

Rank and fear in the nose essay examples

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Gogol's "The Nose" is a short story that is set in Russia during the early 1800s. The story follows in the strange tradition of Russian literature of the time, examining bizarre themes and situations that could not happen in reality. "The Nose" is the story of a man's nose-- the Major Kovalyov's nose, to be precise-- that the barber, Ivan, finds in his morning bread. During this time period, Russia was facing increasing amounts of turmoil. The cultural forces within Russia were causing a shift, a shift that would take place over nearly a century and a half. As a result, the themes of fear and uncertainty became prevalent in Russian literature at the time. Gogol portrays fear through Ivan's concern over being caught with a severed nose and Kovalyov's worry that he will lose his rank without his nose; he also uses the nose to weave a dreamlike reality in which the characters interact with cultural mores and values.

In the first part of "The Nose," Gogol writes, "He stuck in his fingers, and pulled out — a nose! .. His hands dropped to his sides for a moment. Then he rubbed his eyes hard. Then again he probed the thing. A nose! Sure enough a nose! Yes, and one familiar to him, somehow! Oh, horror spread upon his feature! Yet that horror was a trifle compared with his spouse's overmastering wrath" (Gogol). This is an extremely odd way to react to finding a nose in one's breakfast roll; indeed, most people, upon discovering a body part in their breakfast would not be most concerned with the way their wife will react. However, the odd reaction of the protagonist and the even odder reaction of the wife-- to call the man a brute for stealing another person's nose-- is indicative of the disassociation from reality that becomes standard in the story. The fear that the protagonist feels is not a sense of disgust or fear of the body part itself, but it is the fear of society finding out

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that he somehow stole the nose.

The original text, according to the translator, used the word “ nose” in the title in Russian-- a word that is a homonym for “ dream” in the Russian language. There is a decidedly dreamlike state to the text, as though the speaker is moving through dreamlike logic. When Ivan finds the nose in the breakfast roll, the speaker states of Ivan, “ He thought and thought, but did not know what to think ‘ The devil knows how it's happened I don't know for certain whether I came home drunk last night or not. But certainly things look as though something out of the way happened then, for bread comes of baking, and a nose of something else altogether’” (Gogol). There is a disconnect in the logic here; the fear of judgment that the speaker feels is very out of line with the fear that he should be feeling because of the nose in his breakfast roll. In addition, the speaker also immediately knows that his only option is to rid himself of the nose by throwing it over the bridge into the river.

When a policeman stops the barber and questions him about the nose, the barber begins to feel real fear about the state of his future while he is in possession of the nose. However, this is the first time that the reader gets a sense of how unreliable the narrator is; in furthering the dreamlike state of the story, the end of the first part of the story is “ shrouded in mist” (Gogol). In the same way a dream flows seamlessly from one scene to another, the story flows from the discovery of the nose to the story of the nose’s original owner, who wakes up one day suddenly without a nose. Rather than feeling fear for the sudden loss of his nose, and with it the ability to smell, or sneeze, the Major is more concerned with the way society will perceive him without his nose. He goes to the Police Commissioner to report the loss of his

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nose, and on the way stops to look in the mirror: ““ The devil only knows what this vileness means!” The Major said as he looked in the mirror: ““ If even there had been something to take the nose's place! But, as it is, there's nothing there at all”” (Gogol). While the reader may be marveling at the absurdity of this response, the logic of the story is such that it is not too much of a stretch from reality to accept that the Major's response to the loss of his nose is a normal one. In the same way that dreams can bend logic, reality, and even the laws of physics, Gogol's “ The Nose” bends the reality and the perception of reality of the reader and engulfs them in the dreamlike state of the story.

The narrator admits that he or she is unreliable, stating that many things in the text are potentially implausible. However, as the story goes on, the implausibility of the storyline should grow, but the reader instead finds him or herself drawn into the implausibility of the story. As the second part of the story goes on, it becomes apparent that the Major's nose has attained a higher rank than he has; as a result, the nose-- which by now can speak and wears clothes-- refuses to return to the Major's face. This reflects the incomprehensibility of rank in Russian society at the time; the nose, which is not truly capable of doing any civic duties, has somehow attained a high position in government. The nose becomes infamous, and people gather to watch the nose and to take note of its abilities. However, Kovalyov becomes more and more frantic, searching for a way to reattach the nose to his face. The nose itself is a very obvious part of a person's appearance. Had Kovalyov lost a finger or a toe, the story would have been very different; however, the fact that a nose is very prominent and very obvious is symbolic of a deep-seated fear of losing the respect of others in society based on an <https://assignbuster.com/rank-and-fear-in-the-nose-essay-examples/>

outward appearance. When the nose takes on a life and personality of its own, it is as if Kovalyov's reputation has taken on a life of its own, and it is a reputation that he can neither control nor contain. The fear that Kovalyov feels is his inner response to the fact that his nose is running about with his reputation, sullyng it in some ways, and outshining him in others. He makes attempts at reigning in his nose, but in the end, his nose returns to him voluntarily, despite all the things that he tries.

Works cited

Gogol, Nikolai Vasilevich. *The overcoat*. New York: Norton, 1965. Print.