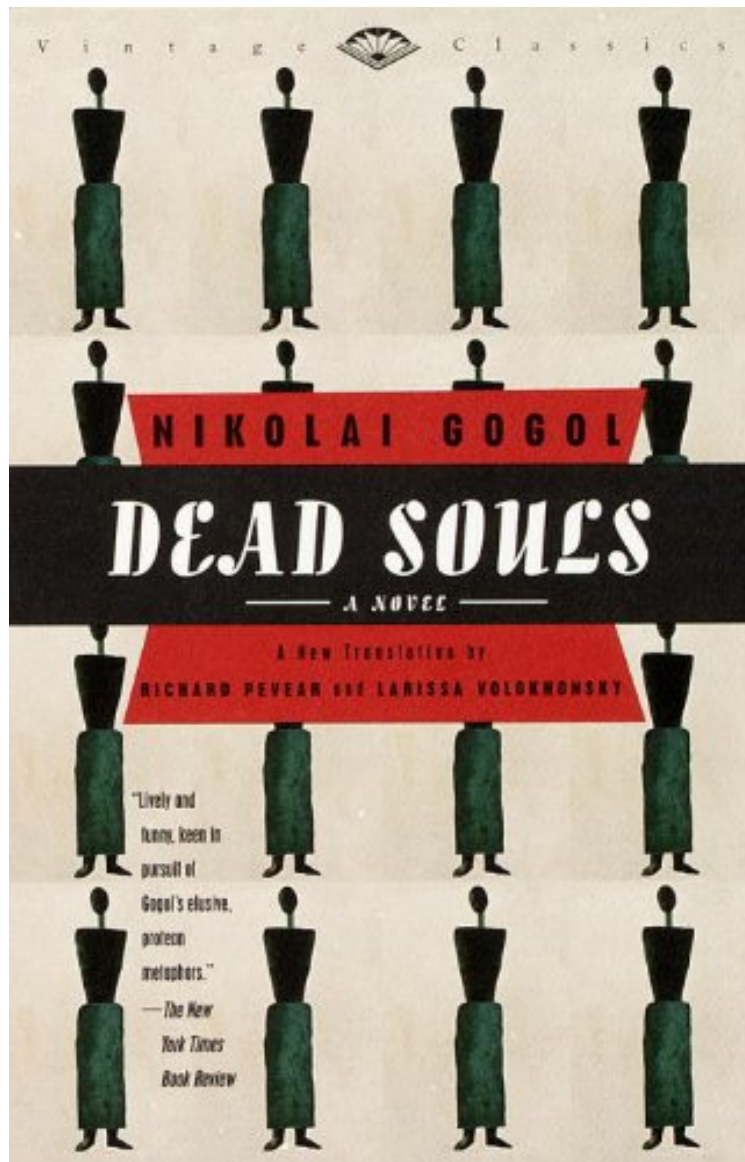


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## Dead Souls

*Nikolai Gogol*

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**Nikolai Gogol : Dead Souls** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dead Souls:

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. The first modern Russian novel By R. M. Peterson Among all humans, the sub-set of famous writers surely has a disproportionate share of strange birds, and one of the oddest was Nikolai Gogol. Born in the Ukraine in 1809, as a young man he re-located to Petersburg, intent on making a name for himself. When he discovered that the civil service was closed to him, he sought to make his fame as a writer - and he

did. Today, his works, collectively, are generally regarded to be a brilliant critique of czarist Russia, exposing the inefficiencies and injustices of the czarist bureaucracy, the decadence and hypocrisy of the aristocracy and landowners, and the misery of all other Russians. Yet, curiously, Gogol was a political conservative who endorsed the existing order, including serfdom. By his lights, improvement in the average person's quality of life was primarily the responsibility of the individual, through education and religion. Gogol himself became consumed with a sort of religious mania. He became increasingly ascetic and he died in a state of delirium, just shy of 43 years of age; the immediate cause probably was self-starvation. The general consensus is that he also died a virgin; in the recesses of academia there is persistent speculation that he was a repressed homosexual. And it is generally accepted that he was a lifelong manic-depressive. Gogol's greatest works are his short stories - including "Nevsky Prospect", "The Overcoat", and "Diary of a Madman". DEAD SOULS is his one novel of note, and for some it is on a par with the best of his short stories. For various reasons, I don't regard DEAD SOULS quite that highly. First, it is unfinished. Part I (280 pages in this edition) was published in 1842. Gogol reportedly likened it to "Inferno" of Dante's "Divine Comedy". Off and on over the next ten years he worked on Part II, which was to be the counterpart to "Purgatory", but several times he condemned his manuscript to the flames, including just before he took to his deathbed. What now exists as Part II (150 pages in this edition) consists of an early manuscript, itself incomplete, that accidentally survived. Not only is it incomplete, it is, in my opinion, not of the same literary quality as Part I. Inasmuch as Gogol never was satisfied with any portion of Part II, I am inclined to ignore it in assessing the novel. But what about Part I? The underlying conceit of the novel is inspired: a relatively minor Russian functionary, Chichikov, stumbles on the scam of acquiring (on paper or in name only) deceased serfs, whom landowners presumably are willing to give away or sell cheaply so that they will not have to continue to pay taxes on them until the next census is conducted, and then mortgaging those dead souls to the government for hundreds of thousands of rubles. Part I tells of Chichikov's efforts to implement his scheme in the unnamed capital of a Russian province. Much of the writing is also brilliant. The novel features a variety of different, and highly modern, writing styles and techniques. Frequently Gogol steps back from the story itself and talks directly to the reader, at times seriously and other times facetiously. The descriptions range from the highly realistic (often in minute detail), to the poetic, to the exaggerated. Often the novel is wildly funny and often it is sharply satiric. I understand that the original Russian abounds with witty plays on words. (A plus of this edition is the translator's detailed footnotes, some of which seek to explain Gogol's inventive wordplay to the English reader.) But for me the conceit of the novel becomes old. And it is too episodic in nature. Like its predecessors among the great Russian novels - Pushkin's "Eugene Onegin" and Lermontov's "A Hero of Our Time" - DEAD SOULS consists essentially of separate stories that are strung together to make up a so-called novel. For example, Chapters Two through Six of Part I each consists of Chichikov's efforts to wheedle out of a different landowner his/her dead peasants. As discrete stories they would be more entertaining than they are strung together seriatim. Further, Gogol's numerous asides to the reader, with time, began to wear on me. There is no question but that DEAD SOULS is a landmark in Russian literature. And there is no question that it is remarkably modern for fiction written 170 years ago. But for this 20th-Century reader who has managed to survive into the 21st Century, it falls short of being enduringly great fiction. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. very funny in a sly way By John Bray It is hilarious in a sophisticated way considering it was written almost 200 years ago 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Dead Souls By Monique I loved LOVED this book. For such an old one it was fantastic. I did skip over bits as I got nearer to the end, but overall this was a great read.

Since its publication in 1842, Dead Souls has been celebrated as a supremely realistic portrait of provincial Russian life and as a splendidly exaggerated tale; as a paean to the Russian spirit and as a remorseless satire of imperial Russian venality, vulgarity, and pomp. As Gogol's wily antihero, Chichikov, combs the back country wheeling and dealing for "dead souls"--deceased serfs who still represent money to anyone sharp enough to trade in them--we are introduced to a Dickensian cast of peasants, landowners, and conniving petty officials, few of whom can resist the seductive illogic of Chichikov's proposition. This lively, idiomatic English version by the award-winning translators Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky makes accessible the full extent of the novel's lyricism, sulphurous humor, and delight in human oddity and error.

.com A socially adept newcomer fluidly inserts himself into an unnamed Russian town, conquering first the drinkers, then the dignitaries. All find him amiable, estimable, agreeable. But what exactly is Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov up to?--something that will soon throw the town "into utter perplexity." After more than a week of entertainment and "passing the time, as they say, very pleasantly," he gets down to business--heading off to call on some landowners. More pleasantries ensue before Chichikov reveals his bizarre plan. He'd like to buy the souls of peasants who have died since the last census. The first landowner looks carefully to see if he's mad, but spots no outward signs. In fact, the scheme is innovative but by no means bonkers. Even though Chichikov will be taxed on the supposed serfs, he will be able to count them as his property and gain the reputation of a gentleman owner. His first victim is happy to give up his souls for free--less tax burden for him. The second, however, knows Chichikov must be up to something, and the

third has his servants rough him up. Nonetheless, he prospers. *Dead Souls* is a feverish anatomy of Russian society (the book was first published in 1842) and human wiles. Its author tosses off thousands of sublime epigrams-- including, "However stupid a fool's words may be, they are sometimes enough to confound an intelligent man," and is equally adept at yearning satire: "Where is he," Gogol interrupts the action, "who, in the native tongue of our Russian soul, could speak to us this all-powerful word: forward? who, knowing all the forces and qualities, and all the depths of our nature, could, by one magic gesture, point the Russian man towards a lofty life?" Flannery O'Connor, another writer of dark genius, declared Gogol "necessary along with the light." Though he was hardly the first to envision property as theft, his blend of comic, fantastic moralism is sui generis.--Kerry Fried Praise for previous translations by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, winners of the PEN/Book-of-the-Month Club Prize

*The Brothers Karamazov* "One finally gets the musical whole of Dostoevsky's original." --New York Times Book "It may well be that Dostoevsky's [world], with all its resourceful energies of life and language, is only now--and through the medium of [this] new translation--beginning to come home to the English-speaking reader." --New York of Books

*Crime and Punishment* "The best [translation] currently available...An especially faithful re-creation...with a coiled-spring kinetic energy... Don't miss it." --Washington Post Book World "Reaches as close to Dostoevsky's Russian as is possible in English...The original's force and frightening immediacy is captured...The Pevear and Volokhonsky translation will become the standard version." --Chicago Tribune

*Demons* "The merit in this edition of *Demons* resides in the technical virtuosity of the translators...They capture the feverishly intense, personal explosions of activity and emotion that manifest themselves in Russian life." --New York Times Book "[Pevear and Volokhonsky] have managed to capture and differentiate the characters' many voices...They come into their own when faced with Dostoevsky's wonderfully quirky use of varied speech patterns...A capital job of restoration." --Los Angeles Times

With an Introduction by Richard Pevear

Language Notes  
Text: English (translation) Original Language: Russian