

Russian Literature in a Cultural Context

Spring 2012

University of Copenhagen & DIS – Danish Institute of Study Abroad

The course provides a general understanding of Russian culture and history through the lens of literature. Russian cinema and art will be studied alongside Russian literary masterpieces by authors such as Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky, Nabokov, Bulgakov and Brodsky, among others.

Classroom: F24-203 (Vestergade 23)

Time: Mondays and Thursdays, 11:40 – 13:00 and field studies/film screenings some Wednesdays (daytime) Tuesday and Thursday nights

Instructor: Jon Kyst - email kyst@hum.ku.dk

B.A. (Russian Language and Literature, University of Copenhagen, 1993)

M.A. (Russian Language and Literature, University of Copenhagen, 1996)

Ph.D. (English and Russian, University of Copenhagen, 2004).

Exchange student, St. Petersburg State University 1993. Visiting Scholar, Columbia University, 2000-2004.

Part-time lecturer, University of Copenhagen. Free-lance translator and interpreter. Director and partner, Akademisk Rejsebureau, Copenhagen.

With DIS since 2003.

DIS Russia study tour leader.

DIS contacts

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Objectives

The aim of the course is to demonstrate how Russia is culturally different from the rest of Europe and the world.

This aim is achieved by reading and discussing Russian works of Russian literature and by learning about the cultural and historical context in which the works appeared.

By the end of the course the participants will have developed their skills in textual analysis and they will be able to provide informed answers to the question 'What is Russia?', drawing on their knowledge of some of the most central works in Russia's literary and cultural heritage within the following four topic areas: *Russia between East and West*; *Dostoevsky's spiritual novel*; *What went wrong? Russia's 20th century totalitarian heritage* and *What went well in Russia's 20th century?*

Content, readings and the class as a learning environment

The course is divided into four different topic areas central to the history of Russian literature and Russia's cultural history. Each topic area has its major focus on readings of literary texts. As the students discuss the texts in class, they are provided with theoretical and critical tools instrumental to understanding the literary works. To promote an understanding of the historical and cultural context specific to the Russian works studied, the course includes lectures on a series of topics in Russian cultural, as well as political and economic history. Apart from the Russian prose fiction and poetry, visual art, music and cinema are studied and discussed; both to support the literature read in class, but also as examples of Russian culture studied on a par with literature.

Students write four analytical papers that demonstrate the students' ability to incorporate theoretical and critical tools as well as knowledge of Russian culture and history in an analysis of literary texts, films and works of art studied in the class.

Course requirements

- 1) 4 analytical papers (1,800-2,000 words each) 80 % (20 % each)
- 2) Participation 20 %

Grading, papers, plagiarism and students' rights and obligations.

Grading follows the American ABCDF standard. A+ is not given. Grading does not follow a "curve." This means that in theory, all students in the class can get an A for the class. All grades are used, including C's and D's. Consider "B" the grade given for an average performance.

Essays must be submitted on time printed, double-spaced, with word count and a list of works cited. Use MLA, Chicago or other standard formats. The professor is not obliged to read late papers and reserves the right to give an "F" grade for late papers. The professor is skilled and experienced in detecting plagiarism. If students are caught plagiarizing, they will fail the entire course. Please keep in mind that submitting papers already submitted in your home school or in Copenhagen, or parts thereof, is considered plagiarism on a par with copy/pasting from others' work. If you are in doubt whether you are plagiarizing or not, ask the professor before you hand in your paper.

The participation grade reflects the fact that the class is designed to be discussion-based. This means that students are expected to take a very active part in all discussions. The participation grade also reflects the student's preparation for class, and punctuality (not being late for class). Absence from the class not due to illness will affect the participation grade and can ultimately result in an "F" grade for participation.

The students have the right to receive timely and substantial feedback on their work in written form, especially work in progress. The students have the right to organize individual meetings with the professor to discuss any issue relevant for the learning process. The students have the right to meet with the professor prior to or during the process of writing papers. Finally, the students have the right to be informed about their expected participation grade during the semester and how it can be improved.

Study tour

Students are very much encouraged to participate in the optional study tour to Russia which is led by the professor and includes sights and discussion topics of very direct relevance for the course.

Readings:

- Akhmatova, Anna. *Poems* (Binder)
- Brodsky, Joseph. "A Guide to a Renamed City" (In *Less Than One*)
- Brodsky, Joseph. "In a Room and a Half" (In *Less Than One*)
- Brodsky, Joseph. *Less Than One*.
- Brodsky, Joseph. *Poems* (Binder)
- Bulgakov, Mikhail. *The Master and Margarita*.
- Bulgakov, Mikhail. *The Heart of a Dog*.
- Chaadaev, Petr. *Philosophical Letters* (Binder)
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Crime and Punishment*.
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from the Underground*
- Gogol, Nikolai. "Diary of a Madman" (In *Plays and Petersburg Tales*)
- Gogol, Nikolai. "Nevsky Prospect" (In *Plays and Petersburg Tales*)

Gogol, Nikolai. "The Nose" (In *Plays and Petersburg Tales*)
 Gogol, Nikolai. "The Overcoat" (In *Plays and Petersburg Tales*)
 Gogol, Nikolai. *Plays and Petersburg Tales*
 Lotman, Yuri. "The Symbolism of St. Petersburg" (Binder)
 Mayakovsky, Vladimir. *Poems* (Binder)
 Nabokov, Vladimir. *Speak, Memory*.
The Master & Margarita. A Critical Companion. Laura Weeks (Ed.)
 Pushkin, Alexander. "The Bronze Horseman" (Binder)
 Pushkin, Alexander. "Queen of Spades" (Handout)
 Raine, Craig. "A Reputation Subject to Inflation" (Handout)
The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature. Neil Cornwell (Ed.)
 Shklovsky, Viktor. "Art as Technique" (Binder)
 Tyutchev, Fyodor. "Russia is a thing of which..." (Binder)

Opera recording:

Tchaikovsky, *Pique Dame* (performed by the Mariinsky Opera in Saint Petersburg. Conductor: Valerii Gergiev) (excerpts on DVD)

Feature films:

Burnt by the Sun (Orig. title: *Утомленные солнцем*. Russia, 1994. Dir. Nikita Mikhalkov)
Brother (Orig. title: *Брат*. Russia, 1997. Dir. Aleksei Balabanov)
Heart of a Dog. (Orig. title: *Собачье сердце*. Russia, 1988. Dir. Vladimir Bortko)

Documentaries:

Fear and the Muse: The Story of Anna Akhmatova (USA, 1991)
Joseph Brodsky: A Maddening Space (USA, 2000)

Course plan:**Topic area I: Russia between East and West****1. Thursday, 20 January**

Pushkin, "Queen of Spades"

Screening of Tchaikovsky's opera Pique Dame (excerpts)

Lecture: Pushkin: Russia's national poet

2. Monday, 24 January

Pushkin, "The Bronze Horseman"

Lecture: Pre-Petrine and Petrine Russia

Wednesday, 26 January 13:00-17:00

Film Screening: *Brother*

Room: Library Cinema

3. Thursday, 27 January

Brodsky, "A Guide to a Renamed City"

Lecture: Sight-seeing in St. Petersburg

4. Monday, 31 January

Lotman, "The Symbolism of St. Petersburg" (Binder)

Lecture: The St. Petersburg problem in Russian cultural history

5. Monday, 7 February

Gogol, "The Overcoat"

Lecture: Nikolai Gogol's life and time

6. Thursday, 10 February

Tiutchev, "Russia is a Thing of Which" (Binder)

Chaadaev, from "Philosophical Letters" (Binder)

Lecture: Russia's national debates in the 19th century

7. Monday, 14 February

Gogol, "Nevsky Prospekt"

Lecture: Gogol's St. Petersburg

8. Thursday, 17 February

Gogol, "The Nose" and "Diary of a Madman"

1st analytical paper due in class

Topic area II: Dostoevsky's spiritual novel

9. Monday, 21 February

Dostoevsky, *Notes From the Underground*, Part I

Lecture: Dostoevsky's life and time

10. Thursday, 24 February

Dostoevsky, *Notes From the Underground*, Part II

Dostoevsky, "Winter Notes on Summer Impressions" (in *Notes from the Underground*)

Lecture: Dostoevsky and the West

11. Monday, 28 February

Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, Parts I-II

Lecture: Dostoevsky's St. Petersburg

12. Thursday, 3 March

Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, Parts III-IV

Frank, "The World of Raskolnikov" (567-77 in *Crime and Punishment*)

"Background and Sources" (467-82 in *Crime and Punishment*)

Lecture: Dostoevsky's gospel

13. Monday, 14 March

Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, Part V-VI, "Epilogue"

Mikhail Bakhtin, "From *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*" (643-55 in *Crime and Punishment*)

2nd analytical paper due in class

Topic area III: What went wrong? Russia's 20th century totalitarian heritage

14. Thursday, 17 March

Bulgakov, *Heart of a Dog*

Lecture: Culture I and II the cultural consequences of the the 1917 Revolution

Thursday, 17 March 18:00 – 21:00

Film screening: *Heart of a Dog*

Room: Library Cinema

15. Monday, 21 March

Bulgakov, *Master and Margarita*, Part I

Lecture: Bulgakov's life and time

16. Thursday, 24 March

Bulgakov, *Master and Margarita, Part II*

Lecture: Russia's 20th century totalitarian heritage

Thursday, 24 March 18:00 – 21:00

Film screening: *Burnt by the Sun*

Room: Library Cinema

17. Monday, 28 March

Weeks, "What I Have Written, I Have Written" (in *The Master and Margarita: A Critical Companion*, pp. 3-51); "Primary sources" (ibid., pp. 195-241)

3rd analytical **paper due** in class

Wednesday, 30 March 17:00-20:30

Room 10-A12. Study tour orientation with Russian language course for students participating in the optional study tour to Russia. Note that participation in this class is mandatory for all students enrolled in the Russia study tour groups.

Topic area IV: What went well? Russia's 20th century contribution to world culture**18. Thursday, 31 March**

Akhmatova, early poems

Mayakovsky, poems

The Silver age: avantgarde, futurism, acmeism

19. NB! Tuesday, 5 April 18:00 – 21:00

No class on Monday, 4 April

Screening and discussion of two documentaries:

Fear and the Muse: The Story of Anna Akhmatova

Joseph Brodsky: A Maddening Space

Reading: Akhmatova, late poems

Room Library Cinema

20. Thursday, 7 April

Brodsky, *Poems*

Raine, "A Reputation Subject to Inflation"

Lecture: Three waves of 20th century Russian emigration

Optional study tour to Russia: St. Petersburg, Novgorod and Moscow

10-16 April, tour leader is course professor Jon Kyst

21. Monday, 28 April

Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*

Shklovsky, "Art as Technique"

Lecture: Russia's contribution to 20th century writing and literary theory

22. Thursday, 2 May

Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*

Lecture: Nabokov's cross-linguistic writing

23. Monday, 5 May

Brodsky, *In a Room and a Half*

Lecture: Life and culture under late Soviet socialism

*4th analytical **paper due** on Monday, 9 May at 15:00 at the ECH office, Vestergade 5-35*