unpaid restaurant tab. The resulting letter-bill is a bizarre document which has often been cited as proof of the absurdist and alogical features at work in the play. "I hasten to inform you, my dear," the Mayor's letter reads, "that my situation was highly lamentable, but, trusting on God's mercy, for two pickles

and half a portion of caviar a ruble and twenty-five kopecks." This letter-bill with its mélange of fear and power as well as food and money, Kott argues, exposes the latent structure of the play. "In this pretended incongruity there is a whole topography and sociology of this country town," he writes. "There are almost hidden links and connections between the mercy of God, fear and power, between pickles in a restaurant and *labardan* in a hospital, between wine on the Mayor's table and in a merchant's cellar." This mimetic role of gastronomy in *The Inspector General*, where it serves as an indicator of social status, psychological reality, and personal well-being, is perhaps best demonstrated in the case of the town's two mysterious visitors, Khlestakov and Osip.

Food begins to fulfill this more strictly mimetic function in act 2 of the play, where Gogol' uses it to characterize not only the social status but also the personality of both the master (Khlestakov) and his servant (Osip). In the opening scene of this act, we listen to a long monologue by Osip, who delivers a poor man's soliloquy that both begins and ends with an impassioned, lyrical entreaty for food. He begins the monologue exclaiming, "The devil take it, how I'd like to eat! My stomach is grumbling as if an entire regiment were sounding its trumpets" and concludes it by saying, "Oh if only I could have some cabbage soup! I could eat the entire world." The audience thus learns right away that the desire for food, as far as Osip is concerned, is almost strictly a matter of survival. As had been the case with Lazarillo, Guzmán, Pablos, and other heroes from the Spanish picaresque tradition (as well as with the servants in the stage comedies of Lesage, Moliére, and Pierre-Augustin Caron Beaumarchais), hunger here signals the bitter deprivation such a character as Osip must endure as a result of his lowly social position. Like the traditional Spanish picaro, whose fate it is, as a servant of many masters, to suffer a number of sudden and severe reversals in life, Osip complains here of the numerous vicissitudes of his job: "One day you eat swell but the next you all but pass away from hunger— like now, for instance." Osip's precarious position in life, as emblematized by his hunger, recalls the plight of Lazarillo who—whether he is tricking the blind man for a morsel of sausage and a sip of wine or pilfering crusts of bread at night from the coffers of the stingy priest from Maqueda—is likewise engaged in a constant struggle for physical survival, a battle that forces him continually to fend off starvation. Indeed, Osip's complaints about his impecunious master's compulsion to show off (ordering the best rooms and the finest meals even though he is flat broke) bring to mind Lazarillo's service under the impoverished but honorable squire from Castille, who was likewise greatly obsessed with maintaining appearances at all costs. In any event, the starving Osip exists, like Lazarillo, at a level that gastrocritics would call the *degré zéro alimentaire:* Both these characters clearly eat to live, rather than live to eat.

Osip's master, as we learn from his monologues in scenes 3 and 5 of act 2, exists at the same *degré zéro alimentaire* as does his servant. Like the traditional picaro, he too is starving because of the vicissitudes of fate. Khlestakov's impoverishment has been brought about largely through his own fault, however; it is losses at cards that have reduced him to his present situation. We discover later, in the letter Khlestakov writes to his friend Triapichkin, that this is by no means the first time that the hero has found himself in a situation where he is unable to pay for food as a basic subsistence item. "Remember how, when you and I were broke, we used to sponge our dinners?"

Khlestakov writes. "Remember how once a baker was going to toss me out on my ear on account of the pies I'd eaten and charged to the King of England?" What distinguishes Khlestakov's hunger from Osip's, however, is that the master, unlike his servant, would rather starve to death than pawn the Petersburg clothing he values so dearly. His dandified appearance, in other words, seems more important to Khlestakov than life itself. The waiter is finally convinced to bring Khlestakov a meager serving of rather bland soup and meat in scene 6, a humorous scene that provides the audience with a telling revelation of the hero's true personality. Although Khlestakov at first absolutely refuses to accept this modest fare and complains throughout the scene about its quality, he nonetheless proceeds to devour greedily the unappetizing food offered him:

What kind of soup do you call this? You've simply poured water into a cup: It has no taste at all; it simply reeks. I don't want this soup, bring me another. . . . My God, what soup! I don't think anyone on earth has ever had to eat such soup. Feathers of some sort are floating around in it instead of fat. Ay, ay, ay. What chicken! Give me the meat! . . . What kind of meat is this? This isn't meat. . . . The devil only knows what it is, but it isn't meat. It's an ax that's been cooked rather than meat.

Khlestakov, whose particular "fervor" is to maintain appearances at all costs, thus feels compelled to criticize this meal as unsuitable for a person of his station, yet he nevertheless eats it.

When the waiter, in reply to the hero's complaints about the food, tells him that this is all that is available, Khlestakov objects strenuously, pointing out that he himself saw two men eating some delicious salmon at the hotel restaurant earlier that day. The waiter explains that decent food—such as salmon, fish, and cutlets—is available only to decent people, to those who are a bit "more respectable" (*pochishche*, literally, "cleaner"); such food, he adds, is reserved for those who "pay cash." This scene reveals not only the character of Khlestakov, but also the sociology of the world in which he lives. In this society those who are well off are fed salmon, while those who are not well off either do not eat at all or else are reduced to eating watered-down soup and meat that is as hard as wood. It could thus be argued that Gogol' uses gastronomy here in a highly mimetic way, endeavoring to illustrate the socioeconomic disparities existent within contemporary Russian society. This was a traditional way to use food motifs during this period. As James Brown has amply demonstrated in his study of fictional meals in French novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, contemporary writers such as Honoré de Balzac, George Sand, Eugène Sue, and Victor Hugo repeatedly exploited the metonymic possibilities of gastronomy in their fiction. By identifying hunger with poverty and culinary extravagance with wealth, these authors used food and eating as a way to criticize the social and economic inequities of contemporary bourgeois life. What makes the scene between Khlestakov and the waiter so distinctively Gogolian, however, is both the comedy involved in the starving hero's protests about the quality of the food and the irony inherent in the fact that those two supposedly decent respectable members of society (who are allowed to eat salmon while Khlestakov is not) are none other than the buffoons Bobchinskii and Dobchinskii.

The sociology of food in *The Inspector General* is likewise reflected in the fact that while Khlestakov, the master, is led off to a sumptuous banquet at the hospital, his poor servant Osip is left behind to fend for himself. Moreover, when Osip is offered pies, cabbage soup, and oatmeal at the Mayor's house in act 3, he does not turn up his nose and shun such "simple fare" as his master had done earlier at the hotel; instead, he accepts it immediately and gratefully. "Give them here!" he shouts without a moment's hesitation when Mishka, somewhat embarrassed, tells him that such unappetizing items are all that is available at the Mayor's house. Throughout the play, therefore, hunger remains for Osip a very basic physiological appetite that must be satisfied. For his master, however, such is not the case. Once Khlestakov's primitive hunger for food has been satisfied by the feast prepared in his honor at the hospital, a new, more voracious, and more insatiable appetite suddenly begins to manifest itself; a desire for other "pleasures" now begins to make itself felt. With the appearance of this desire for pleasures in Khlestakov, the act of eating in *The Inspector General* likewise shifts from a mimetic function, as an indicator of social and psychological reality, to a broader, more symbolic role as a paradigm of human desire. As Khlestakov moves from what Roland Barthes calls the "realm of necessity" (*l'ordre de besoin*) to the "realm of desire" (*l'ordre de désir*), a corresponding shift occurs within his psyche; *l'appétit naturel*, in Barthes's terms, is here superseded by *l'appétit de luxe*. Khlestakov, in other words, moves out of the domain of survival, where food indicates deprivation, into the domain of pleasure, where food indicates indulgence. His behavior, accordingly, now begins to follow the semiotic code of *goûter*, where eating signifies a pleasure that one must "taste."

Upon his return to the stage early in act 3, following his brief absence to attend the banquet held in his honor at the hospital, Khlestakov signals very clearly to the audience that his physical hunger has indeed been satisfied. "The meal was very good," he announces. "I have truly eaten my fill." At the same time, however, he signals that an accompanying shift has taken place within him, a shift from the realm of necessity to the realm of pleasure. "I love to eat a good meal," he says. "After all, that is why one lives—to pluck the petals of pleasure. What was the name of that fish we had?." From this point on, Khlestakov begins to manifest a behavior animated almost entirely by the pleasure-seeking principle. Among the many pleasures —all of them decidedly "oral"—which the hero now begins to indulge in *The Inspector General*, none is more memorable than his outrageous boasting. Notice, however, how Khlestakov's bragging, in that celebrated scene (act 3, scene 6) where he tries to impress the two women present—Anna Andreevna and Mariia Antonovna—with outrageous lies about his life in St. Petersburg, both begins and ends with references to food and meals:

Oh, Petersburg! What a life it is there! You probably think that I am a mere copying clerk. Not at all, I am on friendly footing with the section head. He'll come up and slap me on the shoulder and say, "Come on, old chap, let's go have dinner together."

Excuse me, I'm ready to take a little nap. That lunch we had, gentlemen, was excellent . . . I am satisfied, I am satisfied . . . Labardan! labardan!

It is safe to assume that Khlestakov's "satisfaction" here derives at least as much from his recent bout of boasting as from his earlier feast at the hospital, both of which have to

do, of course, with his mouth. Some of the boasting itself, moreover, directly concerns gastronomical matters. Describing the lavish parties he claims to have hosted in St. Petersburg, for instance, Khlestakov asserts that "on the table they serve watermelon—each one costing 700 rubles. Soup is brought in tureens by steamer straight from Paris: They open the lid and steam escapes, steam such as you could never find in nature." In boasting about his life in the capital, Khlestakov thus attempts to create an image of St. Petersburg as a gastronomical paradise of pleasure.

It seems clear enough to what end Khlestakov does all of this boasting: He wishes to impress the local provincials around him, especially the two women present. Like his own creator, Khlestakov seems to be an obsessive liar, who wishes to win the approval and adulation of others. "Both Gogol and Khlestakov," Henry Popkin observes, "lie instinctively, imaginatively, elaborately, and often unnecessarily." What is not so clear, however, is why Khlestakov insists on lying so brazenly and, as Popkin put it, so "unnecessarily." After all, Khlestakov's lying, as Vasilii Gippius has pointed out, does not serve here as the "extrication" device that we find so often in traditional Russian comedies, such as those written by Ivan Krylov, Aleksandr Shakhovskoi, and Gregorii Kvitka-Osnov'ianenko. Khlestakov does not need to lie in order to extricate himself from an unfortunate situation, since the contradictions in his outlandish statements, Gippius notes, "do not disconcert any of the other characters and are obvious only to the audience." Why then does Khlestakov persist in telling such bold-faced lies? Quite simply, he seems to derive enormous pleasure from telling lies. Like the wine at the feast at the hospital, the lies he tells at the Mayor's house seem to make Khlestakov literally "drunk" with pleasure. Iurii Lotman has suggested that Khlestakov tells lies because of a deep-seated feeling of self-contempt; the act of lying makes him so drunk that he ceases to be himself (that is, an insignificant copying clerk of whom he is ashamed). When Khlestakov mocks the copying clerk, Lotman argues, he is inviting others to laugh at the "real" Khlestakov.

Khlestakov, however, may well be attracted to lying not so much by a desire to escape *from* himself, as by an urge to escape to something outside of himself: that is, to flee from his loneliness and solitude to the pleasure provided by the company of other people. Khlestakov, in short, may simply be an extremely lonely individual who is merely seeking the warmth provided by human companionship. After all, he has been essentially holed up in his hotel room for the past two weeks, unable to leave town because of his dire financial situation. Suddenly, a fortuitous case of mistaken identity makes him an instant celebrity, surrounded by an entourage of extremely friendly, attentive, and solicitous people. "I love hospitality, and I must admit that I prefer it when people treat me well out of the kindness of their hearts, and not out of self-interest," Khlestakov says early in act 4. "I love pleasant company a lot. . . . I love such people." In addition to gaining him the attention of others, lying provides Khlestakov with many of the same psychological benefits that eating does, since both activities induce a condition that Brown refers to as the "serenity" syndrome: They bring about a state of relaxation and amicability. In psychological terms, Brown explains, "appetite" signals social dislocation, while "eating" signals social rapprochement. In the play a hungry, starving Khlestakov must initially suffer his physical privations and psychological alienation by himself, in solitude and in silence. As the play progresses, however,

Khlestakov is able to engage in direct and intimate forms of communication with others through eating and speaking, two essentially oral pleasures. Language and gastronomy are closely related fields, in the sense that the two activities most closely associated with them—eating and speaking—allow man to establish close contact with the world outside himself. "Eating and speaking share the same motivational structure," Brown argues, "language is nothing more than the praxis of eating transformed to the semiosis of speaking: both are fundamentally communicative acts by which man appropriates and incorporates the world." In this respect Khlestakov may be said to be attempting to eat and talk his way into the hearts of those around him, seeking to overcome in the process the existential space that separates his self from the rest of the world. In *The Inspector General* the act of eating, like the act of speaking, may truly be said to constitute the "archetype of intercourse."

Another form of intercourse to which Khlestakov seems drawn, at least ostensibly, is sexual. Eating arouses in him not only the desire to speak—to lie, to boast—but also the desire for sex. His taste for food, he seems to imply, is matched only by his taste for women. Food and sex have, of course, traditionally been located close to each other, both in western culture and in European literature. Indeed, the gastronomical and the sexual are appetites that, contemporary anthropologists assert, are closely associated biologically as well as socially. From a psychoanalytical point of view as well, the table and the bed are never very far apart, since in dreams, as Freud has noted, "a table is very often found to represent a bed." With Gogol', however, characters are seldom allowed to satisfy both their gastronomical and sexual appetites; instead they are usually presented with a choice—*either* a meal *or* a woman. In psychoanalytical terms, such a choice reflects an opposition between "genital" and "oral" modes of libidinal satisfaction. The characters, as one might guess, are invariably encouraged to opt for oral satisfaction; indeed, attempts to derive sexual satisfaction in this fictional world are usually rewarded only with pain and death. Like Gogol', these characters are forced to regress to pregenital (oral) libidinal outlets and thus to embark upon what Hugh McLean has characterized as a "retreat from love."

In *The Inspector General*, Khlestakov first associates gastronomical with sexual pleasures in act 4, scene 2. While commenting on the magnificent feast he enjoyed at the hospital, the hero suddenly switches the topic of his monologue to women, noting to himself that "the Mayor's daughter is not bad." Later in the same act, when he suddenly shifts his romantic attentions from the Mayor's daughter to his wife, Khlestakov refers to her in terms that make the "woman-as-food" motif quite clear. "She is also very nice," he observes, "quite appetizing [*appetichna*]." Similarly, gastronomical and sexual motifs are linked together in Khlestakov's letter to Triapichkin, a letter that, as Kolb-Seletski correctly observes, jumps from mention of the hero's two present paramours to the earlier incident with the baker and his pies in St. Petersburg. In light of the pattern of retreat from love and sex that we discern in the fiction of Gogol'—the regression from genital to anal and oral modes of libidinal satisfaction exhibited by his characters—it comes as no surprise that Khlestakov not only jumps from mention of food to mention of sex (and vice versa), but also digresses easily from talk of women and food to talk of the pleasures provided by a good cigar. This classic Gogolian progression—from food to women to cigars—is illustrated quite nicely by the development of Khlestakov's

appetites in *The Inspector General:* First he eats at the hospital (act 2), then he tries to impress the women at the Mayor's house (act 3), and finally he lights up a cigar (act 4). In fine Gogolian fashion, however, this progression from food to women to cigars is no sooner completed, then it is immediately reversed. Once Khlestakov begins to sing the praises of cigars in act 4, he reverts back right away to the pleasures of women and food:

I see that you are not a cigar fancier. I must admit that cigars are my weakness. I cannot be indifferent to the female sex either.

How about you? Which do you prefer—blonde or brunette? . . . I would really like to know what your taste is.

You fed me well at lunch. I admit that it is my weakness—I love good cuisine.

Of course, Khlestakov cannot talk about cigars or food or women without exaggerating, so he must interject here that, although the cigar he has been given is indeed a "decent" one (poriadochnaia), it is not anywhere near as pleasurable as the 25-ruble cigars he is accustomed to smoking in St. Petersburg.

To the list of pleasures that Khlestakov enjoys in *The Inspector General*—eating, boasting, women, cigars—there must be added one final item: literature. To the hedonistic hero of the play, such oral pleasures merely whet his appetite for the aesthetic satisfactions that come from the consumption of literature. Food and eating have often been used in western literature as metaphors for art, especially for reading and writing. Gogol' himself, in his correspondence as well as in one of his essays, links gastronomy with aesthetics by using alimentary metaphors to describe literature. It is not surprising, therefore, to find in his play that the act of eating— both as *manger* and as *goûter*—becomes paradigmatic of the act of writing literature. Khlestakov's own statements about what he "loves" signal to the audience throughout the play that for the hero food and literature serve as paradigms of human desires:

I love to eat.
I love to philosophize through prose or verse.
I love good cuisine.
I love to read something entertaining.
Moreover, when Khlestakov engages in his outrageous boasting in act 3, scene 6, he brags not only about the food served at his mythical parties, but also about his literary talents and connections. In much the same way that he had earlier boasted of his close personal relationship with his superior at work, Khlestakov brags that he is on a "friendly footing" (*na druzheskoi noge*) with Russia's greatest writer of the time—if not of all time—Aleksandr Pushkin. He proceeds to claim authorship of such foreign works as *Le Marriage de Figaro, Robert-Diable*, and *Norma*, as well as the works of such popular writers in contemporary Russia as Mikhail Zagoskin, Aleksandr Bestuzhev-Marlinskii, Nikolai Polevoi, Osip Senkovskii, and even the notorious Faddei Bulgarin. Carried away by his own literary braggadocio, Khlestakov goes so far as to assert that he exists, not by means of food, but by means of literature (4:49). Indeed, in the letter read to the

townspeople assembled at the Mayor's house in the play's climactic finale, Khlestakov writes that he desires to become a writer since he hungers so for "spiritual" food. "Following your example," he writes to Triapichkin, "I myself would like to take up literature. It is boring, old man, to live this way; one wants at last some food for the soul [*pishcha dlia dushi*]. As I see it, exactly what I need is to take up something elevated." The connection between literature and gastronomy in *The Inspector General* is made clear not only through Khlestakov's words, but also through his gestures. By means of the stage directions provided for the hero in acts 2 and 4, the playwright further encourages the audience to make this connection between eating and writing. In act 2, scene 6, when Khlestakov reluctantly accepts the unappetizing meal brought him by the waiter at his hotel room, the stage direction "he eats" (*est*) is repeated several times, just as later, in act 4, scene 9, when the hero is composing his letter to Triapichkin, the stage direction "he writes" (*pishet*) is likewise several times repeated.

It is literature, curiously enough, that will ultimately bridge the gap of misunderstanding that separates Khlestakov from the Mayor in this play. For Khlestakov, who wishes he had the soul of a writer, literature, like food, serves as a source of pleasure (*goûter*). For the Mayor, on the other hand, both eating and literature signal instead the threat of power and violence (*manger*). If we were to invoke Horace's classic dictum for literature —that it brings pleasure as well as profit (*dulce et utile*)—then we could say that Khlestakov enjoys literature's capacity to entertain, while the Mayor fears its ability to instruct. It is, after all, fear of the potential for violence and aggression that could possibly be unleashed by an inspector general that leads the Mayor and his fellow townspeople to project an identity of power onto the hapless Khlestakov in the first place. They then seek to appease this imagined hunger by "feeding" him whatever pleasures he might like and thus avoiding the terrible *agression gastronomique* they anticipate with so much dread and apprehension. Throughout most of the play, therefore, the Mayor is concerned to fend off being "devoured" by the inspector general; he does so by attempting to appease what he perceives to be that official's formidable appetite for dominance. He tries to "bribe" both Khlestakov and his servant, offering them not only money, but also, significantly enough, food. Thus, the banquet that is arranged at the hospital as well as the wine ordered for the Mayor's table are both obvious attempts to placate the imagined inspector general by satisfying his "appetite." Likewise, the Mayor gives Osip money at first as a tip (*na chai*, literally, "for tea") and then later for sustenance on the road (*na baranki*, "for a bun"). Osip, who realizes very quickly that an instance of mistaken identity has occurred, cleverly exploits the Mayor's fear of being "eaten" to his own self-advantage. "My master is most pleased when other people feed me well," he informs the Mayor in act 3, scene 10. Osip further exploits this feeling of fear (which is harbored by the Mayor and townspeople) during the scene in act 4 when a crowd of angry merchants approaches Khlestakov in hopes that he will listen to their complaints about the Mayor. Khlestakov, who has come to realize at last that he has been mistaken for a person of consequence, refuses at first their offering of bread and salt—the ceremonial food items symbolic of hospitality in Russian culture— mistaking them as attempts to bribe him. "I do not accept any bribes," he tells them, "but if you were, for example, to loan me about three hundred rubles—well, then it would be a different matter entirely. I can accept loans." The clever and pragmatic Osip, on the

other hand, does not hesitate for a moment to accept these culinary tokens of hospitality. "Your excellency! Why don't you accept them?" he asks Khlestakov. "Take them! On the road everything turns out handy. Hand over those loaves and baskets! Hand it all over! It will all come in handy. What's that over there? A bit of rope? Hand that over as well—the rope might come in handy on the road too." The most obvious attempts to bribe Khlestakov occurred earlier in act 4 when the local officials paraded up to this imagined inspector general, one after another, clumsily and nervously offering him various sums of money. Curiously enough, the verb used to describe these bribe attempts (*podsunut'*, "to slip") is the same one Khlestakov uses to characterize the food and drink served him the day before at breakfast: "yesterday they slipped [*podsunuli*] me something at breakfast." In any event, it is clear that the bribes, like the food, are attempts to satisfy the prodigious appetite for power and dominance of the inspector general—attempts to "feed" this monster before he devours the Mayor and his fellow town officials.

Once the Mayor is convinced that the inspector general's appetite has finally been satisfied, however, he then begins to exhibit quite openly his own carnivorism: that is, once he feels that Khlestakov has been sufficiently fed and bribed, the Mayor reveals his own propensity for violence and aggression toward others less powerful than himself. At the end of act 4, the newly engaged Khlestakov drives away (supposedly to visit his uncle), promising to return later to marry the Mayor's daughter. In act 5, therefore, the Mayor need no longer worry about satisfying the prodigious appetite of the inspector general. Instead, he can now indulge his own appetite for power and dominance over his subordinates, an appetite that manifests itself, once again, in gastronomical terms. When he threatens violent retribution upon those merchants who complained about him to Khlestakov, the Mayor claims that he will "feed" them sufficiently: "Before I fed you only up to your mustaches, but now I'll feed you [*nakormliu*] up to your beards." Indeed, he even refers to these merchants in gastronomical terms, calling them "fat-bellies" (*tolstobriukhi*): that is, tax farmers who have become rich ("fat") by controlling state monopolies on liquor. In threatening to settle scores with his constituents, the Mayor thus resorts to the same *agression gastronomique* that he had feared so much from the inspector general. Yet when he switches his thoughts from how he will reprimand those beneath him to how he will enjoy his newly acquired prestige and power in St. Petersburg (as father-in-law to a high-ranking inspector general), the Mayor dreams of glory, just as Khlestakov had earlier, largely in gastronomical terms. "To dream about power," Kott observes with regard to this play, "is to dream about food." Indeed, the Mayor's fantasies about what life will be like as a general in the capital seem to duplicate the picture of St. Petersburg as a gastronomical paradise that Khlestakov had helped to paint earlier when boasting about his life there in act 3. "Yes, they say that there are two kinds of fish there," the Mayor muses, "eels and smelts, both of which are so succulent that your mouth waters as soon as you begin to eat."

In the denouement of the play, when the postmaster and others read aloud Khlestakov's satiric letter to Triapichkin, the Mayor reverts back to his earlier fear of being "eaten" and "devoured." His fear, however, now expresses itself in literary rather than

gastronomical terms; he is mostly afraid that such a writer as Triapichkin will hold him up to public ridicule:

He will spread my story across the whole world. What is even worse than having fallen into ridicule is the fact that some scribbler, some hack will put me into a comedy. That's what is so insulting! . . . I'd fix all of these hacks! Oo! the scribblers, the damned liberals! devil's seed!

What frightens the Mayor most about literature is the way that its practitioners—the so-called "hacks" and "scribblers"—can devour him, a local government servant, by holding him up to public ridicule. Conversely, what attracts Khlestakov to the literary calling and makes him envy his journalist friend Triapichkin is the amusement and pleasure he can derive from ridiculing others. "I can just picture how Triapichkin will die laughing," Khlestakov notes while writing to his friend the letter in which he satirizes the various inhabitants of this provincial town. The desire for "spiritual food" which Khlestakov reveals in this letter—the desire to occupy oneself with something more elevated— has arisen in Khlestakov, however, just as have his other desires, only after his hunger for physical food has been satisfied. Thus, while Khlestakov, in act 2, scene 8, complains about the food he has been served at the hotel restaurant, he adds that the poor lighting in his room prevents him from reading a bit at night after dinner and from "composing something" when the inspiration strikes him.

Eating and writing are pleasures linked together not only for the hedonistic hero of *The Inspector General*, but also for his creator. Gogol', for his part, has been characterized as a "verbal glutton"—as a writer whose voracious appetite for words manifests itself in a highly exuberant prose style. Indeed, Gogol' himself employs gastronomy as a metaphor for literature when he writes to a friend for a critique of *Dead Souls*, phrasing his request in the following manner:

Imagine that I am an innkeeper in some European hotel and I have a table for everyone or a *table d' hôte*. There are twenty dishes on my table and perhaps more. Naturally, not all these dishes are identically good or, at least, it goes without saying that everyone will choose for himself and eat only the dishes he likes. . . . So I am only asking you to say this: "This is what is more to my taste in your work, these places here."

During the last ten years of his life, when he was being pressed by his acquaintances about the status of the eagerly awaited part 2 of *Dead Souls*, Gogol' made use of the metaphor of "author-aschef" several times, complaining in one instance that his masterpiece was not like *bliny*, "which can be prepared in an instant."

The ultimate irony, of course, is that whereas Khlestakov, the fictional alter ego of Gogol', capitalizes upon his situation in *The Inspector General* to his own gastronomical and literary advantage, his creator eventually fell under the deleterious influence of Father Matvei Konstantinovskii, who nurtured a growing religious fanaticism in Gogol', one that led him ultimately to forsake entirely both eating and writing. Gogol' would be encouraged by him not only to practice extreme abstinence, but also to renounce his literary mentor, the sinful, paganistic Pushkin. In his later years, Russia's most famous

comic writer would produce only the preachy, moralizing, and distinctly unartistic *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* (1847) and would eventually burn the troublesome second part of his greatest literary masterpiece, the epic poem *Dead Souls*. This enigmatic gourmand and gourmet, who once referred to meals as "sacrifices," restaurants as "cathedrals," and restaurateurs as "pagan priests," would also come more and more to fast rather than feast and to associate gourmandizing with sin. He would finally be driven to starve himself to death at the relatively tender age of forty-two, apparently in a case of what Rudolph Bell might now call "holy" anorexia. In this respect, the life of Gogol' may have unwittingly imitated his art, for the author of *The Inspector General* not only came to lose all "pleasure" in eating and writing but, as he became progressively devoured by religious fanaticism, he also came to fear with much dread the satanic "power" that could be wielded over him by both food and literature.

Source: Ronald D. LeBlanc, "Satisfying Khlestakov's Appetite: The Semiotics of Eating in the Inspector General," in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 47, No. 2, Fall 1988, pp. 483-498.

Adaptations

The Government Inspector was adapted to the screen in a 1949 American film entitled *The Inspector General*. It starred Danny Kaye as the character of Hlestakov and was directed by Henry Foster.

Topics for Further Study

Gogol lived and wrote in Russia during the first half of the nineteenth century. Learn more about the history of Russia in the nineteenth century. What were the significant cultural conditions and political events of the time? Learn more about Russia in the present day. How is it different from Russia during Gogol's lifetime?

Gogol is from a region of Russia that is now the independent nation of the Ukraine. Learn more about the history and culture of the Ukraine in the nineteenth century. Learn more about the Ukraine today. How has the region changed since Gogol's youth?

In addition to Gogol, important nineteenth century Russian writers include Aleksandr Pushkin, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and Anton Chekhov. Learn more about one of these authors. When and where did he live and write? What are his most important literary works? What similarities, if any, can be found between his work and Gogol's?

The Moscow Art Theater, established in 1895, was a center for innovative techniques in acting and dramatic production in Russia. Learn more about the history of the Moscow Art Theater. What influence do you think these innovative techniques had on productions of Gogol's plays?

Compare and Contrast

1825-1855: The reign of Tsar Nicholas I (1796-1855) as Emperor of Russia is characterized by extreme repression and extensive censorship of all printed materials.

1917-1991: The Russian Revolution of 1917 results in the end of the era of imperial Russia and the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.)

1985-1991: The ascendance of Mikhail Gorbachev as president of the U.S.S.R. results in the policies of *Glasnost* (verbal openness) and *Perestroika* (policy of economic and governmental reform), which usher in an era of unprecedented openness as well as the relaxation of censorship and repressive measures. These measures lead to the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. in 1991.

1712-1917: St. Petersburg, located about four hundred miles northwest of Moscow, and founded by order of the Tsar Peter I the Great in 1703, is made the new capital of Russia in 1912. In the eighteenth century, St. Petersburg becomes a center of intellect and the arts. The population of St. Petersburg increases from over 220,000 to one-and-a-half million between 1800 and 1900. In response to anti-German sentiment, the city is renamed Petrograd in 1914.

1924: Upon the death of Lenin, Petrograd is renamed Leningrad.

1991: A failed coup attempt waged against president Mikhail Gorbachev, at the seat of Soviet government in Moscow, results in the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The allowance of local elections initiates a series of reforms at the municipal level, including policies to introduce elements of free-market economy. In 1991, voters choose to change the name of the city of Leningrad back to St. Petersburg.

Nineteenth Century: Russian literature in the nineteenth century includes many of the greatest works of prose fiction in world literature to date; authors such as Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, and Tolstoy produce some of the most outstanding masterpieces of world literature.

1917-1980s: During this period, state-sponsored censorship allows only for literature that promotes the government propaganda of the U.S.S.R. By and large, Russian citizens have no access to Western literature, and they have little access to works of Russian literature produced prior to the Revolution of 1917. In 1934, under the rule of Stalin, "socialist realism" is declared the only admissible style of literature.

1985-Present: The beginning of the end of the Soviet era is dated to 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev became the president of the U.S.S.R. The policies of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* began effecting a lifting of censorship. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 marks the end of the era of Soviet Russian literature.

What Do I Read Next?

"The Nose" (1836) is one of Gogol's best known short stories. It concerns a man whose nose has left his face and taken up an independent life of its own, and the man's efforts to restore the runaway nose to its proper place on his face.

"The Overcoat" is Gogol's most celebrated short story. It concerns a poor scribe whose heart is broken when his prize possession, a fashionable overcoat, is stolen.

Dead Souls (1842), by Nikolai Gogol, is a comic novel set in feudal Russia. It concerns a man who concocts a get-rich-quick scheme in which he purchases the rights to deceased serfs ("dead souls") to pawn them off for profit.

The Captain's Daughter (1836), by Gogol's contemporary and friend Aleksandr Pushkin, is a historical novel of the Pugachov Rebellion.

Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka (1831 and 1832), by Nikolai Gogol, is a two-volume publication that contains tales drawn from Ukrainian folklore.

Nikolay Gogol: Text and Context (1989), edited by Jane Grayson and Faith Wigzell, is a collection of essays on the works of Gogol discussed in the cultural and historical context of nineteenth-century Russia.

The Complete Tales of Nikolai Gogol (1985) is in two volumes and is edited by Leonard J. Kent. It is an authoritative compilation of Gogol's fiction.

Leaving the Theater and Other Works (1990), edited by Ronald Meyer, is a collection of essays by Gogol.

The Theater of Nikolai Gogol: Plays and Selected Writings (1980) is edited by Milton Ehre. It includes translations of Gogol's dramatic plays.

Uncle Vanya (1896), by the great Russian playwright Anton Chekhov, concerns a man, Uncle Vanya, who has sacrificed his own happiness for the sake of his brother-in-law.

Further Study

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor, *Notes from the Underground and the Gambler*, Oxford University Press, 1991.

Originally published in 1864, the novella *Notes from the Underground* is the best-known work by one of Russia's greatest writers.

Erofeyev, Victor and Andrew Reynolds, eds., *The Penguin Book of New Russian Writing*, Penguin Books, 1995.

This book is a collection of prose fiction by contemporary Russian authors.

Magocsi, Paul Robert, *A History of the Ukraine*, Washington University Press, 1996.

This book includes a historical overview of the region of Russia in which Gogol grew up.

Maguire, Robert A., *Exploring Gogol*, Stanford University Press, 1994.

This book includes criticism and interpretation of Gogol's major literary works.

Pushkin, Aleksandr, *Eugene Onegin*, Penguin, 1979.

Originally published in 1833, this novel, by Gogol's friend and Russia's leading writer of the early nineteenth century, is a masterpiece. It provides a broadbased depiction of Russian life and culture.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an at-a-glance comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

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