

Nikolai Gogol

The Government Inspector was written by a strange little man named Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol. Gogol was born in Ukraine on March 19, 1809, which was then apart of the Russian Empire. He was a strong student, but couldn't keep a job after moving to St. Petersburg following his high school graduation. He then did what was apparently most sensible- he embezzled his mother's rent money to take a rather aimless tour of Germany. His funds soon ran out, so he returned to St. Petersburg. There he had, and lost, two government jobs and several teaching jobs; this is when his writing began to succeed. His novels and short stories basically started the movement towards realism in Russian literature. His most important works are generally considered *Dead Souls* and *The Overcoat*. He also excelled in surrealism, *The Nose*. Fun fact, *The Nose* is about a man who wakes up with out his nose, and soon finds out his nose has developed a life of its own, and has surpassed its previous owner in status and rank. After writing *Dead Souls*, he presumably became depressed, doctors diagnosed him as "Mad", and he died of a self imposed hunger strike, in an attempt to rid himself of the "devil". He was 42.

Brief Contextual History

The Government Inspector was written and takes place in 1830s Russia, in an era were Serfdom was still the societal structure. In this class system, serfs are tenant farmers, basically peasants, who farm a Lord's land; such a structure kept the gap between class dangerously large. Tsar Nicholas I, basically the king, reigned during this time period, from 1825-1855. Napoleon had brought new fangled ideas of religious and other personal freedoms to the Russian people during his failed attempt to conquer Russia in 1812. The Russian people, many of whom still lived as these impoverished serfs, would not soon forget these notions. In 1825, immediately after the death of the previous Tsar Alexander I, 3,000 people marched on St.Petersburg to hopefully cut off the Tsar's oppressive rule- this would become known as the Decembrist Rebellion. Most participants were then sent to Siberia. Soon after in 1826, Tsar Nicholas I enacted a strict Statue of Censorship, which basically prohibits all literary material that in any way, shape, or form questions the current state of the government. This does not mean that such pieces were not written, just most were not published.

Gogol started writing *The Government Inspector* in 1834. It was not going to be published or produced at all due to the censorship laws, until Tsar Nicholas I himself heard rumors about its genius. He called a special premiere performance of the political satire for himself and his court on March 19, 1836. He LOVED it, much to Gogol's surprise, and the comedy was soon the greatest theatrical event of the season. Gogol soon after moved to Rome, presumably for his own safety.

Soon after that, revolutions and rebellions broke out all over Europe. Workers went on strike in Britain, they brought a charter of reform to the government, Polish people rioted and killed 1500 nobles with scythes, and there are uprisings in Germany. Now, one last factoid to leave you with: One year before *Government Inspector* premiered, 1835, a certain Karl Marx began University. In 1848, he publishes the Communist Manifesto, the basis for the 1917 Russian revolution.

Written by Mary Eliza Hendricks

