

LITERATURE AND REVOLUTION

Tradition, Innovation, And Politics In Twentieth-Century Russian Culture

Spring 2010
TR 1:10-2:25
225 Milbank
Barnard GER: **LIT**

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides a “big picture” survey of Russian literature and culture from pre-Revolutionary Symbolism to the culture of high Stalinism and beyond. While it is primarily a literature course, and our chief focus will necessarily be the analysis of texts, we will consider our texts against the background of their cultural and political environment, complementing them with works from the visual and musical arts. Among the questions we shall ponder are the following: how did Russian writers respond to their changing political context in the 20th century? In what ways are the artistic traditions of the Russian 20th century continuous with those of the 19th, and in what ways do they break away from the legacy of the 19th century greats (Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky...)? What relationships obtained among folk culture, mass culture, and “high” culture in 20th-century Russia?

Please note:

(1) Some of the reading assignments will be on the heavy side (i.e, over 100pp. per class session); please look ahead, and plan accordingly. To reward you for keeping up-to-date with the reading, your participation in classroom and online discussions has been weighted at 30% of your final grade.

(2) **This class is discussion-based.** Your opinions are not only welcome, but positively required!

The musical and visual components of the course will be played/shown in class. An archive of these materials will also be available on the course website at <http://russian.psydeshow.org/>.

REQUIREMENTS:

- Participation in classroom and online discussions.....30%
- Two 3-page papers (one due before Spring Break, one after),
each developing a theme or question you raised in one of your
online comments..... 30%
- Midterm assignment (one hour, on Courseworks) 10%
- Final 30%

ABOUT ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

Over the course of the semester, you must contribute substantively to at least 20 of the online discussions at the class blog, <http://russian.psydeshow.org/>, which will take place before each class. (This means you should plan on participating before every class, but you can skip up to 6 times without penalty.) Your contributions should average about 150-200 words, although extreme concision, as well as the occasional 300-word burst of enthusiasm, are welcome. (For reference, this paragraph contains 183 words.) Your contribution may be a provocative question or questions; a response to questions posted by another student or the instructor; a defense or rebuttal of a position taken by another student (remember to be respectful in dissent); or an analysis of a particular passage or moment in the text that seems significant to you. Please read any contributions that have been posted by your classmates before adding your own. **The deadline for contributing to the discussion is NOON on the day of class.** The blog is password-protected; for reasons that will become apparent by April, the username is **zhivago** and the password is **lara**.

To receive full credit, your contribution should be **thoughtful, specific, and explicitly linked to a particular passage or passages in the text(s)** being discussed; give page numbers where appropriate.

BOOKS

The following books have been ordered into Book Culture (112th St. between Broadway and Amsterdam), and placed on reserve at Butler Library:

Andrei Bely, *Petersburg* (Indiana UP)
 Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry and Other Stories* (Penguin)
 Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We* (Eos)
 Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita* (Vintage)
 Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift* (Vintage)
 Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)
 Venedikt Erofeev, *Moscow to the End of the Line* (Northwestern UP)

The following book is out of print, but the Barnard Slavic Department has 20 copies which you are invited to borrow for the semester. We ask you to return these copies at the final exam:

Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, trans. Max Hayward & Manya Harari (Pantheon)

Please DO NOT purchase the new *Zhivago* translation by Pevear and Volokhonsky, which destroys the lyricism of Pasternak's prose.

You are welcome to shop around for cheaper used (or free—from the library) books, but please use the above editions whenever possible. This is particularly important in the case of the works by Bely, Bulgakov, and Solzhenitsyn, which exist in multiple translations, some of which were done from heavily expurgated Soviet editions.

OTHER READINGS

All other readings (marked with an asterisk in the schedule) will be included in a course reader, which will be available for purchase in the Barnard Slavic Dept. by the second week of the semester.

ARTSLINK

Tickets for the Shostakovich opera, *The Nose* (Friday, March 5, at the Metropolitan Opera) have been ordered through ArtsLink. One ticket (at \$19) is reserved for each student in the course, and may be purchased at the Box Office in the lobby of Lerner Hall or at www.cuarts.com/artslink (click on BUY TICKETS). If you pre-registered for the course, you may buy your ticket immediately; otherwise, please wait until after January 29, when I will send the final class roster to ArtsLink. **The deadline to buy your ticket is Friday, February 26 at 8PM** (after that, any left-over tickets will go on sale to the Columbia community). Unfortunately, ArtsLink will only reserve one ticket per student. Student rush tickets may be available from the Met on the day of the show; for details, see <http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/>.

SCHEDULE**Date****Topics and Readings**January

Tu 19

Introduction

The broad trajectory of Russian literature and culture in the 20th century; introduction to the course and its aims.

Revolutionary Modernism, I: Symbolism

Th 21

Andrei Bely, *Petersburg*, pp. 1-96

Tu 26

Petersburg, pp. 97-216 (**big assignment; plan ahead!**)

Music: Tchaikovsky, *The Queen of Spades* (Act II, Scene 3)

Visual Arts: early Malevich, Rozanova (Cubist cityscapes)

Th 28 *Petersburg*, pp. 217-293.

February

Tu 2 *Aleksandr Blok, *The Twelve*.

Music: Stravinsky, *Petrouchka* (Parts 1-2)

Visual Arts: Mikhail Larionov, Natalia Goncharova

Revolutionary Modernism, II: Futurism

Th 4 *Short poems and manifesti by Mayakovsky, Kruchenykh, Khlebnikov.

*Background reading: Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Italian Futurist writings (excerpts)

Music: Stravinsky, *The Rite of Spring* [excerpts]

Visual Arts: Malevich (suprematist paintings), Cubo-Futurist collaborations

The Soviet Modern: from Revolution to Stalinism (1917-1928)

1. CIVIL WAR.

Tu 9 Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry* (assignment TBA)

Visual Arts: Mark Chagall

Th 11 *Red Cavalry*, cont.

2. THE NEW ECONOMIC POLICY (NEP).

Tu 16 *Yury Olesha, *Envy*, Part One

Visual Arts: Kandinsky, theories of color; objective Cubism (Malevich, *Knife Grinder*; Filonov, *Victory over Eternity*).

Th 18 **Envy*, Part Two

3. DYSTOPIA.

Tu 23 Evgeny Zamiatin, *We*, Ch. 1-23

Th 25 *We*, cont.(Ch. 24-end).

Visual Arts: Malevich, late works; Constructivism

Film clip: *Aelita, Queen of Mars*

March

High Stalinism (1928-40)

1. THE STALINIST ABSURD.

Tu 2 *Daniil Kharms, selections from *Incidences*.

*Shostakovich, *The Nose* (opera, available on Courseworks)

2. MAGICAL REALISM

Th 4 Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, pp. 3-125 (BIG ASSIGNMENT; PLAN AHEAD!)

Fri 5 8pm: Shostakovich's *The Nose* at the Metropolitan Opera

Tu 9 *The Master and Margarita*, pp. 126-254 (BIG ASSIGNMENT; PLAN AHEAD!)

Music: TBA

Th 11 *The Master and Margarita*, pp. 255-335.

Fri 12 Last day to turn in paper #1.

13-20 SPRING BREAK

Tradition in Emigration

Tu 23 Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift*, Ch. 1 & 2 (pp. 3-145). (BIG ASSIGNMENT; PLAN AHEAD!)

The Gift, Ch. 3 (pp. 146-211) and Foreword.

Th 25 Visual Arts: Marianna von Werefkin; late Kandinsky

Tu 30 *The Gift*, Ch. 4-5 (pp. 146-366). (BIG ASSIGNMENT; PLAN AHEAD!)

April**In the Cross-Hairs of the Cultural Revolution**

- Th 1 *Mikhail Zoshchenko, short stories: "Nervous People," "The Lady Aristocrat," "The Bathhouse," "The Galosh," "Adventures of a Monkey" (1923-45)
* Anna Akhmatova, *Requiem* (1935-40)

After Stalin: Thaw, Freeze, Stagnation

- Tu 6 1. A SUPPRESSED CLASSIC: DOCTOR ZHIVAGO
Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, Ch. 1-4 (pp. 3-128) = 126 pages
Music: Medtner, Violin Sonata No. 1; Tchaikovsky, Piano Trio; Scriabin, *Prometheus*
- Th 8 *Doctor Zhivago*, Ch. 5-7 (pp. 131-253) = 122 pages
Doctor Zhivago, Ch. 8-13 (pp. 254-418) = 164 pages (PLAN AHEAD!)
Tu 13 Music: Shostakovich, Piano Trio (3rd mvt.)
- Th 15 *Doctor Zhivago*, Ch. 14-17 (pp. 419-559) = 140 pages.
2. THE GULAG.
Tu 20 Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (excerpt, on handout); *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, pp. 3-93 (to the words, "...Don't wait for the whistle").
- Th 22 *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, p. 93-end.
3. POST-UTOPIAN IRONY.
Tu 27 Venedikt Erofeev, *Moscow to the End of the Line*, pp. 11-91.
Visual Arts: Collaborative paintings by Komar and Melamid; installations by Ilya Kabakov.
- Th 29 *Moscow to the End of the Line*, p. 91-end; wrap-up and conclusion.

May

Mon 3 Last day to turn in paper #2.

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Tu 11 FINAL EXAM, 1-4PM