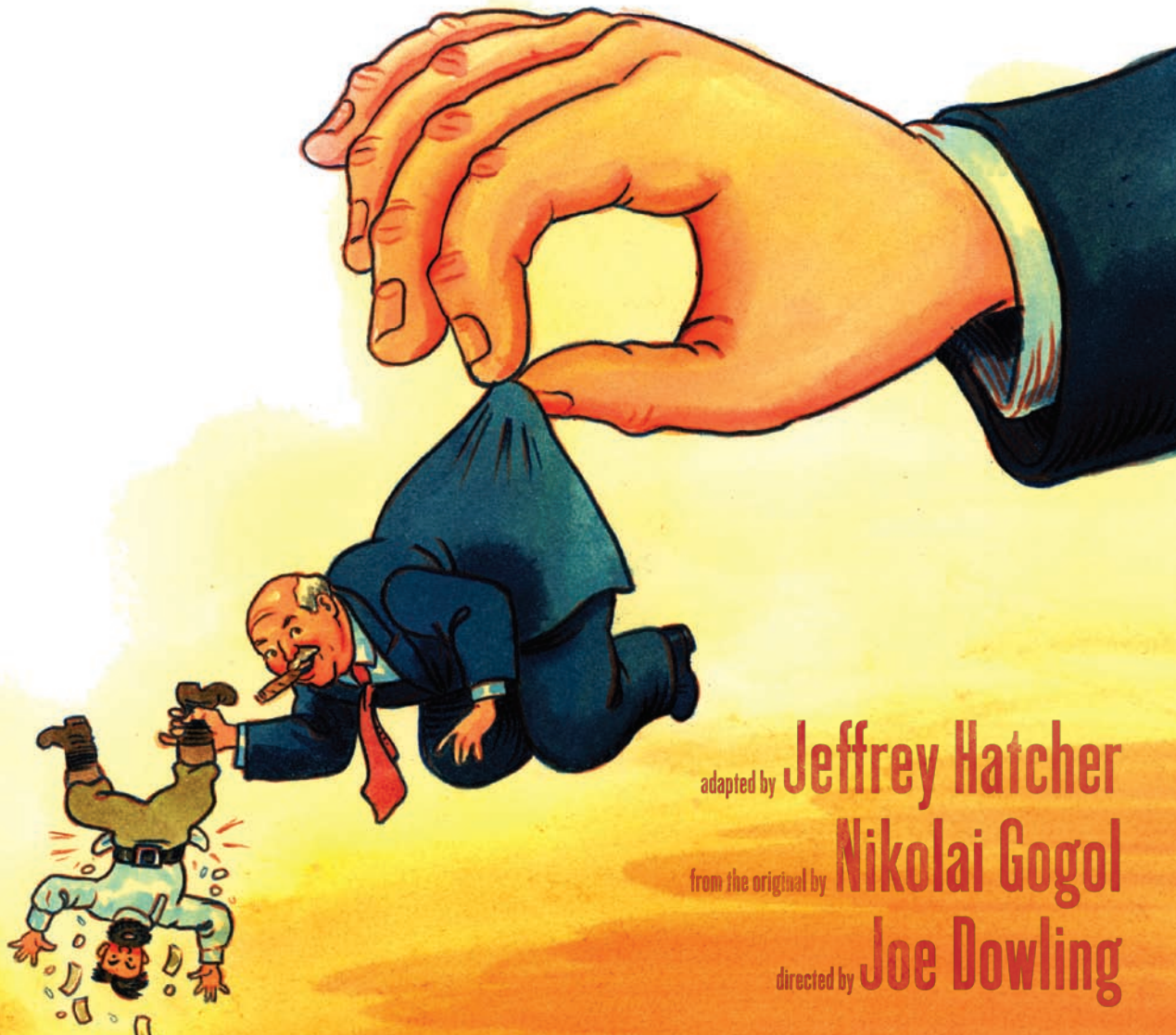




GUTHRIE

# PLAY GUIDE

## THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR



adapted by **Jeffrey Hatcher**  
from the original by **Nikolai Gogol**  
directed by **Joe Dowling**

July 5 - August 24, 2008 • Wurtele Thrust Stage

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## GUTHRIE

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This play guide will be periodically updated with additional information. Play Guide last updated July 15, 2008.

## SYNOPSIS

**W**hen locals in a small Russian town learn that an undercover government inspector is coming for a surprise visit, an unfortunate case of mistaken identity sends the village spiraling into a world of panic and greed. Fearing such a visit will expose the extent of the town's corruption, Mayor Anton Antonovich and other local government officials set off in a flurry of activity to cover up their various misdeeds and prepare for the inspector's arrival.

Gossiping local landowners Dobchinsky and Bobchinsky fuel the town's frenzy when they discover that a stranger from the city has already been staying at the local inn for a week.

Across town, a lowly and impoverished young civil servant, Ivan Alexandreyevich Hlestakov, fights with the Inn Keeper's Wife and the Waitress over his mounting bills, as the Mayor arrives to officially welcome Hlestakov, who he mistakenly assumes is the government inspector.

Bribes fly as the corrupt officials – the Judge, the School Principal, the Hospital Director the Police Chief and the Postmaster – literally fall over themselves to offer fists full of rubles to the unsuspecting commoner. Shocked by his newfound wealth, and deciding to make the most of the town's misconception, he begins weaving elaborate tales of his life as a high-ranking government official with the help of his seedy valet Osip.

The Mayor's wife, wooed by the pedigree of the new visitor and hoping to wed her daughter Marya into further wealth, sets her sights on Hlestakov's heart. Even the Mayor's Maid, and trio of local merchants get into the act, helping put on a false front for the inspector, as a visiting Doctor quietly observes the antics from the background. It isn't until after Hlestakov is long gone, and just moments before the real government inspector is revealed, that the townspeople discover their mistake.

## THE PLAY'S REPUTATION AS REALISM

Almost immediately, the play acquired the reputation of being a stinging satirical attack on government institutions in the realist mode, and that reputation has clung to it since. This misleading reputation is due to Gogol's having been taken up by the literary critic Vissarion Belinsky. Belinsky was Russia's first important literary and social critic, of the same generation as Alexander Herzen and Michael Bakúnin, and believed that literature must first and foremost serve social ends. He championed Gogol as Russia's first great realist, and blind and wrongheaded as his judgment was, it has proved stubborn. In part this is because a true Russian literature was just beginning to emerge, and Gogol's two great contemporaries, Pushkin and Lermontov, were Byronesque Romantics. Next to their characters, those who populate Gogol's work seem pretty ordinary. However, Gogol actually had very little experience of provincial Russian life. He grew up in a small Ukrainian town in the Mirgorod district, but when he came to write his volumes of Ukrainian tales he had to ask his mother to provide him with details of daily life there. Although many of his characters tended to be drawn from average people (when their noses weren't disappearing from their faces and riding around in carriages), one of his favorite authors was Sir Walter Scott, and it seems that although Gogol might start with the mundane details of everyday life, his imagination soon pulled him toward Romanticism and then past it, warping any vision of the real world into the grotesque and the surreal. Even in the early Ukrainian tales, these ordinary people find themselves in extraordinary circumstances, facing ghosts, demons, powerful wizards, and other unsettling, otherworldly creatures. Perhaps Gogol's relationship to realism is captured in a sentence from a story in the *St. Petersburg Tales*, "The Nevsky Prospect." On that great boulevard, Gogol wrote, "the devil himself lights the lamps only so as to show everything not as it really looks," but as it appeared to his unique imagination

# CHARACTERS

**Anna Andreyevna** is the Mayor'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 original stage direction that "she changes her dress four times" during the play. The Mayor'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**, along with Dobchinsky, is a landowner in the town. In his notes describing the characters, Gogol states that the two 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**, along with 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 Mayor that the government inspector has arrived, thus initiating the case of mistaken identity that propels the entire play.

**The Mayor** 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**, 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, Osip. 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 Mayor 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 Mayor'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 Mayor. 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** is the Mayor'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.

**Osip** is Hlestakov's servant. Gogol describes him as a middle-aged man who "is fond of arguing and lecturing his master." Gogol notes that Osip is more clever than Hlestakov and "sees things quicker." Osip muses aloud to himself, informing the audience of

Hlestakov's true identity and destitute financial circumstances. Osip wisely hurries Hlestakov out of the town as soon as possible, fearing that his deception will soon be found out.

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.

The characters are nightmare people in one of those dreams when you think you have waked up while all you have done is enter the most dreadful (most dreadful in all its sham reality) region of dreams. ... Gogol's play is poetry in action, and by poetry I mean the mysteries of the irrational as perceived through rational words.

Vladimir Nabokov, Nikolai Gogol, 1944

# COMMENTS ON GOGOL AND THE PLAY

[Gogol told me that] in Hlestakov he wished to portray a man who tells cock-and-bull stories enthusiastically, with gusto, who is unaware how the words spring to his lips, who, at the moment he's lying, has absolutely no idea that he is doing so. He merely relates his perpetual fantasies, what he would like to achieve, as if these fantasies of his imagination had already become reality. But sometimes in a burst of jabber he loses the thread of his conversation, [and] reality merges with dream. ... "Hlestakov is a lively fellow," Gogol said; "he should do everything fast, animatedly, without reasoning, almost unconsciously, not reflecting for a moment that will come of his actions, how they will conclude, how his words and actions will be received by others."

From the reminiscences of Lev Arnoldi

## If we are to find the essence of this play we should realize how Gogol stands in terms of Russian letters and Russian theater.

Like Pushkin, who was not only Gogol's mentor but the originator of the play's plot, Gogol was a professional writer – one of Russia's first – who depended on the success of his writing to survive. Artistically speaking, he was a rebel; he initiated the naturalistic school of Russian letters and was a dominant influence on many subsequently famous writers, including Dostoyevsky and Ostorovsky.

Throughout his life Gogol's gentle nature never seems far from cracking under the strain of reality (particularly the reality of failure, domestic and professional) so he escapes, as do many of his leading characters, into a world of fantasy, of hallucination, of pretended success. In this play the Mayor and his wife, and Osip and Khlestakov [sic], each in his way nagged by failure, resort to dreams of an idealized life and success. Each sees himself climbing ruthlessly over the prostrate bodies of those around and above him until he reaches the ultimate fulfillment of his dreams.

Unlike his characters, Gogol sees the worth of such dreaming. Moreover, it is important to the purpose of many of his works, the novellas as well as the plays, that we too should see these dreams, for what they really are. As Vladimir Nabokov vigorously reveals in his analysis of the writer, Gogol's characters are victims of *poshlost*, that is, their whole culture, the goal of all their yearnings is built on the ultimate of bourgeois mediocrity."

*Poshlost* is the world of *The Government Inspector*, and it is made all the more vivid by virtue of the tense situation that brings it neurotically to the surface. The awful truth about each character, especially those occupying official posts, may at any moment, they think, be exposed. Each may be forced to admit his sins and submit to punishment; each will then abandon his bourgeois dreams and live with the ugly truth forever. It is ironical that, with the possible exception of the Mayor's fascist-like excesses, none of these truths are particularly black. They are minor, very bourgeois sins – a little bribery, a little adultery, a little misappropriation of funds; the typical sins of petty tyrants in a small provincial town.

Michael Langham, Director of the Guthrie's first production of *The Government Inspector*, 1973–1974 season

Gogol's play is poetry in action, and by poetry I mean the mysteries of the irrational as perceived through rational words. True poetry of that kind provokes — not laughter and not tears — but a radiant smile of perfect satisfaction, a purr of beatitude — and a writer may well be proud of himself if he can make his readers, or more exactly some of his readers, smile and purr that way.

Khlestakov's [sic] very name is a stroke of genius, for it conveys to the Russian reader an effect of lightness and rashness, a prattling tongue, the swish of a slim walking cane, the slapping sounds of playing cards, the braggadocio of a nincompoop and the dashing ways of a lady-killer (minus the capacity for completing this or any other action). ... He is utterly and deliciously vulgar, and the ladies are vulgar, and the worthies are vulgar—in fact the whole play is composed by blending in a special way different aspects of vulgarity so that the prodigious artistic merit of the final result is due (as with all masterpieces) not to what is said but to how it is said—to the dazzling combinations of drab parts. As in the scaling of the insects the wonderful effect may be due not to the pigment of the scales but to their position and refractive power, so Gogol's genius deals not in the intrinsic qualities of computable chemical matter but in the mimetic capacities of the physical phenomena produced by almost intangible particles of recreated life.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol*, 1944

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, Iif and Petrov) his influence was crucial. In this sense alone, to call Gogol the 'father of Russian prose fiction' is eminently justifiable.

Richard Peace, *The Enigma of Gogol*

**T**he *Government Inspector* is a play without virtuous characters, and it is also a play without villains. Khlestakov [sic] comes out of a venerable line of charlatans and imposters but, as Gogol tirelessly repeated, he is not to be identified with the ‘braggarts and theatrical rogues’ of comedy for the simple reason that he has no idea he’s lying. Khlestakov [sic], for Gogol, was a dreamer, a fantasist, for whom imagination and reality have become interwoven into a crazy quilt of illusion. Exposing the ludicrousness of the world about him, he is himself ludicrous. Neither virtuous nor evil, the characters of Gogol’s comic works (the melodramas are something else) are merely ridiculousness. They reside in a halfway house between redemption and damnation – a comic purgatory.

Milton Ehre, “Laughing through the Apocalypse: The Comic Structure of Gogol’s *Government Inspector*” *Russian Review*, 1980.

**The whole comedy takes place in one day; the events develop with breathtaking speed, and only in this way is the delusion of the officials comprehensible and likely, for in their fear they leave themselves no time to reflect. One man’s senseless fear of another must necessarily lead to disaster – not the words of conscience are listened to, but the words of the authorities. Dobchinsky makes the following generalization: ‘When a high official speaks one is frightened.’ And the whole play moves in this atmosphere of fear.**

Vsevolod Setchkarev, *Gogol: His Life and Works*, 1965.

**T**he *Inspector General (Revisor)*, the greatest of Gogol’s three serious attempts at play-writing and the greatest comedy Russia has ever produced, begun during October 1835, was completed in only two months, performed for the first time on the first of May 1836, published the same year, and revised for the 1842 edition of Gogol’s collected works.

Using the ancient literary device of mistaken identity for his plot, Gogol peopled his play with as motley and vulgar a crew as he could create; even his hero, like all his heroes, functions on the same low plane. It is a delightful and outrageous caricature, although Gogol himself, already obsessed by religious mania, insisted that the arrival of the real Inspector General at the conclusion of the play is the call to the Last Judgment. It is a singular play in that it is devoid of love interest and functions beautifully without a single sympathetic character. It is one of the great ironies that this play written by a conservative who cared nothing for reform should be seen as a satire on social corruption. Like *The Overcoat*, it is very much concerned with the absence of moral fiber. It is the nakedness of the soul that is here mercilessly and hilariously exposed. Densely textured, enormously imaginative, it contains incredibly funny dialogue. Gogol’s feverish imagination found even the rich Russian language inadequate to his needs; he molded it, changed it, added to it.

His characters are, despite their excesses, identifiable and recognizable, too. His “little man,” his course man, his rogue, his marvelous “vegetable man,” his drunkard, his fool, his mediocrity – all are part of the real world, much more a part of it than the soulful romantic hero or the fiendish Gothic creation can ever be. And their motivation is real, their reaction to stimuli is real because it is predictable, and the bode by which they govern themselves is also real. Despite all this, his characters are primarily caricatures. On occasion they are symbols of almost mythical dimension.

The frame of reference within which these characters move and function is very real indeed. *Poshlost* is real, so is corruption; so is injustice; so is selfishness. Gogol’s intensive detailing accounts for its recognizability, and even his hyperbolic distortion of it cannot mask it. Need we be surprised to read of the bureaucrat who squirmed through a performance of *The Inspector General* or of the serf owner who was tortured by feelings of guilt (though such reactions are self-imposed)? Laugh as we will at [Gogol’s most memorable characters], the meanness of the world that reduced them to what they are is disturbing.

Character is developed by focusing on mannerisms, on snuffboxes, on how often one shaves, on how one walks, eats, sleeps – and always with great precision.

Leonard J. Kent in his introduction to *The Collected Tales and Plays of Nikolai Gogol*, 1969.

**We all come from under  
Gogol’s Cloak.**

Fyodor Dostoyevsky (as legend goes)

## GOGOL ON WRITING AND THE PLAY

**T**he idea of a comedy has possessed me. ... Just the other day its subject began to take shape; I had already jotted down the tide in a blank thick notebook, *The Vladimir Order, Third Class*, and what fury, laughter, pungency! But I stopped short, realizing my pen had touched upon things the censor wouldn't dream of passing. What is a play that won't be performed? Drama lives only on the stage. An unperformed play is like a soul without a body. Would any craftsman exhibit an incomplete work? All I can do now is to concoct a subject so innocuous that it couldn't offend even a policeman. But what is comedy without truth and fury! So I can't attempt a comedy. But if I pick up my historical studies — before my eyes the stage comes alive, applause reverberates, faces jut from boxes and galleries, grins appear in the orchestra — and to hell with history.

From a letter to M. P. Pogodin, February 20, 1833

**Do me a favor; send me some subject, comical or not, but an authentically Russian anecdote. My hand is itching to write a comedy. ... Give me a subject and I'll knock off a comedy in five acts — I promise, funnier than hell. For God's sake, do it. My mind and stomach are both famished.**

From a letter to Pushkin, October 7, 1835

**T**he reaction to [*The Government Inspector*] has been extensive and tumultuous.

Everybody is against me. Respected officials, middle-aged men, scream that I hold nothing sacred in having had the effrontery to speak of officialdom as I did. The police are against me, the merchants are against me, the literati are against me. They rail at me and run off to the play; it's impossible to get tickets for the fourth performance. If not for the intervention of the emperor, my play would never have remained on the stage, and yet there were people seeking to have it banned. Now I see what it means to be a writer of comedies. The faintest glimmer of truth—and entire classes are up in arms against you.

**Cold sweat drenches my face at the thought that I may perish in dust without becoming famous for any extraordinary accomplishment. Living in this world would be terrible if I failed to make my being beneficial.**

Gogol, in a letter to his uncle, October 1927, shortly before his move to St. Petersburg

**T**he pitiful situation of the writer in our country is a melancholy sight. Everyone is against him, and there is no counterbalance whatsoever. “He’s an incendiary! A rebel!” And who is saying this? Government officials, experienced people who ought to have enough intelligence to see things in their true light, people who are considered to be educated and whom society or at least Russian society, calls educated. Crooks appeared on the stage and everyone is indignant: do you show us crooks? I can understand that the crooks are angry, but why those whom I never regarded as such? This uncultured petulance is very distressing to me; it is a sign of the profound, tenacious ignorance widespread in all classes of our society. ... Whatever enlightened people would greet with loud laughter and sympathy provokes the acrimony of the ignorant, and this ignorance is widespread. Call a crook a crook, and they consider it an undermining of the state apparatus; show a true and living feature, and they translate it to read as a defamation of an entire class and an incitement of other or subordinate classes against it. Consider the plight of the poor author who nevertheless loves his country and his countrymen intensely.

From a letter to M. P. Pogodin, May 15, 1836

**T**he *Government Inspector* has been performed—and I have such a troubled and strange feeling. ... My creation struck me as repellent, bizarre, and not at all mine.

... In general the public was satisfied. Half the audience even received the play sympathetically, while the other half, as usual, railed against it for reasons having nothing to do with art ....

“Fragment of a Letter to a Man of Letters, Written by the Author shortly after the First Performance of *The Government Inspector*,” May 25, 1836

**A**ll is disorganized within me. I see, for example, that somebody has stumbled; my imagination immediately grasps the situation and begins to develop it into the shape of most terrible apparitions which torture me so much that I cannot sleep and am losing all my strength.

... in order to get rid of them [fits of melancholy] I invented the funniest things I could think of. I invented funny characters in the funniest situations imaginable.

Gogol retrospective comments on his work

## GLOSSARY

WORDS AND CONCEPTS  
IN THE GOVERNMENT  
INSPECTOR**A note on characters' names**

From The World's Classics edition of *The Government Inspector*, edited by Christopher English: The names of the characters in *The Government Inspector* are, almost without exception, motivated to some degree or other by language meaning.

Some illustrations from the characters named in this production:

The Mayor, Anton Antonovich Skvoznik Dumakhanovsky (Skvoznik-Dmukhanovsky)

- *Skvoznik*: a drought, or, figuratively, a sly customer, and

- *dmukhati* (Ukrainian): to blow or to whack. The suggestion is one of a devious and voluble man, who is also a windbag, fond of blowing his own trumpet.

The Constable, Svetsunov (Svistunov)

- *svistnut'*: to whistle, also to clout.

The Judge, Lyapkin-Tyapkin

- *tyap-lyap*: any old how: Slapkin-Dashkin. Hlestakov (Khlestakov)

- *khlestat'*: to lash.

The Postmaster, Shpekin (Shpyokin)

- *shpion*: spy, and *shpik*: secret agent: Snooper.

Tryapitchkin (Tryapichkin - Hlestakov's writer friend):

- *tryapki*: rags: Trashkin.

Perhaps the last word on this topic should go to Vladimir Nabokov, who says in his critical biography of Gogol that Hlestakov's (Khlestakov's) name "conveys to the Russian reader an effect of lightness and rashness, a prattling tongue, the swish of a slim walking cane, the slapping sound of playing cards, the braggadocio of a nincompoop and the dashing ways of a lady killer (minus the capacity for completing this or any other action)."

**rubles and kopeks**

The ruble has been the Russian unit of currency for about 500 years; it is divided into 100 kopecks.

**SCOLDS - p. 5**

*If God had wanted us to be smug scolds, he'd have made us live in the cities.* (Mayor)

In early use, a person (esp. a woman) of ribald speech; later, a woman (rarely a man) addicted to abusive language.

**AGNOSTIC - p. 6**

JUDGE

*The fact that I am an Agnostic has no bearing on my ability to entertain all sides of every argument.*

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

*I thought you were an Atheist.*

JUDGE

*I was, but it didn't leave me any room to maneuver. As an Agnostic, I'm open to the highest bidder.*

One who holds that the existence of anything beyond and behind material phenomena is unknown and (so far as can be judged) unknowable, and especially that a First Cause and an unseen world are subjects of which we know nothing.

**DOPPELGANGER - p. 9**

ALL OTHERS

*Yes! — We know! — Idiot doppelganger boys!*

From double-ganger

The apparition of a living person; a double, a wraith.

**SARATOV - p. 13**

*The desk clerk says his travel papers show he's been to pretty much every town in the countryside. After he leaves here he goes to Saratov.* (Bobchinsky)

Saratov, located on the Volga in southeastern Russia, about 500 miles from Moscow, is the administrative center of Saratov province and the birthplace of Peter the Great, who built St. Petersburg and undertook to westernize Russia in the 18th century.

**PODGORNY - p. 30**

*Really. Not even in Podgorny where they burn manure inside the hospital?* (Mayor)

There have been several rural settlements in Russia named Podgorny

**INTERNECINE...ness - p. 49**

*Just Saratov, for my sins. Then it's right back to the capital with its corridors of power, its bureaucratic infighting, its intrigue and internecine...ness. Of course, I'm above all that. I don't play the game. I am the game. You know how you hold power in a bureaucracy? Never have an expression on your face. Never let the cabinet secretaries and the clerks and office gossips ever know when you're pleased or upset or concerned. You can show them anger! Yes, anger is fine. Cold, hard anger that knows what it's going to do to you, my friend! But it has to be non-specific, so the minions'll all wonder if they're the one in trouble.*

(Hlestakov)

Deadly, destructive, characterized by great slaughter. internecine war, war for the sake of slaughter, war of extermination, war to the death.

**Pushkin & Gudenov - p. 50**

HLESTAKOV

*Me neither! What about Eugene Onegin?*

MARYA

*You mean Eugene Onegin —*

[HANDS HIM A BOOK]

— by Pushkin?

HLESTAKOV

*... Well, I'm not saying Pushkin didn't write some of it. We were strolling 'long the Nevsky one day, and I said, "Push! How's the book?" "Ivan, I am so blocked." Long story short: The duel? Mine. The "You loved me but I didn't love you now I love you and you can't have me" bit? Mine. Royalties and reviews? Him. But I don't begrudge. He's working on another one now, by himself. I just hope it's "gudenov."*

**Pushkin, Alexander Sergeyevich** — a Russian Romantic author who is considered to be the greatest Russian poet and the founder of modern Russian literature. Pushkin pioneered the use of vernacular speech in his poems and plays, creating a style of storytelling — mixing drama, romance, and satire — associated with Russian literature ever since and greatly influencing later Russian writers. In 1831, he met Nikolai Gogol. After reading Gogol's 1831–2 volume of short stories *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka*, Pushkin would support him critically and later in 1836 after starting his magazine, *The Contemporary*, would

feature some of Gogol's most famous short stories. Literary legend has it that Pushkin gave Gogol the idea for *The Government Inspector*.

**Gudenov** – reference to Boris Godunov - Tzar of Russia (1598–1605). His life was fictionalized by Alexander Pushkin in the famous play inspired by Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Modest Mussorgsky based his great opera *Boris Godunov* upon Pushkin's play. Sergei Prokofiev later wrote incidental music to the play.

“Do me a favor; send me some subject, comical or not, but an authentically Russian anecdote. My hand is itching to write a comedy. ... Give me a subject and I'll knock off a comedy in five acts-I promise, funnier than hell. For God's sake, do it. My mind and stomach are both famished.”

From a letter to Pushkin, October 7, 1835

Did Pushkin give Gogol the plot of *The Government Inspector* in response to Gogol's letter of October 7, 1835? He may very well have. Pushkin himself was taken for a government inspector on a trip to Nizhny Novgorod in 1833. Among Pushkin's papers there was the following plan of a work, probably jotted down the same year: “Krispin arrives in the Province ... to a fair-he is taken for [illegible] ... [dots in original]. The governor is an honest fool - the governor's wife flirts with him – Krispin woos the daughter.”

(A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy*, vol. 8, bk. 1 [Moscow-Leningrad: AN SSSR, 1948], p. 431.)

#### ORDER OF ST. VLADIMIR - p. 43

*Work. Brains. God. Often I'll pray at night and say, "Oh, God ... how can I be a better mayor? How can I better supervise city services and cut back on bureaucratic waste and fraud? I don't ask for a reward on earth, God, like a district-wide post or the Order of St. Vladimir. No, God, as long as there is an acceptably low level of public drunkenness, as long as the streets are clean with no dead animals left too long in the sun, as long as the patients in the hospital are cured of their serious but exceedingly short diseases, what else reward need I?"* (Mayor)

The Order of St. Vladimir, prince and equal of the Apostles, was a decoration of the fourth class in the Russian Table of Ranks, instituted in 1782 and awarded for state service; it took the form of a ribbon. The Order of St. Anne,

instituted in 1797, was given to military officers for bravery, and took the form of a cross worn on the hilt of the sword.

#### STIGMATA - p. 64

*Oh, my, yes! I have visions! See stigmata wherever I go! In fact, I almost gave up the law to become a priest, but I just felt the rules were too lackadaisical.* (Judge)

Marks resembling the wounds on the crucified body of Christ, said to have been supernaturally impressed on the bodies of certain saints and other devout persons.

#### IMANORATTO - p 85

[COOL]

*Daughter, please remove yourself to the parlor while I chat with your imanoratto.* (Anna Andreyevna)

inamorato - A man with whom one is in love or has an intimate relationship.

#### OTHER NOTES (Gogol and the world of the play):

Until the reforms of the 1860s, Russian law made little allowance for local autonomy. Officials, whether appointed, like the mayor, or elected by the nobility, like the judge, were subject to the authority of appointed provincial governors, the various ministries, and ultimately, of course, to the autocratic tsar. The mayor, judge, hospital director, and the school principal held ranks in the

Table of Ranks and were members of the civil service. In Russia power always had a personal, extralegal character, and in addition to their subordinate status in a governmental hierarchy, officials were exposed to the intervention of “important personages.” Because positions in provincial administration paid poorly and offered few opportunities for initiative and ambition, they were shunned by the more prosperous and better educated. If law gave local functionaries small scope, Russian reality had its compensations. Distances to centers of authority were often enormous, communication was difficult, and the bureaucracy, though growing, was undermanned. “Mayors,” who were essentially policemen, and their confreres came to regard their bailiwicks as personal fiefdoms where they might do pretty well as they pleased. Corruption, abuses of power, and plain incompetence were staggering. Tsar Nicholas I, determined to remedy the situation, had government inspectors dispatched to the provinces with frequency. Tales of men mistaken for such inspectors were common in the literature and gossip of the period. A second-rate play by Grigory Kvitka-Osnoyvanenko, *Visitor from the Capital, or a Commotion in a District Town*, bears resemblances of plot and incident to Gogol's. Though it was not published until 1840, copies of the manuscript (written in 1827) circulated widely. Gogol denied having read it.



**ST. PETERSBURG,  
19TH CENTURY.  
IMAGE COURTESY  
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## BIOGRAPHY OF NIKOLAI GOGOL



**N**IKOLAI 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

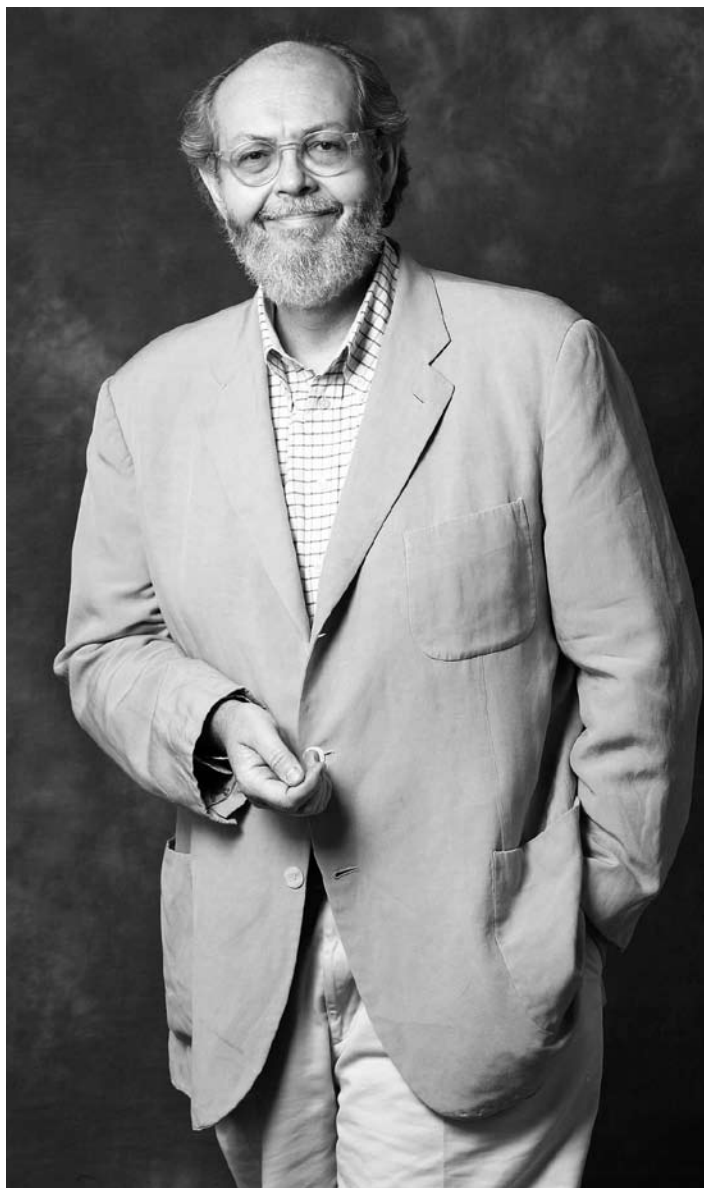
Gogol was sixteen years old, his father died. In 1828, Gogol arrived in Saint Petersburg, intent on becoming a civil servant. Obtaining a disappointingly low-level, low-paying post in the government bureaucracy, Gogol focused his ambitions on writing. His very first publication, in 1829, was mostly ignored; 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.

## BIOGRAPHY OF JEFFREY HATCHER



**J**EFFREY HATCHER wrote the book for the Broadway musical *Never Gonna Dance*, and many of his plays have been produced off-Broadway, including *Scotland Road*, *Three Viewings*, *A Picasso*, *The Turn of the Screw* and *Tuesdays with Morrie*, which he wrote with Mitch Albom. His plays have premiered and been produced at theaters across America and the Twin Cities, including *To Fool the Eye*, *The Falls*, *The Boys* and *The Government Inspector* at the Guthrie. *The Monkey King*, *Korczak's Children*, and *Miss Nelson is Missing!* at The Children's Theater Company, *Good 'n' Plenty*, *Murderers*, *Mrs. Mannerly*, and *Three Viewings* at Illusion Theater, and *A Piece of the Rope* and *All the Way with LBJ* at the History Theater. Other plays and theaters include *Compleat Female Stage Beauty*, *Smash*, *Hanging Lord Haw-Haw*, *Work Song* (with Eric Simonson), *Lucky Duck* (with Bill Russell and Henry Krieger), *Sockdology* and *What Corbin Knew* at Yale Rep, Old Globe, Seattle Rep, South Coast Rep, Intiman Theatre, Denver Center, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Milwaukee Rep and dozens more in the U.S., U.K., Germany, France, Japan, Chile, Belgium and other countries. He's also written screenplays for *Stage Beauty* (2004), *Casanova* (2005), and the upcoming *The Duchess* (2008) starring Keira Knightley and Ralph Fiennes, as well as episodes for the television series *Columbo*.

Mr. Hatcher has received numerous awards for his playwriting, including the Rosenthal New Play Prize, Frankel Award, Charles MacArthur Fellowship Award, American Theatre Critics Association Citation and Barrymore Award for Best New Play in 2003 for *A Picasso*. He's also received fellowships from the McKnight Foundation and Jerome Foundation, and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Theatre Communications Group and Lila Wallace Fund. He is a member and/or alumnus of The Playwrights' Center, the Dramatists Guild, the Writers Guild and New Dramatists.

# COMMENTS BY JEFFREY HATCHER

## JEFF HATCHER ON *THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR*

**T**his is my favorite Russian joke. If you ask a Frenchman, “What do you wish for your country,” the Frenchman will say, “I wish for my country the poetry of Rimbaud, the beauty of Paris, the majesty of Napoleon.” If you ask a German, “What do you wish for your country,” the German will say, “I wish for my country the greatness of Goethe, the grandeur of Wagner, the philosophical insights of Nietzsche.” If you ask a Russian, “What do you wish for your country,” the Russian will say, “*I wish that my neighbor’s cow should die!*”

There is more to Russia than that, of course – Tolstoy, Chekhov, the dog who went up in Sputnik – but it’s been argued that the reason Russia and its people have always felt a bit backwards in comparison with their more cosmopolitan counterparts in Paris, London and Vienna is because the Renaissance and the Enlightenment skipped them completely. Nobody came by to give them the word. This tends to be blamed on the country’s vast expanses and terrible weather – destiny as defined by geography and mud.

This may explain why Russia, be it Tsarist, Soviet, or Putinesque, has such a wobbly respect for good government, civic standards and the law, and why the west has always looked down its nose at Russia, regardless the charms of Dostoevsky, *The Nutcracker*, and Mrs. Khrushchev’s sense of style.

Why then is *The Government Inspector* – surely one of the most *à la Russe* examples of Russia’s culture – such a universal play?

In one sense, it’s the classic case of a very original and specific idea – a hapless nobody is mistaken for a powerful government official by a group of corrupt, small town officials. But it’s also because its characters are so recognizable to any person in any country in any age who has attended a city council meeting, met a contractor, or had an inflated

opinion of himself.

I first encountered *The Government Inspector* in college, in 1977. We performed the version Peter Raby adapted in the late 1960s and performed at the Guthrie in 1973 with Peter Michael Goetz as Dobchinsky or Bobchinsky (even Peter’s not sure). I played the Judge in that college production, and as theatergoers know, there’s no one more persuasive playing an old man than a 19 year old with white gunk in his hair. I knew at the first read through 30 years ago that in *The Government Inspector* Gogol had come up with one of the great, original comic situations – on a level with *Volpone*, *Tartuffe*, *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *The Odd Couple*.

I wasn’t a writer in 1977. Back then I wanted to act and be a part of “the regional theater movement.” But when I did become a playwright and started to do adaptations, I often wished I could get a crack at doing a new version of *The Government Inspector*. So getting the chance to do this version with Joe directing this cast at the Guthrie is a particular kick.

Last, a question I would expect from the study guide: “Does *The Government Inspector* have contemporary significance?” I could answer that question with specific reference to some recent politicians and events, “but it would be wrong, that’s for sure.”\*

### Jeff Hatcher

(With apologies to the entire Russian people. And their cows.)

\* Richard Nixon, telling John Dean he could come up with a million dollars to pay the Watergate burglars hush-money, and then suddenly remembering that his tape recorder was on.

## QUOTE FROM THE ADAPTOR AND PLAYWRIGHT

**A** playwright friend of mine says the three best things in life are ‘Sex, Food, and Re-Writing Someone Else’s Play.’ An *adaptor* of someone else’s play gets a modified version of that particular *frisson*: not as scholarly and precise as translator, not as free and original as the author himself. Writing an adaptation is like a game of ‘telephone’: someone whispers a story to someone else, who in turn whispers it to someone else, etc. The fun is finding out if the story you get at the end matches the story you started with at the beginning.

My job has been to tailor the text, massage it, expand it here, condense it here, condense it there, know when to hew close to the original and when to go off on my own for a bit.

Jeffrey Hatcher, about adapting a play for the Guthrie, *To Fool the Eye*, in 2000

# RUSSIAN CENSORSHIP

## CENSORSHIP

Under the reign of Tsar Nicholas I, Russian writers suffered extremely strict censorship of all written material. In 1826, a statute on censorship 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.” Penalties included warnings, rebukes, fines, confiscations of offending books or magazines, police supervision or detention in the guardroom of local military garrisons. It was a wonder that anything got into print at all. 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.

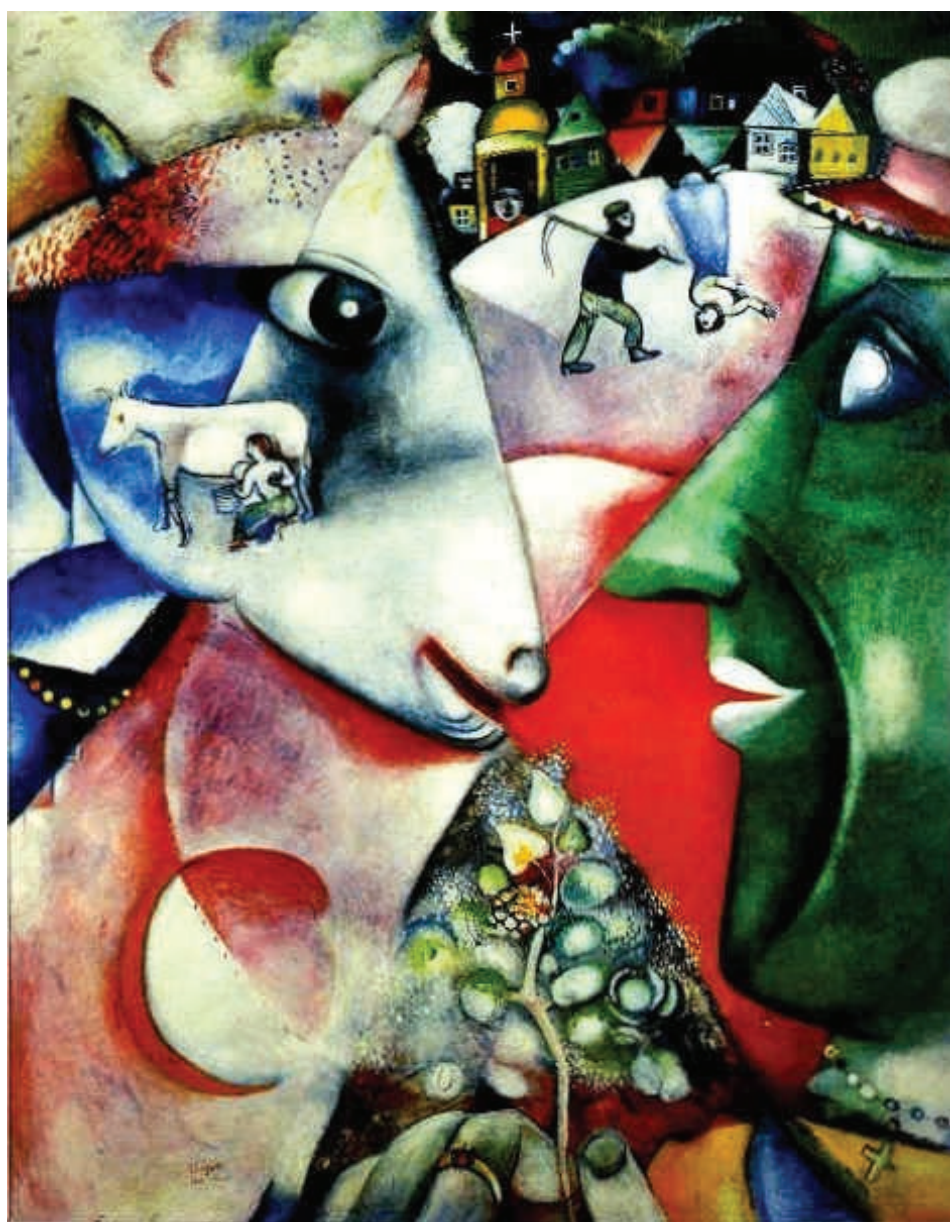
## NINETEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIAN LITERATURE

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.

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 Government Inspector* based on his own experience of being mistaken for a high-ranking 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.



**I AND THE VILLAGE BY MARC CHAGALL. MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK. USED WITH PERMISSION.**

## COMMENTS FROM THE CREATIVE TEAM

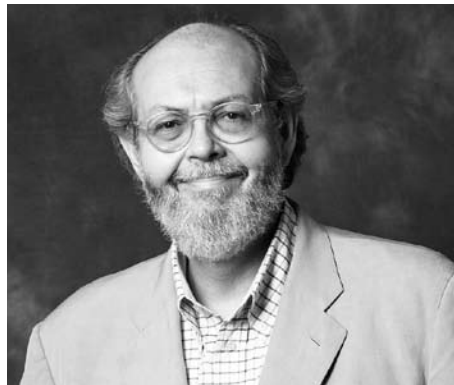


### JOE DOWLING

Director

This is a really beautiful adaptation. It is very, very funny. It absolutely captures the spirit of Gogol's original. And it's interesting, written in 1836, and it was expected, because it is a satire on provincial life and indeed on political life in Russia, it was expected that it would be banned. But it was the tsar himself who said, no, let it be seen. And he also went to the first performance, and said, oh, yeah everyone gets this but I think I get it most of all. But he wasn't really smart enough to see the actual level of the satire, and the almost devastating critique that the play was of both provincial and indeed political life in Russia at the time. It is really interesting because Gogol precedes Chekhov and Turgenev by some years, and the idea that he really was in this play, the father of Russian realism, I think is widely accepted. And he was horrified at the first performance of this play because the actors were over playing and not really obeying the stage directions – not that anybody here would ever do that, so I merely mention it as some kind of historical fact. But his constant desire was for a greater realism in the theater. Some critics have sort of said that he believed theater, which up to then really was much more romantic and much more kind of based on boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl – in this play, boy doesn't quite get the girl, in fact he doesn't get her at all—and that was seen as both a departure for theater of the time and also to many people a great disappointment. The play was quite heavily criticized originally and indeed led to Gogol leaving the country for a period of time — which playwrights tend to do if their plays are not well received, isn't that right Jeffrey?

But there is no doubt that this play and its significance in world literature is that it really was the beginning of the Russian realistic movement that did lead to Chekhov and some of the greatest plays ever written. And so its significance is huge. And I think what Anne has given us is a fabulous array and John has given us this tremendous... The energy, I think, of both the set and the costumes is going to be quite wonderful. And our job, I think, when playing it, is to find obviously the humor, which I think is all there, but also to find who these people really are, so that essence of Gogol's desire for realism is not lost in the flurry of farmyard animals and pink dresses. So it is the mixture of all of those things that we are going to work at in getting.



### JEFFREY HATCHER

Adaptor

We have been talking about this so long, my first correspondence with Joe started "Dear Mr. Ciulei."

I do want to tell you my son's favorite Russian joke: you go up to a Frenchman and say, "what do you wish for your country." The Frenchman says, "I wish that it will be known for its beauty, and its magic, and its wine, and its women, and its painting. If you go up to German and you say "what do you wish for your country". "I wish that my country will be known for Schiller, Goethe, and Wagner and the greatness of the German people. If you go to a Russian and say "what do you wish." "I wish that my neighbor's cow should die." This is not to minimize the achievements of the Russian people.

But Joe's quite right; it is something that I have actually been wanting to do for a long

time. I do a lot of adaptations, and some are the kinds that you really get into, and some less so. If someone comes up and says, "Hey, Strindberg, *Dreamplai*." Yeah. Cause you know it will be in the Studio and at a hundred seats a pop at \$16 a seat, it's not going to work out. But this is actually something that I have wanted to do. My wife and I were actually in a production of *The Government Inspector* back in college, and you know how great it is to see 19 year olds play old people. You know, it is all that, "Oh, look at me. I'm ancient." But oddly enough, we actually used the version that Peter Rabey did for the Guthrie back, I think, in '73 or '74, something like that, which is a very good version of the play. But I had read others over the years and thought, well, you know the structure is great, it is one of the great ideas. But sometimes the jokes don't always come across, and you'll find that kind of literal translation where a maid comes in and says, "Ha! That's like the herring, not with the mouth in its eye." I know the Russians laughed at that.

One of the really great things, though, about working on this adaptation is in the sense writing for the company here today. Although I don't think we ever talked initially about who might play what, you can't help but have in the back of your head the actors who are here and who do so many of the shows and how they might fit in. You kind of write for people's rhythms and the way they can color a bit, and kind of "eh they will be able to make something out of this and I didn't even have to finish the line." And strangely enough, none of those actors are here today. No, seriously. The original title of this adaptation was "Sally Wingert in *The Government Inspector*." And it was going to be with Phyllis Wright as Sally Wingert.

But at any rate, I think it is going to be great fun. I thank you for the opportunity. It really is something that I have always wanted to do. It's just the perfect cast. And I think given the political situation and all that, although we don't lean too far in that direction, I think there will be all sorts of fun stuff to bump into along the way. I thank you for having me, and I look forward to a great 9 ½ weeks.

From comments made to the cast and Guthrie staff on the first day of rehearsal, June 3, 2008

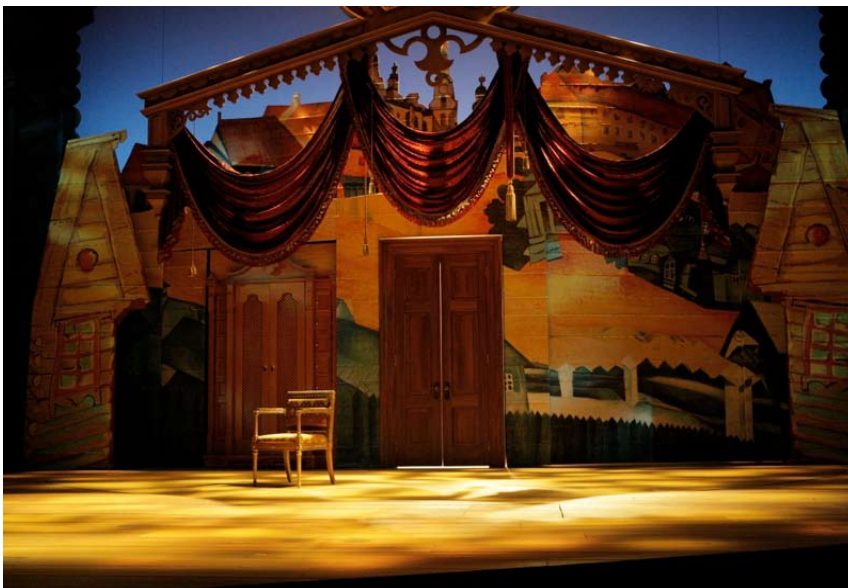
# BUILDING THE PRODUCTION

## Backstage information about *The Government Inspector*.

Opening Friday, July 11, 2008

Jacque Frazzini, Editor  
Education and Community Programs

Special thanks to Michal Daniel  
for the photographs



### SET

**Jon Arnone, Set Designer**  
**Craig Pettigrew, Assistant Technical Director**  
**Michael Hoover, Lead Scenic Artist**

At the first rehearsal Set Designer Jon Arnone explained his concept for the backdrop of the set as being inspired by the paintings of Marc Chagal with vivid colors, houses and people who seemed to “float” through the rural Russian township. Arnone researched pictures from various sources to create a collage effect with his design of minarets and buildings superimposed on one another. The somewhat cartoon-like design is further enhanced by the costume and wig designs that will be discussed in later sections. The center stage arch, seen in the following photograph, is a steel structure covered with Lauan (a type of plywood) and various layers of insulation foam board as used in conventional housing construction.

Assistant Technical Director Craig Pettigrew explained that the walls of the set have been built of rough-cut pine with an industrial product Enner Foam sprayed into the gaps between the boards. For Lead Scenic Artist Michael Hoover the rough hewn lumber used on the walls was a bit of a challenge in that the wood was very dry and porous, making it difficult to paint the mural. To create a better surface to paint upon, the boards were primed with a heavy coat of

latex paint the same color as the actual raw boards making the mural paint easier to spread and blend. Without the primer coat, the mural colors would have soaked into the wood very quickly, and the entire project would have taken a great deal more time to execute.

Hoover described the process that was used on the stage deck, seen below left and right with different set pieces and lighting. Pre-cut lengths of Duron (a type of pressed hardboard) form the deck. A mixture of clay and flexible glue made to be the consistency of thick mud was applied in a uniform coat using a regular paint roller. Before it dried, Hoover and his crew combed through this mixture using wood graining tools as well as some straw brushes to replicate the appearance of rough wood similar to the set walls. Once this dried, it formed a very durable surface which has an almost rubber-like quality that can be

subsequently painted and sealed. This same glue and clay mixture was also used on the perimeter of the deck.

Surrounding part of the stage deck is a split rail fence made of actual tree branches which were collected from various places around town and then painted blue. Straw in the moat area was used in the recent Guthrie production of *Peer Gynt*. Masking the upstage area of the set is an RP (rear projection) screen with a white scrim (a sheer curtain which can be opaque or transparent depending on the lighting) suspended further downstage of the RP screen. Suspended below the scrim is a muslin curtain which is used for masking in Act II. To accomplish scene changes and the movement of actors and props, a turntable located in the center stage area is used.



## LIGHTING

**Christopher Akerlind, Lighting Designer**  
**Tom Mays, Lighting Supervisor**

Lighting Supervisor Tom Mays describes the lighting design for this production as “simple, but yet complex in execution.” Though there are over 100 light cues, there are only about five “looks” to the show. A “look” is a dramatically different lighting state used to set the scenes or locations. Cues are different manipulations with the looks to highlight specific characters or situations during the action of the play. According to Mays, the lighting effects are basically subtle with a fairly consistent color palette throughout the show. The entire show is almost entirely lit with conventional lighting equipment, but because it is a farce seven different patterns of gobos are subtly integrated into the show to lend texture. A gobo is a piece of metal or glass in which a pattern is cut allowing light to be projected through it to the stage creating designs or patterns. One hundred twenty-two lights project different patterns through the gobos to create abstract shapes and regulate the amount of light and darkness that the characters move through. Since all of the scenes take place during daylight, gobos are used during intermission to create a nightscape on the cyclorama (a large curved curtain used as background for stage settings) above the set to suggest the passage of time when the audience returns for Act II.

A total of 600 lighting instruments are used in the production along with 38 color scrollers which have different colored gels that can be indexed via the lighting control board.

## SOUND / COMPOSER

**Adam Wernick, Composer**  
**Reid Rejsa, Sound Designer**

Composer Adam Wernick’s concept for the show was to use existing Russian folk songs, but since it is a comedy, he specifically wanted to find lively selections in major keys. To accomplish this, he researched the Internet for traditional Russian music sources and discovered a local balalaika orchestra that plays at St. Mary’s Cathedral in Minneapolis. A balalaika is a Russian stringed instrument somewhat like a guitar but with a triangular body and usually three strings. These local musicians recorded music for the production in the Guthrie sound studio. The instrumentation for recordings that were made in the studio included a domra, balalaikas, bass balalaika, accordion, violin and

tambourine. Fortunately, the accordionist was familiar with all the various styles of Russian folk music. In the course of his local research, Wernick became acquainted with Kramarczek’s Sausage Company on East Hennepin in Minneapolis, a gathering place where the food and the music are reminiscent of the “homeland” for various cultures from Eastern Europe. The selection “God Save the Tsar” was located through Web research and is from a recording by a military band.

Reid Rejsa, Sound Designer, explains that many of the effects for the production were pulled from the Sound Department library. These include: gun shots, swords clashing, horses’ hooves and voices during the mob scene. A major sound effect is the electronic keyboard which has been installed in the piano played by Ivan Alexandreyevich Hlestakov (Hunter Foster). When the keys are played, a controller sends signals downstairs to a sound studio where these signals are then blended into the sound system. Although Foster is actually playing the piano, a tape recording of the music has been made in the event that his understudy (who does not play the piano) should happen to take his place. There are two original compositions by Wernick – one at the end of Act I when Svetsunov, the Police Chief (Stephen Pelinski) plays a short piece on the piano and another when Hlestakov (Hunter Foster) is contemplating suicide.

## PROPS

**Patricia Olive, Props Manager**

The Guthrie Props Department has worked their usual magic in constructing some highly imaginative props for this show. In Scene I, the six large portraits, seen below left, were created using the actual artwork that Set Designer Jon Arnone had selected.

Staff Props Craftsperson Nick Golfis took pictures of actor Peter Michael Goetz who is playing Anton Antonovich, the Mayor, using different angles. Superimposing these pictures on the artwork from Arnone, Golfis used Photo Shop so that all of the portraits look like Goetz. Interestingly the portrait to the right of center was of the original playwright Nikolai Gogol.

Two props – a hat box and a lampshade – were created in collaboration with the Guthrie Costume Department. As these props are worn by an actor, they had to be made to fit.



Props Intern Carina Liebsch built the hat box, and Staff Props Craftsperson Stacey Schwebach created the lampshade. Using red polyester scenic fabric Schwebach cut and draped the large swags which are attached to the flying center stage archway then trimmed them with tassels made from red bullion and gold trim.

The cartoon cutouts which are positioned in the moat area around the stage and on the stage, seen on the previous page, were made by Liebsch and painted by Golfis. Paper props such as letters and petitions were created by Liebsch. Using Internet images, Staff Props Craftsperson Kellie Larson printed the rubles. Designed and built specially for the production is the bed at the inn and is the work of Staff Props Craftsperson John (Linus) Vlatkovich. An example of the ingenuity of the Props Department, Vlatkovich created a special gunshot effect for the scene when Hlestakov (Hunter Foster) is contemplating suicide. A reservoir of shredded construction paper the same color as the floor was built, cinnamon was added, and when the gun is fired a small hose blows air into the reservoir making it appear that a shot was fired. Liebsch created the food items such as the fried smelt that Osip, Hlestakov's servant (Luverne Seifert) eats which is Knox gelatin with black food coloring and silver cake decorating powder added – and some orange jello added for taste! Whole wheat lasagna noodles which have been cut are used for the cabbage dishes. The “pre-chewed” food which Hlestakov (Foster) complains about is real beef jerky. Luggage which Osip (Seifert) carries was made by Schwebach and Staff Props Craftsperson Mel X. Springer.

Props Manager Patricia Olive explains that the concept of the trappings and furniture in the Mayor's house are intended to reflect a very eclectic look as all of these were obtained through bribes. The gold brocade chairs last

appeared in the Guthrie production of *Hamlet*; the balloon-back chairs were in *The Merchant of Venice*, but all have been reupholstered by Master Soft Props Artisan Rozi Graham. Another example of “recycling” is the piano which was used in the production of *Jane Eyre* and altered to add an electronic keyboard. Using picture references from Set Designer Jon Arnone, Golfis built the settee, Graham upholstered it and fake garlic swags painted gold were added to the bottom. Both settee and piano can be seen below. Springer created the armoire/closet, above, which is plywood over a metal frame with pieces of foam detail overlaid on each other and added for trim. To complete the look of the room, the chandelier, used in the recent production of *9 Parts of Desire*, was pulled from stock and refurbished by Liebsch and Schwebach.

Smaller props such as pillows, the decanter and aperitif glasses were also pulled from stock; red glasses and vodka bottles were purchased locally at World Market. Earlier in the show Hlestakov (Hunter Foster) smashes a special “breakaway” glass to the floor, so 70 glasses have been purchased from Alfonso's Breakaway Company in Los Angeles for the entire run of the show. These special glasses appear to shatter but do not present a safety hazard for



actors and can be easily swept up.

The Props Department is often called upon to create unusual items for a show and this production is no exception. To create the bearskin rug, seen below, the form for the head was purchased from Van Dyke's Taxidermy, a Cabela Company, and then altered by Larson. Fake fur was purchased from a mill in Wisconsin and stabilized with heavy felt and wool serge by Graham.

For the scene with the Mayor (Peter Michael Goetz) and Hlestakov (Hunter Foster), the cigars they are smoking are electronic. Ordered online from a company in China, these cigars are battery operated and fitted with an atomizer when activated by the user, vaporizes a non-toxic substance that simulates real smoke but which is not harmful to the actors or to audience members



## COSTUMES

Ann Hould-Ward, Costume Designer  
Amelia Cheever, Costume Design Assistant

Costume Designer Ann Hould-Ward described her costume concept for the production as based on the fantastic descriptions of each character in the script. She terms them as “larger than life” in both size and personality. Costume Design Assistant Amelia Cheever further supports this idea by stating that “the characters look exactly like their costume sketches.” Eighty-five percent of the show was built by the Guthrie Costume Department from fabrics ordered from New York then washed, dyed and distressed. Dress fabrics consist primarily of silks, wools and some synthetic fabrics. Costume Craftsperson John Becker created the extraordinary hats for the Mayor’s wife (Sally Wingert) and for the other female cast members. The fur hat worn by the Judge (Wayne A. Evenson) is made from wool purchased from a local farm and contributed by a sheep which the Costume Department has affectionately named “Buddy.”

Costumes for the merchants, the peasant women and Svetsunov, the Police Chief (Stephen Pelinski) were pulled from stock. To complete the “larger than life” concept envisioned by Hould-Ward, many of the costumes are padded with cotton batting, foam and pillows. Some of the Ukrainian and Russian shoes, hats and mittens were purchased online. According to Cheever, the most time intensive costumes were those for the Mayor’s wife (Sally Wingert) and for the Landowners Bobchinsky (Kris L. Nelson)



and Dobchinsky (Lee Mark Nelson) seen from left to right below.

Draper/Tailor dj Gramann, II and his crew were responsible for all of the trim for the dresses worn by Wingert. There are 227 yellow tassels on the blue dress, 125 gold and silver tassels on the pink dress, 137 bows on the red velvet dress and 563 “fish scales” each one individually made. Since the two brothers Bobchinsky (Kris L. Nelson) and Dobchinsky (Lee Mark Nelson) are twins, the challenge in costuming them was to make certain the costumes were identical.

## WIGS

Ivy Loughborough,  
Wigmaster

The work of Wigmaster Ivy Loughborough and her crew have beautifully complimented the designs of Arnone and Hould-Ward. Loughborough describes this as a “highly stylized” production with the costumes and the sets almost going toward the cartoonish aspect. The look that is desired is to support the “larger than life” philosophy expressed by the costumes particularly. Even though some of the actor’s hair is long enough for the time period, a wig is necessary to fit in with the heightened reality of



the show. Starting with a look that is realistic but taking it to a place that is beyond that; therefore, everyone in the production has a wig - 25 in all with 18 facial hair sets for the men. Two of these special wigs are seen below on the Mayor’s wife (Sally Wingert) and the mayor’s daughter (Maggie Chestovich).



## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

### 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?

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How do the physical attributes of each character, including their costumes, props, sound effects, and physical behavior, reflect his or her internal thoughts, feelings, and attitudes and status in the world?

How does the world Gogol creates in *The Government Inspector* differ from ours? How is it similar? Do you think it is realistic? Why or why not?

What is Gogol satirizing in *The Government Inspector*? What do you think Gogol is saying about society, politics, and humanity? Do you agree? Why or why not?

What statement do you think Gogol was trying to make by having the Mayor address the audience and say, "those who laugh the hardest are laughing at themselves"? (It is said that Gogol added that line after the play's first performance in St. Petersburg.)

Do you think Hlestakov is justified in taking advantage of the townspeople? What would you do in his position? Is he a hero or a villain? Who are other heroes and villains in the play? Are there any heroes?

Polish theater critic Jan Kott calls *The Government Inspector* a "tragic farce." What do you think he means by that?

## ADDITIONAL SOURCES

### BOOKS

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