

RUSSIAN CLASSIC LITERATURE

NICOLAY GOGOL

**THE MANTLE
AND OTHER STORIES**

Translated by *Claud Field*

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО
КАРО
Санкт-Петербург

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Вашему вниманию представлен сборник повестей одного из самых известных русских писателей-классиков Н. В. Гоголя. В издание вошли как повести, относящиеся к «украинскому» периоду творчества автора — «Майская ночь, или Утопленница» и «Вий», так и к «петербургскому» — «Нос», «Шинель», «Записки сумасшедшего». Выбранные произведения показывают два мира, описанных Гоголем с непередаваемым юмором и глубокой печалью, — красочную простоту украинского села и мрачную фантастичность жизни столичного Санкт-Петербурга.

Английский перевод повестей с русского языка, выполненный Клодом Филдом, снабжен постраничными, в большей степени культурологическими, комментариями. Книга адресована студентам языковых вузов, носителям языка и всем любителям русской классической литературы.

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This short novel collection of one of the most renowned Russian classic authors Nicolay Gogol includes novels of writer's both "Ukrainian Period" – "A May Night and the Drowned Maiden", "The Viy" and the "Petersburg Period" – "Memoirs of a Madman", "The Nose" and "The Mantle". The selected short novels introduce the reader to the two worlds described by Gogol with inimitable humour and deep sorrow – the colourful simplicity of Ukrainian village and the dark whimsicality of St. Petersburg's capital city life.

The English translation of the short novels made by Claud Field is complemented with footnotes mostly of culturological nature. The book may be of interest to the University or College students who study English, the native English speakers and everyone who admires Russian Classic Literature.

LIFE AND WORKS OF NICOLAY GOGOL



The classic of the Russian literature, the most peculiar Russian writer of the first half of the 19th century, Nicolay Vasilyevich Gogol (1809–1852), was born in a family of a landowner in the Mirgorod district of the Poltava province.

In 1828 he moved to St. Petersburg where he tried his hand as an official, an actor, a tutor, and it was there that he started to write.

In the fall of 1831 he published the collection of novels “Evenings on the Farm Near Dikanka” (1831–1832) which made the writer well-known and opened a new direction in the Russian literature. The period of 1832–1836 became the most fruitful in the life of the writer. He published two collections of stories, each of them became a cornerstone of the whole direction of development of the Russian literature.

In 1833 the collected stories “Mirgorod” was published which included the stories “Old-world Landowners”, “Taras Bulba”, “The Viy”, “A story about the quarrel of Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich”. Mirgorod is the name of a town in the Ukraine near Dikanka, but this

collection of stories also continued the line of “Evenings”, and the language and style of the writer became even more perfect in a different way. Instead of the expected amusing stories with a lot of folklore legends and inimitable soft humour in “Mirgorod” the readers found an absolutely special prose: historical dramas, mystical stories and works which can be considered as the masterpieces of realistic art.

In 1835 Gogol published the collection of stories “Arabesques”. The author included stories “The Portrait”, “Nevsky Prospect”, “Memoirs of a Madman” in it. Later these short stories along with the novels “The Nose”, and “The Mantle” became part of a new cycle, “The Petersburg Stories”. The action takes place in St. Petersburg, and the author created a special, unique, realistic on the bound of irreality world of the capital of the Russian Empire. Nicolay Gogol created in the Russian literature an idea of Petersburg as a strange, mystical and semi-mythical city.

In 1836 he accomplished his long-time dream and wrote the comedy “The Inspector-General”. Novelty and a sublime witticism of this play which struck the general public and caused hot disputes, brought to Gogol the glory which didn’t leave him to the end of his days.

At the end of 1836 Nicolay Gogol went abroad where he spent about 12 years in the continuous work on the main novel of his life, “Dead souls”. This novel, though the author called it the poem, is still a sample of the Russian prose, and at the time of the publication in unconditionally made the author the greatest writer and “the master of thoughts”. After the publication of the first

volume of the poem (1842) the work on the second volume continued with great difficulty. In 1845 the author burned it because he considered his own attempt to carry out the task unsuccessful. His idea had been to represent convincingly and truly positive, not just negative as in the first part, the best qualities of the human soul. In 1848, after his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Gogol returned home. By the beginning of 1852 he prepared for edition the second volume of "Dead souls", but shortly in a condition of the deep mental disorder the writer burned the new edition and a few days later he died.

This edition includes stories from all three collections: "A May Night, or the Drowned Maiden" ("Evenings on the Farm Near Dikanka"), "The Viy" ("Mirgorod"), "The Nose", "The Mantle" and "Memoirs of a Madman" ("Arabesques", "The Petersburg Stories").

The story "A May Night, or the Drowned Maiden" is written by Gogol on the basis of the folklore impressions which he received in Poltava. National beliefs and legends create a special color, the captivating bright picture representing a love story of the young Cossack Levko and the girl Ganna.

The legendary and unreal basis of "The Viy" allows to connect this work with stories from "Evenings", but the fantastic situations appear here in an absolutely real and homely space of the 17th century. According to Slavic legends the stare of the powerful being the Viy

could not only kill the unfortunate person, but destroy and incinerate the whole village as well. In Gogol's work the gaze doesn't kill, but removes the magic force of all talismans against evil spirits. But this mythical being appears only at the end of the story, and the ordinary Kiev student-seminarist who has been released on vacation becomes the main character of the story. On his way he unexpectedly faces the whole army of evil spirits which he hopes to annihilate.

"The Petersburg Stories" opened new ways in the Russian literature. For the first time a life of "a slight man" (a man belonging to lower class) is closely observed and investigated in literature. The author penetrated into psychology of the person suffering not from pangs of love, but from the most ordinary problems so deeply. It is considered that the realism and psychologism for which classical Russian literature became famous, originate from these works. To characterise the literature of the 19th century, they often say, "All of us came from Gogol's 'Mantle'". But after all it is impossible to call Gogol the perfect realist like his followers of the middle of the 19th century. In his works life always balances on the brink of reality and fantasy. This trend of mixing these two was continued in the Russian literature only in the 20th century by Mikhail Bulgakov.

In the story "Memoirs of a Madman" Gogol did not seek to represent only a mental condition of the insane person; this is an acute satire on the falsehood and injustice of the public relations based on the power of rank and money. The story shows us the diary of the

main character, Axanti Ivanovitch Poprishchin, some insignificant Petersburg official. The feelings and reasonings of this unremarkable person at first are amusing but then they drive him crazy and touch the soul of the reader.

In “The Nose” the principles of grotesqueness run into absurdity; the irreality which is so peculiar to almost all works of Gogol is realized to the full. The official Kovaloff wakes up one morning without his nose, instead of the nose there is absolutely nothing. And the nose, as is told further, begins to live its own life. This story is considered one of the most unusual plots in the world literature.

The story “The Mantle” is traditionally interpreted as a sign of protest against the social inequality, cruelty of bureaucrats and the sad fate of lower classes. The story “The Mantle” tells the reader about the life of a so-called “slight man”, Akaki Akakievitch Bashmatchkin, a poor functionary from St. Petersburg. Even his name tells about the extreme mediocrity of the hero. The tragedy of his life is his old overcoat which in time became completely worthless. He was compelled to stint in absolutely everything to buy himself a new coat... The short happiness of his life is the subject of this story, which became one of the most important in classical Russian literature.

We hope, the stories included in this collection will give the reader the first and distinct idea of the works of Nicolay Gogol, the great writer and one of the giants of the “Golden Age” of the Russian literature.

A MAY NIGHT, OR THE DROWNED MAIDEN



*From the miscellaneous collection of novels
“Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka”*



I. GANNA

Songs were echoing in the village street. It was just the time when the young men and girls, tired with the work and cares of the day, were in the habit of assembling for the dance. In the mild evening light, cheerful songs blended with mild melodies.

A mysterious twilight obscured the blue sky and made everything seem indistinct and distant. It was growing dark, but the songs were not hushed.

A young Cossack¹, Levko by name, the son of the village headman, had stolen away from the singers, guitar in hand. With his embroidered cap set awry on his head, and his hand playing over the strings, he stepped a measure to the music. Then he stopped at the door of a house half hidden by blossoming cherry-trees. Whose house was it? To whom did the door lead? After a little while he played and sang:

*“The night is nigh, the sun is down,
Come out to me, my love, my own!”*

“No one is there; my bright-eyed beauty is fast asleep,” said the Cossack to himself as he finished the song and approached the window. “Gala, Gala, are you asleep, or won’t you come to me? Perhaps you are afraid someone will see us, or will not expose your delicate face to the cold! Fear nothing! The evening is warm, and there is no one near. And if anyone comes I will wrap you in my caftan², fold you in my arms, and no one will see us. And if the

¹ **Cossack** — in the Ukraine in the 15th–18th centuries — a military estate (also semi-agricultural), and also a kind of a cavalry. (Hereinafter — Editor’s Note.)

² **Caftan** — a warm coat with long sleeves.

wind blows cold, I will press you close to my heart, warm you with my kisses, and lay my cap on your tiny feet, my darling. Only throw me a single glance. No, you are not asleep, you proud thing!” he exclaimed now louder, in a voice which betrayed his annoyance at the humiliation. “You are laughing at me! Good-bye!”

Then he turned away, set his cap jauntily, and, still lightly touching his guitar, stepped back from the window. Just then the wooden handle of the door turned with a grating noise, and a girl who counted hardly seventeen springs looked out timidly through the darkness, and still keeping hold of the handle, stepped over the threshold. In the twilight her bright eyes shone like little stars, her coral necklace gleamed, and the pink flush on her cheeks did not escape the Cossack’s observation.

“How impatient you are!” she said in a whisper. “You get angry so quickly! Why did you choose such a time? There are crowds of people in the street... I tremble all over.”

“Don’t tremble, my darling! Come close to me!” said the Cossack, putting down his guitar, which hung on a long strap round his neck, and sitting down with her on the door-step. “You know I find it hard to be only an hour without seeing you.”

“Do you know what I am thinking of?” interrupted the young girl, looking at him thoughtfully. “Something whispers to me that we shall not see so much of each other in the future. The people here are not well disposed to you, the girls look so envious, and the young fellows... I notice also that my mother watches me carefully for some time past. I must confess I was happier when among strangers.” Her face wore a troubled expression as she spoke.

“You are only two months back at home, and are already tired of it!” said the Cossack. “And of me too perhaps?”

“Oh no!” she replied, smiling. “I love you, you black-eyed Cossack! I love you because of your dark eyes, and my heart laughs in my breast when you look at me. I feel so happy when you come down the street stroking your black moustache, and enjoy listening to your song when you play the guitar!”

“Oh my Gala!” exclaimed the Cossack, kissing the girl and drawing her closer to him.

“Stop, Levko! Tell me whether you have spoken to your father?”

“About what?” he answered absent-mindedly. “About my marrying you? Yes, I did.” But he seemed to speak almost reluctantly.

“Well? What more?”

“What can you make of him? The old curmudgeon pretends to be deaf; he will not listen to anything, and blames me for loafing with fellows, as he says, about the streets. But don’t worry, Gala! I give you my word of a Cossack, I will break his obstinacy.”

“You only need to say a word, Levko, and it shall be as you wish. I know that of myself. Often I do not wish to obey you, but you speak only a word, and I involuntarily do what you wish. Look, look!” she continued, laying her head on his shoulder and raising her eyes to the sky, the immeasurable heaven of the Ukraine; “there far away are twinkling little stars — one, two, three, four, five. Is it not true that those are angels opening the windows of their bright little homes and looking down on us. Is it not so, Levko? They are looking down on earth. If men had wings like birds, how high they could fly. But ah! not even our oaks reach the sky. Still people say there is in some distant land a tree whose top reaches to heaven, and that God descends by it on the earth, the night before Easter.”

“No, Gala. God has a long ladder which reaches from heaven to earth. Before Easter Sunday holy angels set it up, and as soon as God puts His foot on the first rung, all evil spirits take to flight and fall in swarms into hell. That is why on Easter Day there are none of them on earth.”

“How gently the water ripples! Like a child in the cradle,” continued Ganna, pointing to the pool begirt by dark maples and weeping-willows, whose melancholy branches drooped in the water. On a hill near the wood slumbered an old house with closed shutters. The roof was covered with moss and weeds; leafy apple-trees had grown high up before the windows; the wood cast deep shadows on it; a grove of nut-trees spread from the foot of the hill as far as the pool.

“I remember as if in a dream,” said Ganna, keeping her eyes fixed on the house, “a long, long time ago, when I was little and lived with mother, someone told a terrible story about this house. You must know it — tell me.”

“God forbid, my dear child! Old women and stupid people talk a lot of nonsense. It would only frighten you and spoil your sleep.”

“Tell me, my darling, my black-eyed Cossack,” she said, pressing her cheek to his. “No, you don’t love me; you have certainly another sweetheart! I will not be frightened, and will sleep quite quietly. If you refuse to tell me, *that* would keep me awake. I would keep on worrying and thinking about it. Tell me, Levko!”

“Certainly it is true what people say, that the devil possesses girls, and stirs up their curiosity.

Well then, listen. Long ago there lived in that house an elderly man who had a beautiful daughter white as snow, just like you. His wife had been dead a long time, and he was thinking of marrying again.

“Will you pet me as before, father, if you take a second wife?” asked his daughter.

“Yes, my daughter,” he answered, “I shall love you more than ever, and give you yet more rings and necklaces.”

“So he brought a young wife home, who was beautiful and white and red, but she cast such an evil glance at her stepdaughter that she cried aloud, but not a word did her sulky stepmother speak to her all day long.

“When night came, and her father and his wife had retired, the young girl locked herself up in her room, and feeling melancholy began to weep bitterly. Suddenly she spied a hideous black cat creeping towards her; its fur was aflame and its claws struck on the ground like iron. In her terror the girl sprang on a chair; the cat followed her. Then she sprang into bed; the cat sprang after her, and seizing her by the throat began to choke her. She tore the creature away, and flung it on the ground, but the terrible cat began to creep towards her again. Rendered desperate with terror, she seized her father’s sabre which hung on

the wall, and struck at the cat, wounding one of its paws. The animal disappeared, whimpering.

“The next day the young wife did not leave her bedroom; the third day she appeared with her hand bound up.

“The poor girl perceived that her stepmother was a witch, and that she had wounded her hand.

“On the fourth day her father told her to bring water, to sweep the floor like a servant-maid, and not to show herself where he and his wife sat. She obeyed him, though with a heavy heart. On the fifth day he drove her barefooted out of the house, without giving her any food for her journey. Then she began to sob and covered her face with her hands.

“You have ruined your own daughter, father!’ she cried; ‘and the witch has ruined your soul. May God forgive you! He will not allow me to live much longer.”

“And do you see,” continued Levko, turning to Ganna and pointing to the house, “do you see that high bank; from that bank she threw herself into the water, and has been no more seen on earth.”

“And the witch?” Ganna interrupted, timidly fastening her tearful eyes on him.

“The witch? Old women say that when the moon shines, all those who have been drowned come out to warm themselves in its rays, and that they are led

by the witch's stepdaughter. One night she saw her stepmother by the pool, caught hold of her, and dragged her screaming into the water. But this time also the witch played her a trick; she changed herself into one of those who had been drowned, and so escaped the chastisement she would have received at their hands.

Let anyone who likes believe the old women's stories. They say that the witch's stepdaughter gathers together those who have been drowned every night, and looks in their faces in order to find out which of them is the witch; but has not done so yet. Such are the old wives' tales. It is said to be the intention of the present owner to erect a distillery on the spot. But I hear voices. They are coming home from the dancing. Good-bye, Ganna! Sleep well, and don't think of all that nonsense." So saying he embraced her, kissed her, and departed.

"Good-bye, Levko!" said Ganna, still gazing at the dark pine wood.

The brilliant moon was now rising and filling all the earth with splendour. The pool shone like silver, and the shadows of the trees stood out in strong relief.

"Good-bye, Ganna!" she heard again as she spoke, and felt the light pressure of a kiss.

“You have come back!” she said, looking round, but started on seeing a stranger before her.

There was another “Good-bye, Ganna!” and again she was kissed.

“Has the devil brought a second?” she exclaimed angrily.

“Good-bye, dear Ganna!”

“There is a third!”

“Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye, Ganna!” and kisses rained from all sides.

“Why, there is a whole band of them!” cried Ganna, tearing herself from the youths who had gathered round. “Are they never tired of the eternal kissing? I shall soon not be able to show myself on the street!” So saying, she closed the door and bolted it.

II. THE VILLAGE HEADMAN

Do you know a Ukraine night? No, you do not know a night in the Ukraine. Gaze your full on it. The moon shines in the midst of the sky; the immeasurable vault of heaven seems to have expanded to infinity; the earth is bathed in silver light; the air is warm, voluptuous, and redolent of innumerable sweet scents. Divine night! Magical night! Motionless, but inspired with divine breath,

the forests stand, casting enormous shadows and wrapped in complete darkness. Calmly and placidly sleep the lakes surrounded by dark green thickets. The virginal groves of the hawthorns and cherry-trees stretch their roots timidly into the cool water; only now and then their leaves rustle unwillingly when that freebooter, the night-wind, steals up to kiss them. The whole landscape is hushed in slumber; but there is a mysterious breath upon the heights. One falls into a weird and unearthly mood, and silvery apparitions rise from the depths. Divine night! Magical night! Suddenly the woods, lakes, and steppes become alive. The nightingales of the Ukraine are singing, and it seems as though the moon itself were listening to their song. The village sleeps as though under a magic spell; the cottages shine in the moonlight against the darkness of the woods behind them. The songs grow silent, and all is still. Only here and there is a glimmer of light in some small window. Some families, sitting up late, are finishing their supper at the thresholds of their houses.

“No, the hopak¹ is not danced like that! Now I see, it does not go properly! What did my godfather tell me? So then! Hop! tralala! Hop! tralala! Hop!

¹ **Hopak** — a Ukrainian national dance.

Hop! Hop!” Thus a half-intoxicated, middle-aged Cossack talked to himself as he danced through the street. “By heaven, a hopak is not danced like that! What is the use of lying! On with it then! Hop! tralala! Hop! tralala! Hop! Hop! Hop!”

“See that fool there! If he were only a young fellow! But to see a grown man dancing, and the children laughing at him,” exclaimed an old woman who was passing by, carrying a bundle of straw. “Go home! It is quite time to go to sleep!”

“I am going!” said the Cossack, standing still. “I am going. What do I care about the headman? He thinks because he is the eldest, and throws cold water on people, and carries his head high. As to being headman — I myself am a headman. Yes indeed... otherwise...” As he spoke, he stepped up to the door of the first cottage he came to, stood at the window, drumming with his fingers on the glass, and feeling for the door-handle. “Woman, open! Woman, open quickly I tell you! It is time for me to go to sleep!”

“Where are you going, Kalenik? That is the wrong house!” some young girls who were returning from the dance called to him as they passed. “Shall we show you yours?”

“Yes, please, ladies!”

“Ladies! Just listen to him!” one of them exclaimed. “How polite Kalenik is! We will show you the house — but no, first dance before us!”

“Dance before you? Oh, you are clever girls!” said Kalenik in a drawling voice, and laughing. He threatened them with his finger, and stumbled, not being able to stand steadily. “And will you let yourselves be kissed? I will kiss the lot.” With tottering steps he began to run after them.

The girls cried out and ran apart; but they soon plucked up courage and went on the other side of the road, when they saw that Kalenik was not firm on his legs.

“There is your house!” they called to him, pointing to one which was larger than the rest, and which belonged to the village headman.

Kalenik turned towards it, and began again to revile the headman.

But who is this headman to whose disadvantage so much has been said? Oh, he is a very important person in the village. Before Kalenik reaches his house, we shall doubtless find enough time to say something about him. Everyone in the village takes off his cap at the sight of him, and even the smallest girls wish him good morning. Which of the young Cossacks would not like to be a headman? The headman has an entry everywhere, and every stalwart

rustic stands respectfully, cap in hand, so long as the headman feels round his snuff-box with his thick, coarse finger. In parish-meetings and other assemblies, although his power may be limited by the votes of the majority, the headman still maintains the upper hand, and sends whom he chooses to make roads or dig ditches. In outward manners he is morose and severe, and not fond of talking. Long ago, when the Empress Catherine of blessed memory journeyed to the Crimea¹, he was chosen as one of her escort for two whole days, and had the high honour of sitting with the imperial coachman on the box.

Since then the headman has formed the habit of shaking his head solemnly and thoughtfully, of stroking his long, drooping moustache, and of darting hawk-like glances from his eyes. Whatever the topic of conversation may be, he manages to refer to his having accompanied the Empress, and sat on the box of the imperial coach. He often pretends to be hard of hearing, especially when he hears something that he does not like. He has an aversion for dandies, and himself wears under a

¹ **Crimea** — the Tauride voyage (from 2 January 1787 to 11 July 1787) — an unprecedented journey to the Crimea of Catherine II (the Great) and her court in transit.

black caftan of cloth, made at home, a simple, embroidered, woollen waist-band. No one has seen him wear any other dress except, of course, on the occasion of the Czarina's journey to the Crimea, when he wore a blue Cossack's uniform. Hardly anyone in the village remembers that time, and he keeps the uniform packed up in a chest.

The headman is a widower, but his sister-in-law lives with him. She cooks his dinner and supper, keeps the house and furniture clean, weaves linen, and acts as housekeeper generally. The village gossips say that she is not a relation of his; but we must remark that the headman has many enemies who spread all kinds of slanders about him. We have now said what we considered to be necessary about the headman, and the drunken Kalenik is not yet half-way to his house. He continued to abuse the headman in terms which might be expected from one in his condition.

III. AN UNEXPECTED RIVAL. THE CONSPIRACY

“No, you fellows, I won't. What is the good of all those silly goings-on? Aren't you tired of these foolish jokes? People already call us good-for-

nothing scapegraces. Better go to bed!" So Levko said one evening to his companions, who were trying to persuade him to take part with them in further practical jokes. "Farewell, brothers! Good night!" he said, and left them with quick steps.

"Does my bright-eyed Ganna sleep?" he thought as he passed the house shaded by the cherry-trees. Then in the silence he heard the sound of a whispered conversation. Levko stood still. Between the trees there glimmered something white. "What is that?" he thought, as he crept closer and hid himself behind a tree.

By the light of the moon he saw the face of a girl standing opposite him. It was Ganna. But who was the tall man who had his back turned to him? In vain he strained his eyes; the whole figure was hidden in shadow, and the slightest forward step on Levko's part would expose him to the risk of discovery. He therefore leant quietly against the tree, and determined to remain where he was. Then he heard the girl utter his name distinctly.

"Levko? Levko is a baby," said the tall man in an undertone. "If I ever find him with you, I will pull his hair."

"I should like to know what rascal is boasting of pulling my hair," said Levko to himself, stretching out his head and endeavouring to miss no word.

But the stranger continued to speak so low that he was inaudible.

“What, aren’t you ashamed?” said Ganna after he had finished. “You are lying and deceiving me; I will never believe that you love me.”

“I know,” continued the tall man, “that Levko has talked nonsense to you and turned your head.” (Here it seemed to the Cossack as though the stranger’s voice were not quite unknown to him, and that he must have heard it somewhere or other.) “But Levko shall learn to know me,” continued the stranger. “He thinks I don’t notice his rascally tricks; but he will yet feel the weight of my fists, the scoundrel!”

At these words Levko could no longer restrain his wrath. He came three steps nearer, and took a run in order to plant a blow which would have stretched the stranger on the ground in spite of his strength. At that moment, however, a ray of light fell on the latter’s face, and Levko stood transfixed, for he saw it was his father. But he only expressed his surprise by an involuntary shake of the head and a low whistle.

On the other side there was the sound of approaching footsteps. Ganna ran hastily into the house and closed the door behind her.

“Good-bye, Ganna!” cried one of the youths, who had stolen up and embraced the headman, but