

THE DISCOURSE OF SELF IN RUSSIA AND THE WEST

CLRS G6110
Spring 2010
W 4:10-6
709 Hamilton Hall

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Introduction

This course approaches the development of self-narrative and literary self-conceptualization in Russian and West European literature from a comparative perspective. By reading seminal Russian and Western works -- both fictional and non-fictional -- in the autobiographical mode, along with influential secondary texts on autobiography and its problematics, we shall examine the ways in which the notion of "the self" has been constructed at different times by different authors; explore the various uses to which this notion has been put; and seek to draw fruitful comparisons between the Russian and Western conversations about "self."

Course Requirements

Regular and active participation in class meetings; one brief (10 minutes) presentation on a relevant work from the secondary literature; one critical paper of approximately 15 pages, on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor.

Books

The following books are available at Book Culture (536 W. 112th St., betw. Broadway and Amsterdam).

Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* (Oxford World's Classics)
Archpriest Avvakum, *The Life, Written by Himself* (Michigan Slavic Translations)
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions* (Oxford World's Classics)
Mikhail Lermontov, *A Hero of Our Time* (Everyman's Library)
Leo Tolstoy, *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth* (Penguin)
Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The House of the Dead* (Penguin)
George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (Mariner Books)
Jean Genet, *The Miracle of the Rose* (Grove Press)

Topics and Readings

Introduction: confession, testimony, lyric, narrative

Session 1 The disputed origins and uses of autobiography. A comparative outline of the evolution of autobiography theory in the West and in Russia: major thinkers and developments.

In-class readings:

*"The Story of the Flood," *The Epic of Gilgamesh*
*Sappho lyrics TBA

Confessions, I: The sacred self

Session 2 Primary reading:
Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, Books 1-9

Secondary readings:

W.C. Spengemann, "The Formal Paradigm," in *The Forms of Autobiography*
Peter Brooks, "Confession, Selfhood, and the Religious Tradition," in *Troubling*

Confessions

Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: A Review of Work in Progress," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow.

Session 3

Primary readings:

The Life of Avvakum, Written by Himself

Secondary readings:

Philippe Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Pact"

Priscilla Hunt, "The Autobiography of the Archpriest Avvakum: Structure and Function."

V. V. Vinogradov, "On the Tasks of Stylistics: Observations Regarding the Style of *The Life of Archpriest Avvakum*"

Confessions, II: The profane self

Session 4

Primary readings:

Rousseau, *Confessions*, Books 1-2

*Montaigne, "To the Reader" (preface to *Essays*)

*Fonvizin, *Chistoserdechnoe priznanie*

*Karamzin, *My Confession: A Letter to an Editor of a Journal*

Secondary readings:

Lydia Ginzburg, "Rousseau's *Confessions* and the Modifications of Personality," in *On Psychological Prose*.

Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in Olney, *Autobiography*.

Nancy L. Cooper, "A Chapter in the History of Russian Autobiography."

M. M. Bakhtin, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" (excerpt).

Confessions, III: The topography of self

Session 5

Primary readings:

*Karamzin, *Letters of a Russian Traveler* (selections)

*Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, Vol. 1

Secondary readings:

Roger Anderson, "Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveller*: An Education in Western Sentimentalism."

A. G. Cross, "Karamzin and England."

Session 6

Primary readings:

Lermontov, *A Hero of Our Time*

Secondary readings:

Lewis Bagby, "Narrative Double-Voicing In Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*."

David Goldfarb, "Lermontov and the Omniscience of Narrators."

Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*: Introduction ("Criticism in the Contact Zone") and/or Chapter 5 ("Eros and Abolition").

Confessions, IV: The discovery of childhood

Session 7 Primary readings:
Tolstoy, *Childhood*
*Wordsworth, *The Prelude*: “Two-Part Prelude” (1799); Book I (1805); Book 14 (1850).

Secondary reading:
Andrew Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood*, Ch. 1.
Philippe Lejeune, “Autobiography in the Third Person.”

Session 8 Primary readings:
*Proust, *The Way By Swann’s*, Ch. 1
*Babel, childhood stories

Secondary readings:
Paul de Man, “Autobiography as De-Facement.”
Richard Coe, *When the Grass Was Taller*, Introduction.

Testimonies, I: The individual in history

Session 9 Primary readings:
*Herzen, selections from *Past and Thoughts*
*Mandelstam, selections from *The Noise of Time*

Secondary readings:
Lydia Ginzburg, “Herzen’s *My Past and Thoughts* and Historical Identity,” in *On Psychological Prose*
Jane Gary Harris, “Autobiography and History: Osip Mandelstam’s *Noise of Time*,” in *Autobiographical Statements...*

Session 10 Primary readings:
Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*

Secondary readings:
Antony Shuttleworth, “The Real George Orwell: Dis-Simulation in Homage to Catalonia and Coming Up for Air,” in *And in Our Time*
Miquel Berga, “Orwell’s Catalonia Revisited: Textual Strategies and the Eyewitness Account,” in *The Road from George Orwell*.

Testimonies, II: Inside the discipline factory

Session 11 Primary readings:
Dostoevsky, *Notes from the House of the Dead*

Secondary readings:
Nancy Ruttenburg, *Dostoevsky’s Democracy* (pp. 31-71).

Session 12 Primary readings:
Genet, *The Miracle of the Rose*

Secondary readings:
Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Part Four (Prison): Ch. 1 ("Complete and austere institutions"), Ch. 3 ("The carceral").

Session 13 Primary readings:
*Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*: Preface and Chapter 1 ("Arrest")
*Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*: "In the Bathhouse," "A Piece of Meat," "Dry Rations," "A Child's Drawings," "The Injector," "My First Tooth"

Secondary readings:
Leona Toker, "Toward a Poetics of Documentary Prose."
A. Urban, "Khudozhestvennaia avtobiografiia i document."

Testimonies, III: Vanishing points

Session 14 Primary readings:
*Zoshchenko, *Before Sunrise* (excerpt)
*Akhmatova, *Poem Without a Hero*
*Shostakovich, String Quartet No. 8 in C minor

Secondary reading:
Andrei Zhdanov, "essays" on literature and music.

May 7 (Friday): PAPERS DUE by email to rstanton@barnard.edu