



# NIKOLAI VASILYEVICH GOGOL

Readings in Russian Literature: The Nineteenth Century  
IIIT Hyderabad  
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# Hetmanate and Khanate

- “Cossacks” were eastern Slavic people originating in the southern steppes, in what is today Ukraine and southern Russia.
- Ukrainian Cossacks long believed that they were the true people of ‘Rus, and that the Russian Empire was a usurper.

Source: BBC.com



# Hetmanate and Khanate

- Crimean Tatars are a Turkic people who belong to the Crimea.
- Russia annexed the Crimea from the Ottomans in 1783.
- Russia lost the Crimean War against Britain, France, Sardinia and the Ottoman Empire in 1852.



# Hetmanate and Khanate

- Deportation of Tatars to Uzbekistan in 1944; many thousands die.
- Crimea goes to Ukraine in 1954.
- Empire always tries to impose homogeneity as an integrating impulse.
- This has been resisted by Orthodox Cossacks and Tatar Muslims in the Crimea for a long time.

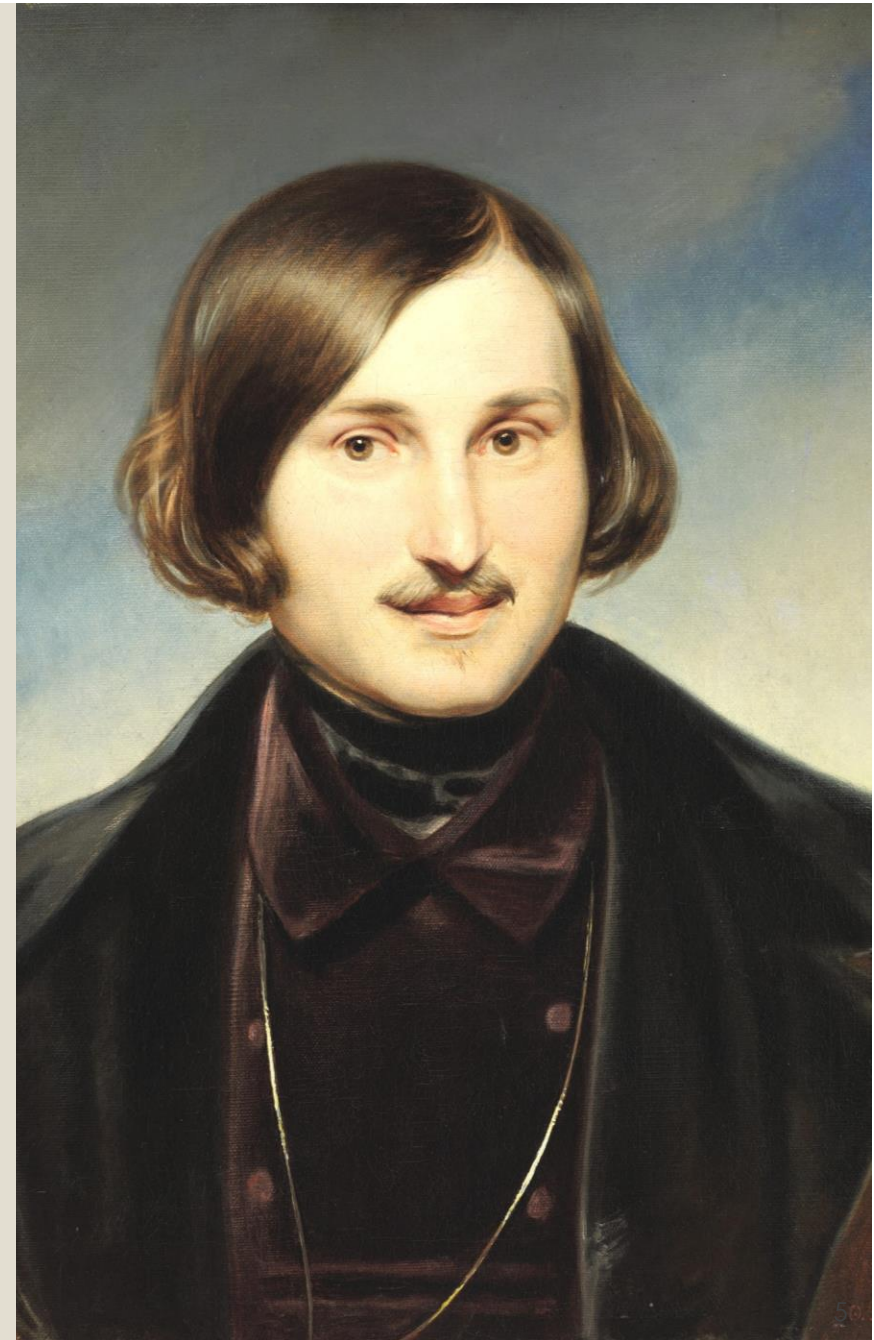
Source: BBC.com



# Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol (1809-1852)

- Born in Sorochintsy, Poltava Province, Ukraine.
- Raised on a small estate owned by his mother, close to Dikanka.
- Sent to boarding school near Kyiv.
- Graduated at nineteen, struggled to hold government posts in St. Petersburg, wrote a terrible poem and then bought back all the copies.
- In 1831-2, published *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* in *Otechestvenniye Zapisi* and achieved instant success at the age of twenty-two.
- Wrote more on Ukraine and Ukrainian provincial life.

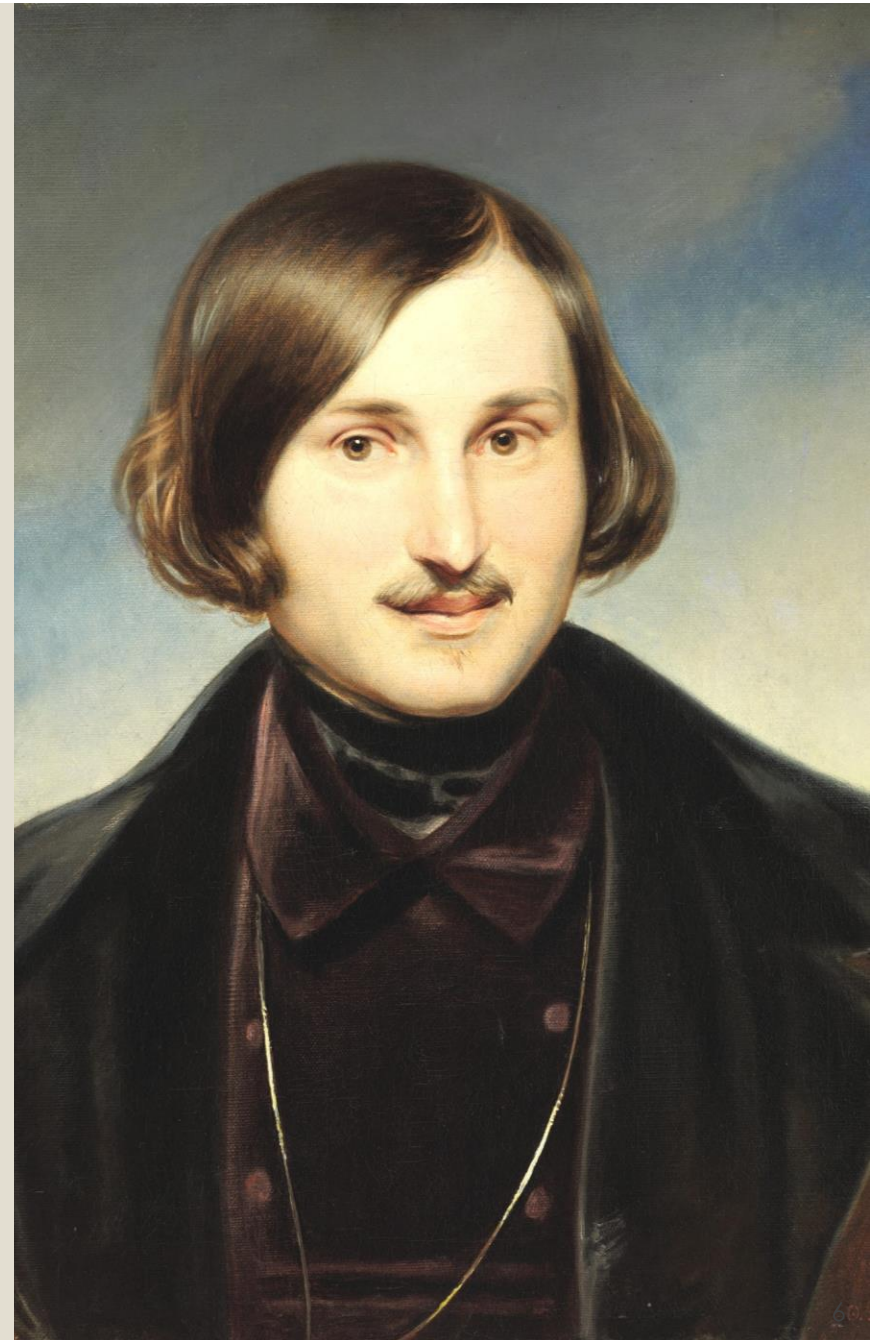
Originally painted in 1841  
Otto Friedrich Theodor von Möller  
Oil on canvas  
Tretyakov Gallery



# Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol (1809-1852)

- Pushkin was impressed and published Gogol's work in *Sovremennik*.
- "The Nose" was published in the third issue of *Sovremennik*.
- Left for Switzerland, Paris, and Rome; lived there for twelve out of the sixteen remaining years of his life.
- His illustrious writing career was only twelve years long, and he did not write much in the last ten years of his life.
- His literary perspective lies in between provincial Ukraine and cosmopolitan Russia.

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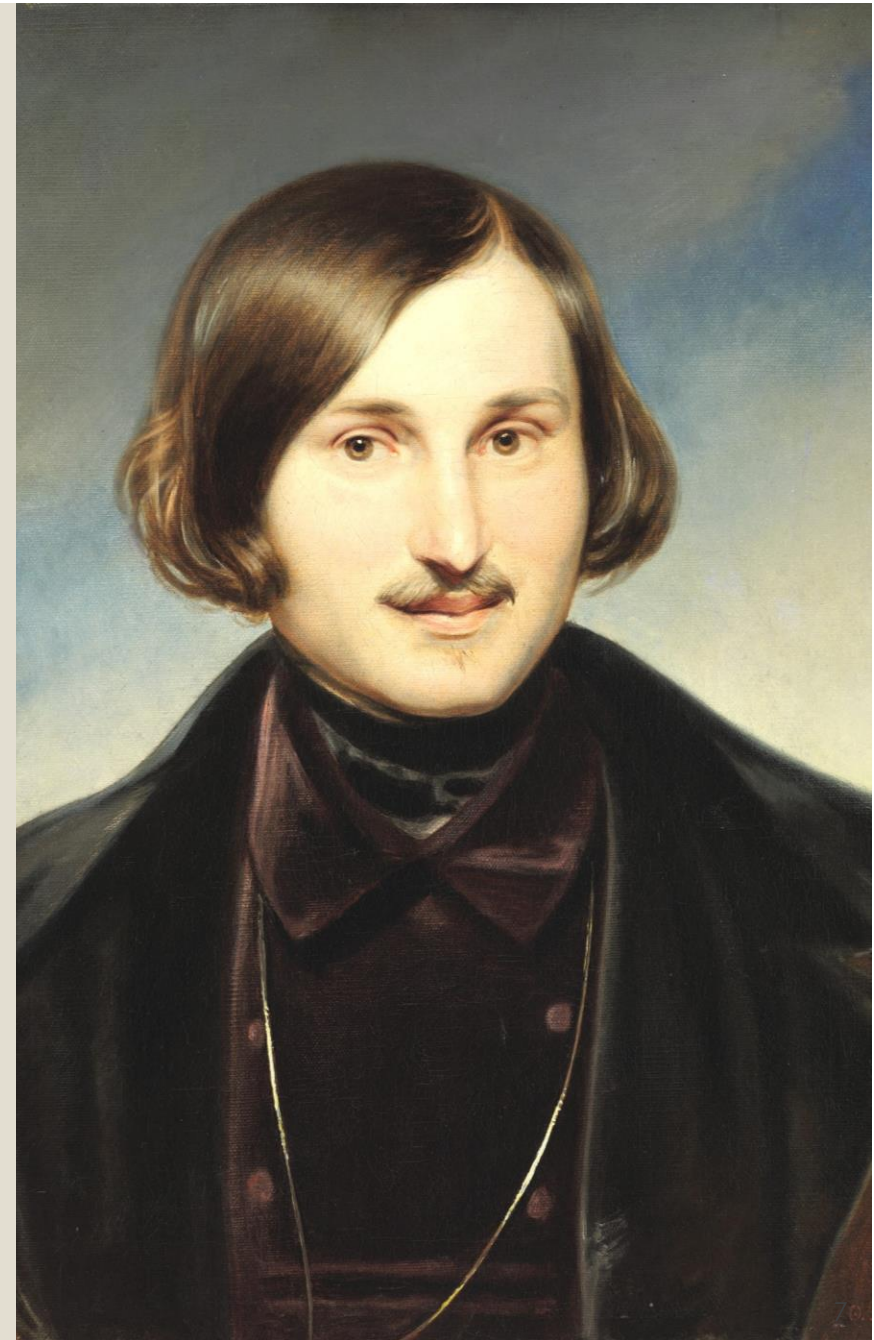




# Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol (1809-1852)

***“He did not write from within Ukrainian popular tradition, he wrote looking back at it. Yet he also never entered into the life of the capital, the life he saw flashing by on Nevsky Prospect ... this enforced, official reality of ministries and ranks remained impenetrable to him. Being on the outside of both worlds, Gogol seems to have been destined to become a ‘pure writer’ in a peculiarly modern sense” (Pevear 13).***

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# Little Russia

*“The province offered an ideal combination of the native and the exotic, the real and the fantastic, peasant earthiness and pastoral grace. The landscape of Little Russia is open steppe, not the forests of the north; the climate is sunny, warm, southern, conducive to laziness and merry-making; the earth is abundant; the cottages, built not of logs but of cob or whitewashed brick, are sunk in flourishing orchards; the men wear drooping mustaches, grow long topknots on their shaved heads, and go around in bright-colored balloon trousers. Here was a whole culture, with its heroic past of successful struggle against the Turks on one side and the Poles on the other, that could be taken as an embodiment of the Russian national spirit.”*



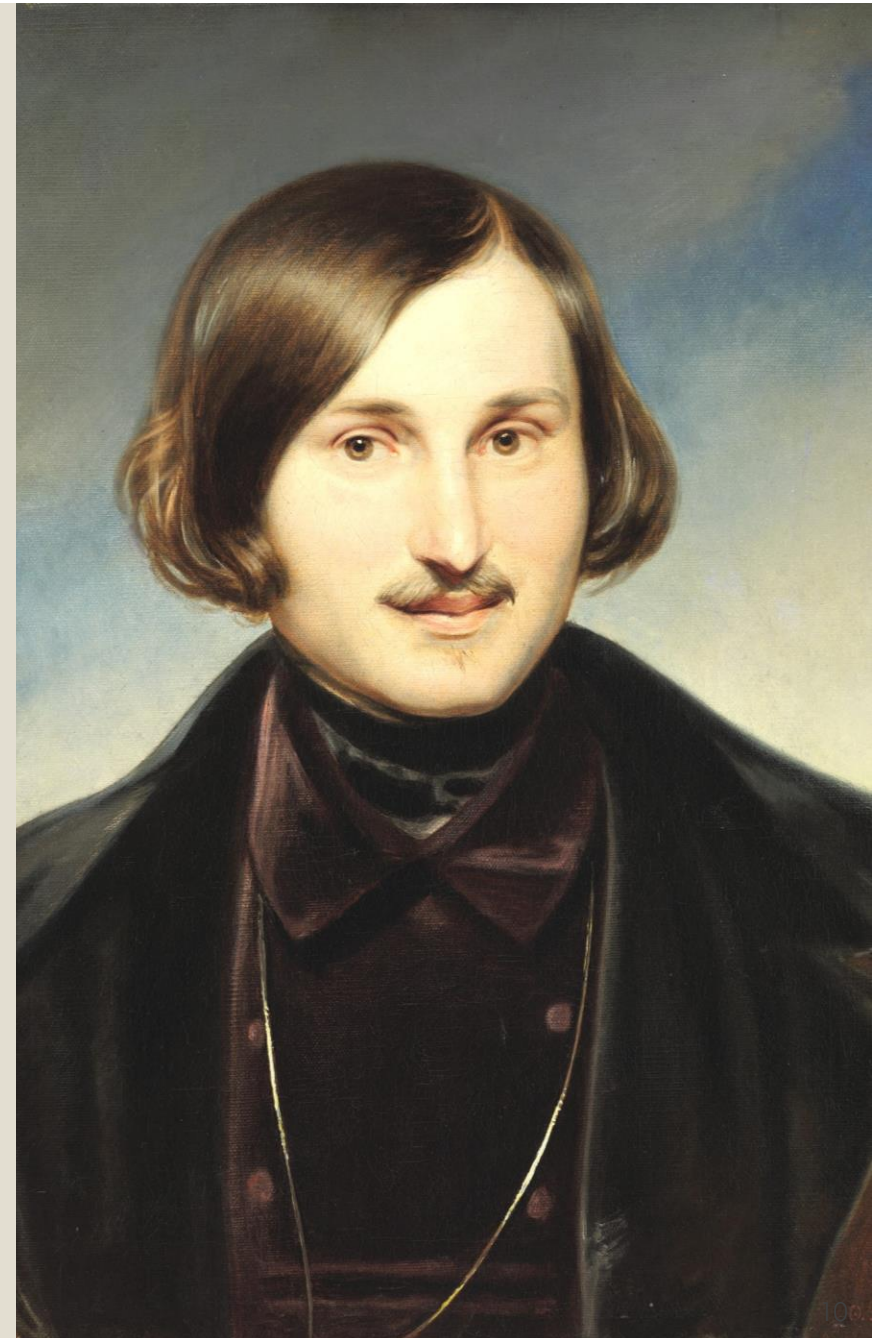
# Little Russia in Gogol's Work

*“a world of proud, boastful Cossacks, of black-browed beauties, of witches, devils, magic spells and enchantments, of drowsy farms and muddy little towns — that is, a stage-set Ukraine, more operatic than real” (ibid. 16).*

# Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol (1809-1852)

- Themes: folklore, idyllic nature and idyllic provincial life, in which the uncanny and supernatural intervene
- Not realistic, however, no depiction of the life of real Ukrainians in the provinces.
- A strange sense of humour, poking fun at the illusion of reality.
- Is his writing truly romantic or realistic, romantic and realistic, or is he doing something totally different?
- What do his stories mean? Do they mean anything at all?

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# Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol (1809-1852)

- He stands apart in the history of nineteenth-century Russian literature because he does not fit into the established traditions and schools of art of his time.
- Modern sensibilities in his work, i.e. beyond realism

***“a fantastic realist”***

*(Fyodor Dostoevsky, qtd in Pevear 12)*

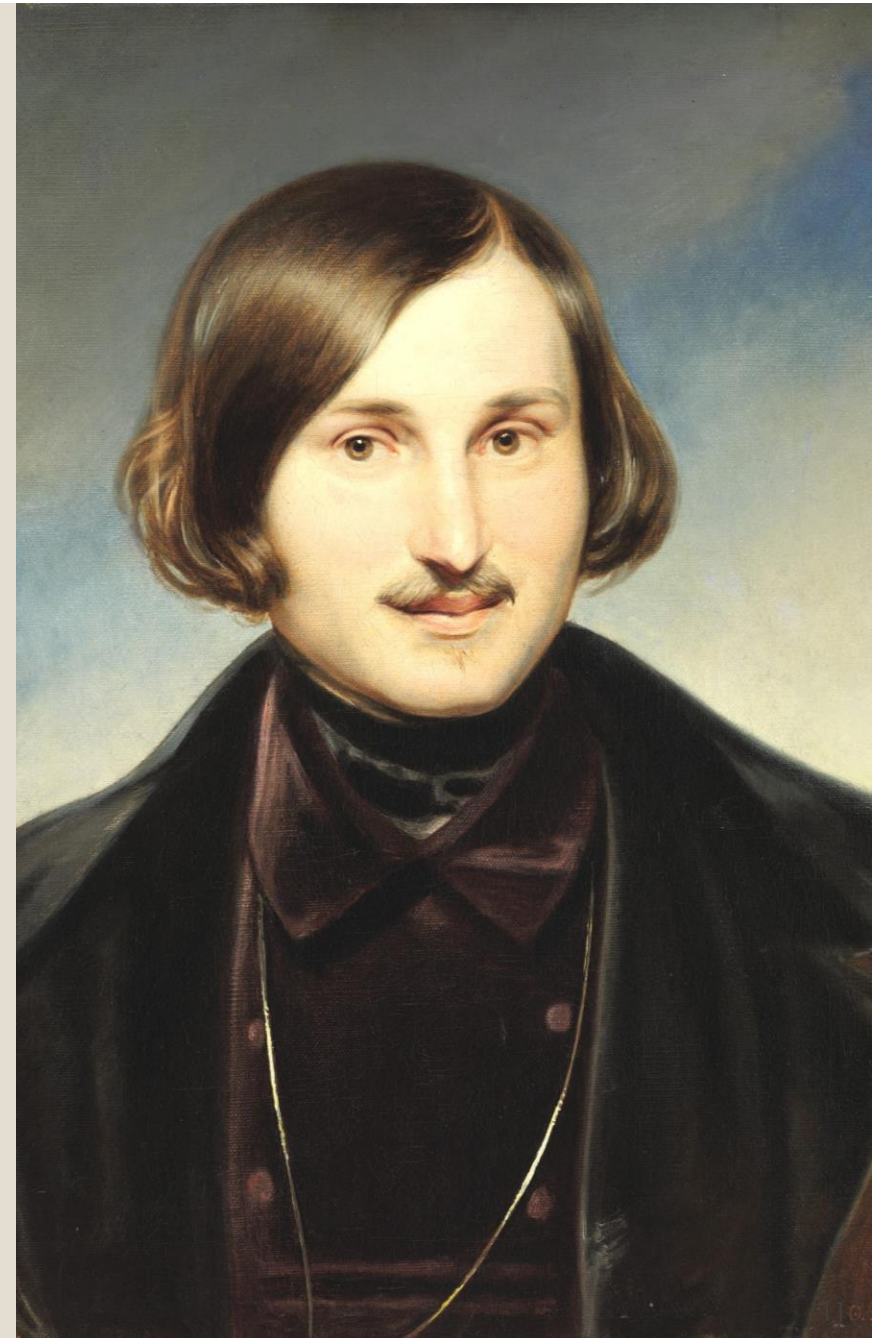
***“We still don’t know what Gogol is”***

*(Andrey Bely, qtd in Pevear 13)*

***“His criterion was not social utility, however, but artistic idiosyncrasy.”***

*(Richard Pevear 28)*

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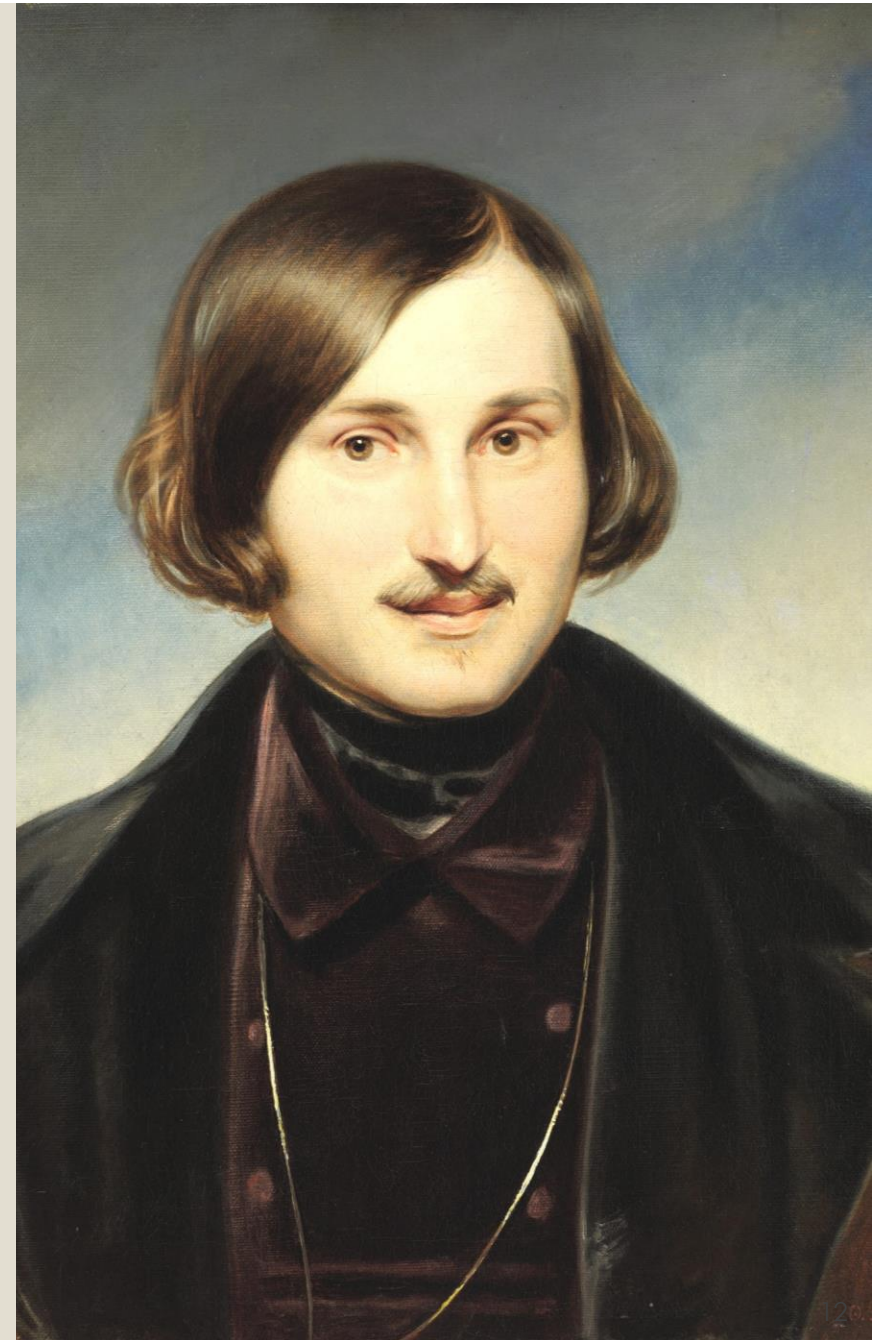




# Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol (1809-1852)

*“Gogol was made uneasy by his works. They detached themselves from him and lived on their own, producing effects he had not foreseen and that sometimes dismayed him. He would write commentaries after the fact, trying to reduce them to more commonplace and acceptable dimensions. But their initial freedom stayed with them. It was inherent in his method of composition, and in his astonishing artistic gift — astonishing first of all to himself” (30).*

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# “The Nose”: Interpretations

- **Social Critique:** the hypocrisy of official pretensions and state hierarchies
- **Religious Message:** March 25, Feast of the Annunciation – Apocalypse
- **Laughter for its own sake:** no meaning of its own, complete in itself, laughter as an end
- **Illusion of Reality:** all things that we hold so dear are hollow fictional constructs (Table of Ranks)

# The Nose

- Everyday nuances of life: how the barber dresses, the airs he puts on, his wife's thoughts about the extra refill of coffee, his concern about her feelings.
- Something particularly apt about this barber coming across a nose, from what his wife says.
- Actually begins to believe he has cut it off somehow, as a result of his shocked and panicky wife's words.
- Why is Ivan Yakovlevich so desperate to get rid of the nose?

***“Whether I came home drunk yesterday or not, I can't say for sure. But by all tokens this incident should be unfeasible: for bread is a baking matter, and a nose is something else entirely. I can't figure it out! ... ”***

# The Nose

- “Ivan Yakovlevich blanched . . . But here the incident becomes totally shrouded in mist, and of what happened further decidedly nothing is known.”

## *Why do we abandon Ivan Yakovlevich to his fate?*

- “After that . . . but here again the whole incident is shrouded in mist, and what came later is decidedly unknown.”

# Collegiate Assessor

*“But meanwhile it is necessary to say something about Kovalev, so that the reader may see what sort of collegiate assessor he was. Collegiate assessors who obtain that title by means of learned diplomas cannot in any way be compared with collegiate assessors who are made in the Caucasus. They are two entirely different sorts. Learned collegiate assessors . . . But Russia is such a wondrous land that, if you say something about one collegiate assessor, all collegiate assessors, from Riga to Kamchatka, will unfailingly take it to their own account. The same goes for all ranks and titles.”*



# Approaching his Nose

- *“The nose had his face completely hidden in his big standing collar and was praying with an expression of the greatest piety. ‘How shall I approach him?’ thought Kovalev. ‘By all tokens, by his uniform, by his hat, one can see he's a state councillor. Devil knows how to go about it!’”*
- *“He hastened into the cathedral, made his way through a row of old beggar women with bandaged faces and two openings for the eyes, at whom he had laughed so much before, and went into the church.”*



Image Source: *Arcadia*, 2013  
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# Visual Representation of “The Nose”

1. **Timelines** – the Barber, Kovalev, and the Nose; intersections
2. **Characteristics** of people and places – for example, high-and-mighty bureaucrats, the rough and rustic barber, the oppressed cabby
3. **Surrounding Information** – the newspaper office
4. **Imagining** the Nose

## **To Do:**

- Narrator's Role
- Reality and Plausibility

# Narrator's Inclusion of Self

- Open, thoughtful, friendly, conversational narrator, at ease, as if merely offering a conversation about an interesting occurrence:

“He decided to go to St. Isaac's Bridge: might he not somehow manage to throw it into the Neva? . . . But I am slightly remiss for having said nothing yet about Ivan Yakovlevich, a worthy man in many respects.”

“But meanwhile it is necessary to say something about Kovalev, so that the reader may see what sort of collegiate assessor he was. Major Kovalev had come to Petersburg on business—namely, to seek a post suited to his rank: as vice-governor if he was lucky, or else as an executive in some prominent department. Major Kovalev would not have minded getting married, but only on the chance that the bride happened to come with two hundred thousand in capital. And therefore the reader may now judge for himself what the state of this major was when he saw, instead of a quite acceptable and moderate nose, a most stupid, flat, and smooth place.”

# Works Cited

- Gogol, Nikolai. *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol*. Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. Vintage Classics, 1998. Reprint 1999.