

Russian ²⁵¹350—Honors Masterpieces of 20th and 21st Century Russian Literature

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Office Hours: Mondays 2-4
and by appointment

Course Description:

The course is taught entirely in English and fulfills the GEC category 5B1 (Arts and Humanities, Analysis of Texts, Literature). It will introduce you to some of the masterpieces of modern Russian literature. We will look at these works in their historical and cultural context and examine them as individual representations of the talent and concerns of a given writer as well as considering their place in the "evolutionary process" that is Russian letters. We will also consider critical and philosophical trends throughout the Soviet period and beyond, trying to come to an understanding of what Russian modernity and postmodernity really are. Although this course is a continuation of Russian 250, Masterpieces of 19th Century Russian Literature, it requires no previous knowledge of Russian literature or history.

Objectives:

While Oprah chose *Anna Karenina* for her book club in 2004, and *Crime and Punishment* is popular among high school teachers of English, 20th and 21st century works are generally less well known in the United States. In part this is because the 20th century saw immense changes and complicated historical events that cut Russia off from literary and cultural processes in the West. At the same time, especially now, when the Iron Curtain has fallen, Russian literature and culture has much to offer the American student.

In this course, we will tackle some of the most interesting and challenging Russian writers, male and female, conservative and radical, formal innovators and philosophical frontrunners. We will also consider relevant works of art, film, and scholarship to better understand these writers and their cultural milieu. Thus in this course students will learn how to read, analyze and discuss great Russian works of literature while perceiving them in their cultural and artistic context.

Requirements:

The course will consist of a combination of lecture and class discussion. Please notice the reading requirements of the course—this is Russian literature, after all, so you'll be doing a LOT of reading. Make sure you read the assignment before coming to class and bring your books with you; you will

be called upon to offer insights and do close readings in class. Note that regular attendance is strongly encouraged; in order to succeed in this course you **must** attend class and do your reading.

Texts:*

- Ivan Bunin, *Sunstroke: Selected Stories* ("The Gentleman from San Francisco" 1915)
- Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry* (1926)
- Vladimir Nabokov, *The Defense* (1930)
- Valentin Kataev, *Time, Forward!* (1931)
- Anna Akhmatova, *Requiem* (1935-40, publ. 1963)
- Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962)
- Vladimir Sorokin, *The Queue* (1985)
- Liudmila Petrushevskaya, *The Time: Night* (1992)
- Boris Akunin, *The Turkish Gambit* (2003)

Secondary Texts:*

- Mikhail Epstein, Alexander Genis and Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover, *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture* (1999) (called *EGVG* below)
- Sally Laird, *Voices of Russian Literature: Interviews with Ten Contemporary Writers* (1999)
- Nancy Ries, *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation during Perestroika* (1997)

**All texts are available at SBX Bookstore on High Street.*

Grade Distributions:

Reading Reports (6)	=	30%
Attendance and Class Participation, including weekly homework	=	20%
Presentation	=	20%
Final Paper	=	30%

Writing Assignments: Grading Criteria

Weekly Homework

By Sunday morning each student will email 2-3 provocative questions related to the reading to the professor. The professor will then compile these questions into a list to send back to the students by 9 p.m. that evening. We will use these questions as a basis for our discussion during the week. This "homework," in conjunction with attendance and participation, will make up 30% of your final grade.

Reading Reports

You will be expected to do a "reading report" on six of the works we are reading this quarter. You should type and email your report to the professor by 9 a.m. on Wednesday morning (Thursday for T-Th classes). In the report, you should identify the aspect of the work that interests you most (plot, characterization, language [metaphors, style, form], philosophical underpinnings, etc.). Your report should be 400-500 words long, in paragraph form, pointing out the ways in which your chosen aspect are developed uniquely in the work.

Reading reports will be evaluated based on 1) interesting and complete content; 2) creative reading approach; and 3) literacy of the paper itself (i.e. spelling, punctuation, style). Each reading report counts for 5% of your final grade. You may use one or more of these reports as a place for working out ideas for your presentation and/or final research paper.

Presentation

Each student will give a 15 minute presentation, with visuals, on a topic of your choice related to the art and life of the Soviet and/or post-Soviet periods. We will have a week-long “symposium” in the 9th week of classes to present the work. This symposium, which will take place over the course of two class periods, will enable students both to present their own work and to react to the work of others and should lead to continued conversations in the final week of the course.

Final Research Paper

You will write a ten-paper research paper, due during finals week, on a topic of your choice. Your paper must be typed, double-spaced, in a 12 point font, using the MLA style of bibliographic citation. You must discuss your topic in advance with the professor, and you should use a minimum of two primary sources and 3-5 secondary sources in preparing your paper. The paper should be well-written and organized, contain evidence of research and textual support, and show individual thought.

NOTES:

Disabilities:

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at 614-292-3307 in room 150 Pomerene Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Absences:

This course meets twenty times, for a total of 40 academic hours in the classroom. This means that two class meetings equals more than 10% of the course. You are responsible for the reading material *and* for the lecture material. You are also expected to participate in class discussions, and a “grade” will be recorded for each day of class on a scale of 1 to 5. (1= physical presence in the classroom, 5= active participation with evidence of knowledge of material and individual insight). These daily grades will translate into the 30% participation grade which is a component of your final grade.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is the representation of another's works or ideas as one's own: it includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person's work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person's ideas. All cases of suspected plagiarism, in accordance with university rules, will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct.

Syllabus

Week 1

Monday How to Read Russian Literature

Wednesday The Legacy of the 19th Century
Readings: Ivan Bunin, "Gentleman from San Francisco" (1915) and "Rusya" (1940)

Week 2

Monday What's War Got to Do With It?
Readings: Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry* ("My First Goose," "The Life Story of Pavlichenko," "Matvey Rodionych")
Reading Report on *Red Cavalry* due Wednesday 9 a.m.

Wednesday The Russian Abroad
Readings: Vladimir Nabokov, *The Defense* (15–117)

Week 3

Monday Dream Worlds and Reality
Readings: Vladimir Nabokov, *The Defense* (118–256)
Reading Report on *The Defense* due Wednesday 9 a.m.

Wednesday Soviet Production and the Five Year Plan
Readings: Valentin Kataev, *Time, Forward!* (3–103)
Andrei Sinyavsky, "What is Socialist Realism?" (1959)

Week 4

Monday Socialist Realism B the Official Method of Soviet Prose
Readings: Valentin Kataev, *Time, Forward!* (105–249)
Mikhail Epstein, "The Paradox of Acceleration" (1985) (*EGVG* 177–182)

Wednesday Early Soviet Cinema and its Effect on Prose
Readings: Valentin Kataev, *Time, Forward!* (250–345)

Week 5

Monday Stalin and the Terror
Readings: Anna Akhmatova, *Requiem*
Reading Report on "Requiem" due Wednesday 9 a.m.

Wednesday **FILM:** *The Cranes are Flying* (1957; 94 minutes)

Week 6

Monday The Thaw: A View into Life in the Gulag
Readings: Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (2–89)
Reading Report on *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* due Wednesday 9 a.m.

Wednesday Russian Values, Solzhenitsyn-style
Readings: Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (90–142)

Week 7

Monday Soviet Life... Published Abroad (Soviet Russia and the Émigré Press)
Readings: Vladimir Sorokin, *The Queue* (2–90)
Alexander Genis, “Postmodernism and *Sots-Realism*: From Andrei Sinyavsky to Vladimir Sorokin” (*EGVG*, 197–211)

Wednesday Russian Talk: Language and Storytelling during Perestroika
Readings: Vladimir Sorokin, *The Queue* (91–198)
Nancy Ries, *Russian Talk*, chapters 1 & 2 (15–82);
Interview with Sorokin (Laird, 43–162)

Week 8

Monday Narrative Form: The Diary
Readings: Liudmila Petrushevskaja, *The Time: Night* (1–76)
Reading Report on *The Time: Night* due Wednesday 9 a.m.

Wednesday Women, Madness and the Narrative of Illness
Readings: Liudmila Petrushevskaja, *The Time: Night* (76–155)
Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover, “The New Model of Discourse in Post-Soviet Russian Fiction: Liudmila Petrushevskaja and Tatiana Tolstaia” (*EGVG*, 227–268); Interview with Petrushevskaja (Laird, 23–48).

Week 9

STUDENT SYMPOSIUM: SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET LITERATURE AND CULTURE (presentation and discussion of projects)

Week 10

Monday Post-Soviet Society: The Rise of Middlebrow Fiction
Readings: Boris Akunin, *The Turkish Gambit* (3–126)
Reading Report on *The Turkish Gambit* due Wednesday 9 a.m.

Wednesday Russians and History: A Re-Evaluation
Readings: Boris Akunin, *The Turkish Gambit* (127–224)
Alexander Genis, “Onions and Cabbages: Paradigms of Contemporary

Culture” (EGVG 394–422)