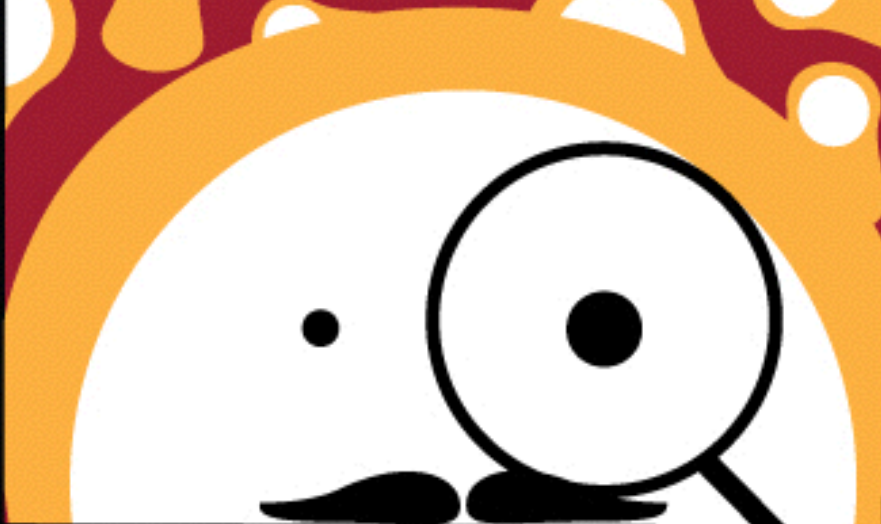


# THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR

NIKOLAI GOGOL'S CLASSIC COMEDY  
ADAPTED BY JEFFREY HATCHER



## **THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR STUDY GUIDE**

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**DRAMATURGY: JAZMIN MEDINA**



**PERFORMANCE DATES:**  
**APRIL 29TH, 30TH AT 7:30PM**  
**MAY 5TH, 6TH, 7TH AT 7:30PM**  
**MAY 6TH AT 10:00AM**

**UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-PARKSIDE**  
**MAIN STAGE THEATRE**

## SYNOPSIS

In a little Russian village in 1836, the townspeople and the officials that run it, learn that a government inspector will be coming to town for an undercover inspection. Inevitably, chaos ensues as Mayor Antonovich and the other government officials try to take matters into their own hands by trying to hide and bribe their crooked ways. Eventually, the mayor is given local gossip that the government inspector is staying at a small inn in the village, and he and the other bumbling officials decide to pay him a visit. Little does the town know that the man they visit, Alexandreyevich Hlestakov, is a civil servant running away from his problems and in no way is he a government inspector. Hilarity ensues as Helestakov starts to take his new role as the government inspector very seriously, as the whole town caters to his every need.

## THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR



A government inspector's job is to supervise the operations and programs in many various cities. Their role within the government is to try and prevent fraud and corruption while also being a resource to those around them. They try providing better policies and methods of carrying out different government programs within various cities.

## CHARACTERS

### **ANTON ANTONOVICH SKVOZNIK DUMAKHANOVSKY**

*Anton (ahn-tawn) Antonovich (ahn-toe-noff-ich) Skvoznik (shk-vost-nic) Dumakhanovsky (doom-mah-kah-noff-skee)*

The Mayor is one of the most corrupt officiates of the town who has the most to fear from the arrival of the secret government inspector. Gogol describes him as “a man who has grown old in the state service, who “wears an air of dignified respectability, but is by no means incorruptible.” He too, like me many others, indulges in the fantasy of moving up in status by Hlestakov’s supposed promotion and proposed engagement to his daughter.

### **ANNA ANDREYEVNA**

*Anna (ah-nah) Andreyevna (ahn-drayv-vna)*

Anna is the Mayor’s wife who is “tolerably young and is a provincial coquette” according to Gogol. Her main concern is with her vanity and appearance. She flirts shamelessly with Hlestakov, all the while imagining the benefits she could enjoy in Saint Petersburg with his marriage to Marya.

### **MARYA ANTONOVNA SKVOZNIK DUMAKHANOVSKY**

*Marya (mar-e-ya) Antonovna (ahn-toe-noff-na) Skvoznik (shk-vost-nic) Dumakhanovsky (doom-mah-kah-noff-skee)*

Marya is the Mayor and Anna’s daughter. Known to be deadpan and sullen, she prefers to wear black clothing— unlike her mother who dresses in her in bright colors and pastels. Her mother rushes her to the inn to meet the infamous government inspector, in order to make a match.

## CHARACTERS CONTINUED

### **GRUSHA**

*Grusha (grew-sha)*

The Mayor and his family's old grumpy gnome of a maid.

### **IVAN ALEXANDREYEVICH HLESTAKOV**

*Ivan (ee-vahn) Alexandreyevich (ah-lecs-ahn-drey-vich)  
Hlestakov (ha-les-ta-koff)*

An official from St. Petersburg, that is about 23 years old. He is a “recovering” gambler, and womanizing alcoholic, trying to start anew by paying off his debts and failing miserably. All the while, he is accompanied by his brutally honest servant, Osip. He was recently fired from his position as a clerk to the assistant associate undersecretary in the department of bureaus. He is mistaken to be the government inspector by the whole town and he makes use of this timely opportunity to weave elaborate lies about himself to receive bribes from the local government officials. Gogol insists that this character is an “opportunist”, who makes the most of this case of mistaken identity.

### **OSIP**

*Osip (ah-sip)*

Hlestakov's servant. Gogol describes him as a middle-aged man who is “fond of arguing and lecturing his master.” He is more clever than Hlestakov and catches on to things more quickly than he does. Osip has a lot of asides, and muses aloud to himself, revealing to the audience the truth of Hlestakov's character.

### **JUDGE LYAPKIN-TYAPKIN**

*Lyapkin-Tyapkin (lap-ken tap-ken)*

The Judge of the court. A former atheist, she is now agnostic, which means that they believe nothing is known or can be known of the existence of God.

### **IVAN KUZMICH SHPEKIN**

*Shpekin (sh-pay-ken)*

The Postmaster is described as “an artless simpleton” who really is nothing more than a gossip. The Postmaster abuses the position as postmaster to open up everyone's letters in the town, and keeping the ones they loves the most. The postmaster is the one to reveal Hlestakov's true character.

### **LUKA LUKICH KHLOPOV**

*Luke (look-a) Lukich (look-keech) Khlopov (klo-pov-ye)*

The School Principal (Director of Schools) that seems to have no control over anyone in the education system. He has a perpetual fear that he will be reprimanded if he takes charge when he needs to.

### **ARTEMI PHILIPPOVICH ZEMLYANIKA**

*Artemi (Ar-temi) Philippovich (fil-i-po-veech) Zemlyanika (zim-li-ni-ka)*

The Hospital Director (Charity Commissioner and Warden of the Hospital) that is always with the district doctor. He teaches the doctor phrases to be more understandable by all, and to make bribing Hlestakov all the easier.

## CHARACTERS CONTINUED

### **CHRISTIAN OVANOVICH HÜBNER**

*Christian Ovanovich (o-van-o-veech) Hübner (who-bear-ner)*

The District Doctor; Chief of Surgery. He is foreign; not a native of Russia. He seems to be involved with the hospital exchange program, but no one can seem to understand him.

### **PIOTR IVANOVICH DOBCHINSKY**

*Pyotr (pee-ter) Ivanovich (ee-vahn-noff-ich) Dobchinsky (dob-chin-skee)*

A country squire that has a big forehead, and is a local landowner. He is married and has nine children. He is not related to Bobchinsky.

### **PIOTR IVANOVICH BOBCHINSKY**

*Pyotr (pee-ter) Ivanovich (ee-vahn-noff-ich) Bobchinsky (bob-chin-skee)*

A country squire that has the lisp. He is not related to Dobchinsky, although they supposedly look very much like each other, and have the same name.

### **SVETSUNOV**

*Svetsunov (svets-tu-noff)*

The Police Chief, who is not used to change. He has a hard time following the Mayor's change in rules when the government inspector comes to town.

## CHARACTER NAME MEANINGS

The names of the characters in *The Government Inspector*, for the most part, are motivated by language meaning in the original Russian script.

For Example:

- The Mayor, Anton Antonovich Skvoznik Dumakhanovsky  
Skvoznik: A drought, or figuratively a sly customer.  
Dmukhati (Ukrainian): To blow or to whak;  
A windbag fond of blowing his own trumpet.
- The Constable, Svetsunov  
Svistnut': To Whistle also to clout.
- The Judge, Lyapkin-Tyapkin  
Tyap-lyap: Any old how: Slapkin-Dashkin
- Hlestakov
  - Khlestat': To Lash
- The Postmaster, Shpekin (Shpyokin)
  - Shpion: Spy
  - Shpik: Secret Agent; Snooper.
  - Tryapki: Rags; Trashkin



## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

19th Century Russia was a period of great change. It is an era where the entire country was ready to modernize its ways, just like their European neighbors had already done. Russia was completely ruled by autocrats or tsars that ruled with absolute power. Serfdom, which was typical in the middle ages, wasn't even abolished in Russia until 1861. This system of status was the use of people in complete servitude to a lord; in other words, slavery. Although monarchy had many strict laws to control the people of Russian, revolutionary ideals and the widespread demand of education was on the rise, along with a surge in industry and the arts.

Nicholas I was the Tsar of Russia (1825 - 1855) when *The Government Inspector* was first published and performed. Nicholas is best remembered for his harsher treatment of the people than the czars before him, and his "constant strife for more power." He was a conservative regarding serfdom and wanted to keep it in practice, and also tried to maintain his power by taking away education from the people. That way he would be certain that revolutionary ideals wouldn't be able to spread throughout his country. His actions led to the eventual beginnings of the Crimean War later on in history.

The people of Russia were isolated amidst Russia's great exploits in foreign affairs and in big government business. Overall, Russian government at this time was completely inefficient, unfair, and corrupt.



## RUSSIAN CENSORSHIP AND LITERATURE

As a means to control his people and stop the spread of revolutionary ideals, Tsar Nicholas I, censored all Russian written material. In 1826, it was deemed in a statute that it prohibited the publication of any matter that was going to criticize or harm the monarchy or church, which was the existing top order of society. If you broke the law, you could receive warnings and fines, and even police supervision. Eventually in 1847, it expanded their censorship control to cover all of the capital and its theatres.



If the Tsar did not already have such a fondness for Gogol and his work, *The Government Inspector* would've been censored for many years, and thus unavailable to be produced theatrically. But despite the censorship, Russian literature really hit its stride in the 19th century. Writers passed along unofficial manuscripts of written works to friends and acquaintances to bypass the censors. Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoyevsky and Pushkin are some examples of famous authors, and also some of whom influenced Gogol's work.

Fun Fact! It is said that Pushkin met Gogol in Saint Petersburg and suggested the topic for *The Government Inspector* that was based on his own experience of being mistaken for a government official while staying at an inn in a remote town.

## PLAYWRIGHT: NIKOLAI GOGOL

Nikolai Gogol was a Russian humorist, dramatist, and novelist whose novel *Dead Souls* and short story *The Overcoat* are considered the foundations of the 19th century Russian realism. His writing is characterized by imaginative power, linguistic playfulness, and for his combined use of satire, humor, social realism, the fantastic and the grotesque.

Around 1828, Gogol arrived in St. Petersburg, traveling from his hometown Sorochintsi, Ukraine, intent on becoming a civil servant to support himself. Obtaining a disappointingly low-level, low-paying post in the government bureaucracy, and even after trying, unsuccessfully, to become an actor, Gogol focused his ambitions on writing. His very first publication of his poetry was in 1829 was mostly ignored; although it was given scathing reviews by critics. After being humiliated and completely discouraged, he purchased all the remaining copies of his work and burned them, swearing to himself that he will never write poetry again.

He got a second equally dismal government post afterwards and also began teaching history at a girl's boarding school in 1831, at which he was totally unequipped to do. In his spare time, he wrote for periodicals, finding escape in his childhood memories of the Ukraine. He mixed romanticized escapism themed memories of the past with realistic pessimistic attitudes of his present. In 1831, *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* was then formed; Gogol's two volume collection of stories derived from Ukrainian folklore. The collection was well-received, and he became famous overnight.

He then gained the attention of Aleksandr Pushkin, Russia's leading literary figure, who influenced his writing and even provided him ideas for two of his most important works, including *The Government Inspector*. After failing as an assistant professor of medieval history in 1834 at St. Petersburg University, Gogol continued to publish two more books of short stories, and two plays, including *The Government Inspector*. The Tsar even requested the first theatrical production, purely based on his fondness for Gogol, and it was performed in 1836. After the heavy criticism he received for *The Government Inspector*, he left Russia declaring that "Everyone was against me." He spent the next 12 years in exile, traveling throughout Europe, and eventually settling in Rome.

After Pushkin's death in 1837, Gogol inherited the mantle of the leading Russian writer of the day and in 1848, he returned to Russia, settling in Moscow. He then became increasingly preoccupied with religious concerns, eventually dying at the age of 42 in 1852 as a result of a religious fast and depression.

Gogol's influence on Russian literature continues to this day. He is considered to be the father of Russian prose fiction and for the next 100 years, his prose and stories dominated the literary world.



## ADAPTER JEFFREY HATCHER

*“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 fission: not as scholarly or precise as a translator, not as free and original as the author himself. Writing an adaptation is like a fun 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 matched 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 on my own for a bit.”*

Jeffrey Hatcher, on adapting a play



Jeffrey Hatcher has an extensive history in film, theatre, and playwriting. He has had numerous works produced off Broadway, including *A Picasso*, *The Turn of the Screw* and more. He even wrote the book for the Broadway musical *Never Gonna Dance*.

But he has written and produced many plays all across America, and especially within the Twin Cities, which included *The Government Inspector* at the Guthrie Theatre. He’s even worked at the Milwaukee Rep!

He wrote screenplays for the movie *Stage Beauty* (2004), *Casanova* (2005) and *The Duchess* (2008), and has also written episodes for the t.v. show *Columbo*.

He is a member and alumnus of the Playwright’s Center, the Dramatists Guild, the Writer’s Guild, and New Dramatists, while also having won numerous awards for his playwriting.

## GLOSSARY

RUBLE/KOPECK: Russian currency. 100 kopecks make 1 ruble.

AGNOSTIC: The belief that the afterlife is unknowable.

ATHEIST: The belief in no higher power.

ASSUAGE: To subdue.

RECRIMINATION: To blame.

DOPPELGÄNGER: A double.

PODGORNY: A rural settlement in Russia



PUSHKIN: A famous Romantic author who is considered to be the greatest Russian poet and founder of Russian literature.

GUDENOV: Reference to Boris Godunov, the Tsar of Russia in 1598 - 1605

ORDER OF ST. VLADIMIR: A decoration of the fourth class in the Russian Table of Tanks in 1782. It was awarded for service and came in the form of a ribbon.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How does the world Nikolai Gogol created in *The Government Inspector* differ from our world? Do you see any similarities? Do you think the world in the play is realistic? Why or why not?



The characters in Gogol's play are full of outrageous physical features, not to mention outrageous clothing, and physical behavior. Do you think any of these attributes really reflect who these characters are and how they live in Gogol's world?

Hlestakov ends up deceiving the whole town, receiving all of the benefits, and leaving without a trace. Do you believe he was justified in doing what he did? Who do you think is the hero in this play? And the villain? Are there any heroes or villains?

Other novels have been censored the past like *Lord of the Flies*, *Catcher in the Rye*, or even *Harry Potter* in some places of the world. Do you know of any other literature that has been censored or removed? Do you think it was for the better? Why?





## **ADDITIONAL SOURCES**

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