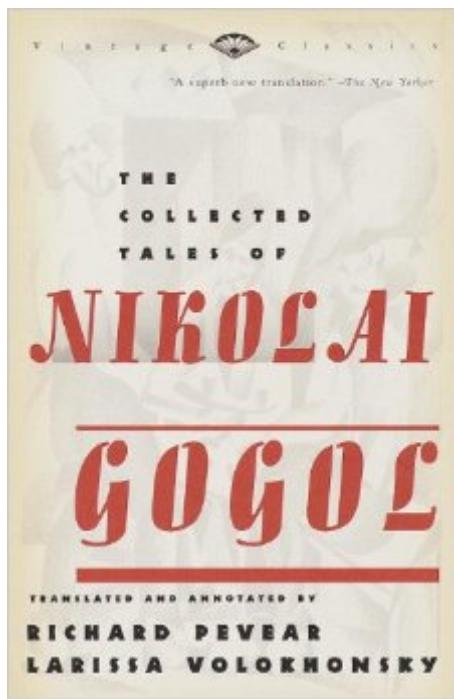


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The Collected Tales Of Nikolai Gogol



Synopsis

When Pushkin first read some of the stories in this collection, he declared himself "amazed." "Here is real gaiety," he wrote, "honest, unconstrained, without mincing, without primness. And in places what poetry! . . . I still haven't recovered." More than a century and a half later, Nikolai Gogol's stories continue to delight readers the world over. Now a stunning new translation--from an award-winning team of translators--presents these stories in all their inventive, exuberant glory to English-speaking readers. For the first time, the best of Gogol's short fiction is brought together in a single volume: from the colorful Ukrainian tales that led some critics to call him "the Russian Dickens" to the Petersburg stories, with their black humor and wonderfully demented attitude toward the powers that be. All of Gogol's most memorable creations are here: the minor official who misplaces his nose, the downtrodden clerk whose life is changed by the acquisition of a splendid new overcoat, the wily madman who becomes convinced that a dog can tell him everything he needs to know. These fantastic, comic, utterly Russian characters have dazzled generations of readers and had a profound influence on writers such as Dostoevsky and Nabokov. Now they are brilliantly rendered in the first new translation in twenty-five years--one that is destined to become the definitive edition of Gogol's most important stories.

Book Information

Paperback: 464 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (June 29, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375706151

ISBN-13: 978-0375706158

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.9 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (38 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #55,776 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #20 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Regional & Cultural > Russian #468 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Short Stories & Anthologies > Anthologies #886 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Short Stories & Anthologies > Short Stories

Customer Reviews

This collection brings together almost all of Gogol's notable short stories, from his first surviving piece, *St. John's Eve*, to his last and most acclaimed short piece, *The Overcoat*. The first seven

stories come from Gogol's earlier period (1830-1835) during which he set his tales in the Ukraine, while the last six, written between 1835 and 1842, are all set in Petersburg. Critics still disagree to some extent over the quality of Gogol's Ukrainian tales and the extent to which they reflect the artistic vision found in his later, most famous pieces. I would acknowledge that there aren't any absolute masterpieces among these stories, but the world he creates through the lot of them, with the constant presence of the supernatural (probably best seen in "The Night Before Christmas" and "Viy") and a charming provincial sense of humor (at its height in "The Story of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich"), is really quite memorable. Also, it's very interesting to see how the simple country folk of the Ukrainian tales evolve into the often equally naive clerks found in the Petersburg tales, and how the demons and ghosts of Gogol's earlier pieces anticipate the haunted portraits and phantoms of departed eternal titular councillors that would later win Gogol lasting fame. It is, however, the Petersburg tales that are really the centerpiece of the collection. Though it would be a mistake (one that has tempted many a socially-minded critic over the years) to portray these stories as representing a profound sympathy on Gogol's part for plight of the little man, Gogol uses humble copying clerks, struggling artists, and their ilk to paint a wondrously alive picture of the bustling imperial capital.

Nikolai Gogol wrote the stories included in this volume between 1831 and 1842, yet many of them are so modern that one could readily believe that they had been written between 1931 and 1942. Given their 19th-Century vintage, some of these tales are indeed classics of literature. It might be useful to specify which tales are included in this volume and who the translators are. Despite the "collected" of the title, this volume does not gather together ALL of Gogol's tales. Instead, it offers seven "Ukrainian Tales" and six "Petersburg Tales", presented in the order of their composition. The seven Ukrainian Tales are: St. John's Eve *The Night Before Christmas *The Terrible Vengeance of Fyodorovich Shponka and His Aunt *Old World Landowners Viy *The Story of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich *The six Petersburg Tales are: Nevsky Prospect *The Diary of a Madman *The Nose *The Carriage *The Portrait *The Overcoat *(The asterisks denote the stories that are classics in my personal pantheon.) The most conspicuous omission from this volume is "Taras Bulba". The translators are Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, who seem to have made it their mission to translate into English all of the major works of 19th-Century Russian Literature. Their "style" has been criticized by some, but I (though not at all literate in Russian) suspect it well-suited to the informal, irreverent, even madcap prose of Nikolai Gogol. Over the years I ended up with three other collections of Gogol's tales and I sense that the P&V translations are more

appropriate for Gogol than those by Constance Garnett and pretty much on a par with those by David Magarshack.

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