

RUS 232: Russian Literature of the Twentieth Century

Spring 2020
MWF: A-234 Wells Hall
MWF 12:40-1:30
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Office: B-467 Wells Hall
Office Hours: M 11:30-12:30 / W 1:30-
2:30 or by appointment

During the relatively brief span of Russian literature, Russian and Soviet authors have produced some of the greatest works of world literature. Both the Tsarist government and Soviet regime attempted to control authors through censorship and the threat of exile, prison, or death. Nevertheless, authors continued to work and find ways to speak to their audiences. This introductory course will survey the major trends in Russian literature from the end of the 19th century to the present.

CHANGES 2022:

add Aleichem, 33 abominations, Sofia Petrovna?,
remove: Despair

COURSE SCHEDULE:

MONDAY, JANUARY 6: Introduction to the course. What is Russia? Why is literature important?

For Wednesday (1/8): Purchase all course books. Read through the syllabus carefully. Look through the course D2L page. Start reading *The Seagull* for Friday. Read Nabokov's "Good Readers and Good Writers" and "Putin and 100 Books"—these two texts are your first journal assignment.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8: Russia of the late 19th / early twentieth century. Nabokov and Good Readers. The Russian "canon." Chekhov: life, works, and the theater.

For Friday (1/10): Read at least the first two acts of *The Seagull*. Journal due.

For Monday (1/13): *The Seagull*. Make sure you read pages 1-3 (introduction) as well as 5-51 (the entire play) **carefully**. Read them twice! Don't forget your journal.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 10: *The Seagull*.

For Monday (1/13): See above. Please note that the entire *Cherry Orchard* is due for Wednesday, plan accordingly.

MONDAY, JANUARY 13: Discussion of *The Seagull* (1895).

For Wednesday (1/15): Read *The Cherry Orchard* (1903), pp. 159-211 (intro and play).

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15: *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard*.

For Friday (1/17): Read "Scene from Chekhov's Play *The Dodo*" (D2L). Read Chekhov's story "Gooseberries" (D2L). Think about the Chekhov works we have read. What do they have in common? What about them is modern?

FRIDAY, JANUARY 17: Finish Chekhov's plays. Russia through the revolutions of 1917.

For Wednesday (1/22): Read (**in this order**): Matthew 4:1-4:11, Mark 1:12-1:13, Luke 4:1-4:13, *The Grand Inquisitor* 1-22, *The Grand Inquisitor* v-xv, I Samuel 8. Look at Ivan Kramskoi's painting Christ in the Desert (Христос в пустыне); what does it say about the figure of Christ (mention it in your journal). Bible passages and painting also on D2L.

MONDAY, JANUARY 20: NO CLASS. MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY

Assignment for Wednesday (1/22): See above.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22: Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor and the Twentieth Century. For Friday (1/24): Read works of Socialist Realism handout and Milosz handout (D2L). Who is Daniil Kharms? Read "Kharms selection" (D2L).

FRIDAY, JANUARY 24: Background to *Circus*. The Rise of Stalin. Start *Circus*.

For Monday (1/27): Finish viewing *Circus* (D2L), preferably in groups (Journal 1: based on *Circus*, how would you define Socialist Realism? Use examples from the film). Read the Introduction to Zamiatin's *We* (xi-xxvi). Read the first ten "records" of *We* (1-58). Include in your journal: who is Alexander Scriabin? (Journal 2).

MONDAY, JANUARY 27: Zamiatin and Russia after the Revolutions. The utopian tradition in literature. Zamiatin's *We*.

For Wednesday (1/29): Read the next ten "records" of *We* (59-113) and the *We* poems (D2L).

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29: Zamiatin's *We*. *We* poems. Writing a paper.

For Friday (1/31): Complete Zamiatin's *We* and read the *We* Bible passages include all additional readings in your journals). Start thinking about Paper One topics.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 31: Brainstorm for Paper One. Zamiatin's *We*.

For Monday (2/3): **Write Paper One.** Read the Foreword and first two chapters of *Despair*. Pay close attention to our narrator! What is he like?

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3: The Emigration. Vladimir Nabokov. *Despair*.

For Wednesday (2/5): Read chapters one through eight of *Despair* (yes, reread one and two! What else did you notice the second time around?).

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5: Discuss *Despair*

For Friday (2/7): Finish *Despair*. Think about making a film version of *Despair* – what problems might it present and how would you solve them? (= double journal entry: one on meaning of the novel, one on the film question)

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7: *Despair*. Making a film version?

For Monday (2/10): Read the Introduction to *Master and Margarita* and pp. 7-47. Read Master and Margarita Gospel passages (D2L handout).

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 10: Final discussion of *Despair*. Mikhail Bulgakov and *The Master and Margarita*.

For Wednesday (2/12): *Master and Margarita*, 47-74. “Bulgakov” from *What Every Russian Knows*.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12: *Master and Margarita*

For Friday (2/14): *Master and Margarita*, 75-103. Who is Faust? Complete a second journal entry on the origins and versions of the Faust legend. What are some of its key elements?

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14: The Faust legend. Other background. *Master and Margarita*.

For Monday (2/17): *Master and Margarita*, 104-214.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 17: *Master and Margarita*

For Wednesday (2/19): *Master and Margarita*, 217-247. Complete the Book of Job journal assignment (D2L).

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19: Discuss *Master and Margarita*

For Friday (2/21): Read *Master and Margarita* 248-275. Include in your journal possible topics for Paper Two.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21: Discuss *Master and Margarita*

For Monday (2/24): Complete *Master and Margarita*. Read The Revelation to John (last book of the Bible – mention any parallels in your journal).

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24: *Master and Margarita*. Brainstorming for Paper Two.

For Wednesday (2/26): Two-part journal: Read “Bears in the Caviar” (D2L) and mention possible influence on Bulgakov in your journal. Write a one-paragraph response to the question “what is the meaning of *Master and Margarita*? What does this book “mean”? Work on Paper Two.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26: *Master and Margarita*. Editing papers. Review the first half of the semester.

For Friday (2/28): Paper Two due to Prof. Merrill by **class on Friday**

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28: *Master and Margarita* and the Soviet Era. Getting ready for *Doctor Zhivago*.

OVER BREAK: Watch one episode (each one is 49-50 minutes long) from the ten-part series *Master and Margarita* and complete a journal about it.

March 2-6: No class, Spring Break!

MONDAY, MARCH 9: The Death of Stalin and the Thaw. Pasternak and *Doctor Zhivago*

For Wednesday (3/11): Read the Introduction (xi-xxiii), the character list (xv) in *Doctor Zhivago*, and “The Poems of Yurii Zhivago” (521-559), the final chapter of the book.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11: Boris Pasternak and *Doctor Zhivago*. The poems of Yurii Zhivago.

For Friday (3/13): Read *Doctor Zhivago*, 3-20

FRIDAY, MARCH 13: *Doctor Zhivago*

For Monday (3/16): Read *Doctor Zhivago*, 21-165.

MONDAY, MARCH 16: *Doctor Zhivago*

For Wednesday (3/18): Read *Doctor Zhivago*, 166-208.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18: *Doctor Zhivago*

For Friday (3/20): Read *Doctor Zhivago*, 209-253.

FRIDAY, MARCH 20: *Doctor Zhivago*

For Monday (3/23): Read *Doctor Zhivago*, 254-351, and the 91st Psalm (D2L).

MONDAY, MARCH 23: *Doctor Zhivago*

For Wednesday (3/25): Read *Doctor Zhivago*, 352-375.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25: *Doctor Zhivago*

For Friday (3/27): Read *Doctor Zhivago*, 376-418.

FRIDAY, MARCH 27: *Doctor Zhivago*

For Monday (3/30): Read *Doctor Zhivago*, 419-503.

MONDAY, MARCH 30: *Doctor Zhivago*

For Wednesday (4/1): Finish *Doctor Zhivago*, including the poems again.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1: *Doctor Zhivago*, book and film (?).

For Monday (4/6): Assignment for Monday: Read the first 120 pages of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.

MONDAY NIGHT (4/6): EVENING CLASS TO VIEW DAVID LEAN'S DOCTOR ZHIVAGO (1965) (WELLS HALL B-342, 5:45-9:00)

FRIDAY, APRIL 3: No class (Prof. Merrill away).

Journal entry on Zhivago film vs. the novel.

MONDAY, APRIL 6: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*

For Wednesday (4/8): Finish reading *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Complete the Foucault journal assignment (note it has several parts).

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8: *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*

For Friday (4/10): Read Kolyma Tales selection (D2L). Read two articles: "Art and Freedom" and "New Road to Asia" (D2L) React to both in your journal: what are

they telling/arguing and do you agree? Start thinking about and working on Paper Three.

FRIDAY, APRIL 10: *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Brainstorm Paper Three
For Monday (4/13): Read *Moscow to the End of the Line*, 7-121. Include in your journal topics you might write on in Paper Three.

MONDAY, APRIL 13: The Brezhnev “Era of stagnation.” Venedikt Erofeev and *Moscow to the End of the Line*. What is Postmodernism? Is this novel Postmodern?
For Wednesday (4/15): Complete *Moscow to the End of the Line*. Read “Literary Drinkers” (D2L). Does Erofeev fit in anywhere?

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15: Paper Three / *Moscow to the End of the Line*.
For Friday (4/17): 1. Bring at least an outline of Paper Three to class. The more you bring, the more you can receive feedback on. Journal: What is *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*? (read the page on D2L). What is it about? Any similarities?

FRIDAY, APRIL 17: Paper Three. *Moscow to the End of the Line*.
For Monday (4/20): Finish Paper Three, to be handed in on Monday.

MONDAY, APRIL 20: PAPER THREE. *Moscow to the End of the Line* / Baranskaia.
For Wednesday (4/22): Read “Week Like Any Other” (D2L).

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22: The Soviet Era / Natal’ia Baranskaia.
For Friday (4/24): Review the entire semester. Bring all course books to class tomorrow.
2. **Journal:** research the idea of historical trauma. What is it? Could it be applied to Russia of the 20th century? Have you seen it manifested in any of the works we have read this semester so far?

FRIDAY, APRIL 24: *A Week Like Any Other*. Review the twentieth century in Russian literature. The Final exam.

Final Exam: Monday, April 27, 12:45-2:45 (A-234)

RUSSIAN TITLES / РУССКИЕ НАЗВАНИЯ:

The Seagull (1895) / Чайка

The Cherry Orchard (1903) / Вишнёвый сад

The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor / Легенда о Великом Инквизиторе

We / Мы

Despair / Отчаяние

Master and Margarita / Мастер и Маргарита

Doctor Zhivago / Доктор Живаго

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich / Один день Ивана Денисовича

Moscow to the End of the Line / Москва – Петушки

A Week Like Any Other / Неделя как неделя

FUN ADDITIONAL CONTEXT TO CONSIDER / ECHOES OF OUR KEY THEMES:

The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor: Watch “Black Jesus” season 1, episode 6, “Love Thy Enemy, Part I.” What does this episode say about the question of free will?
*Mature language and drug references.

We: Read *1984*, *Brave New World*, or watch *A Clockwork Orange*. How do they treat the balance between freedom and happiness, the individual and society? Are utopias and free will incompatible?

Despair: Watch Hitchcock’s *Rope*. How does the film treat the theme of murder and art? Do Hermann and Hitchcock’s hero have anything in common?

Master and Margarita: Research links between *Master and Margarita* and the Rolling Stones’ “Sympathy for the Devil”

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich: Watch David Lean’s film *Bridge Over the River Kwai* and consider the theme of captivity and labor as portrayed in both.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Reading Assignments.** All reading assignments must be completed **before** the class in which they will be discussed. The reading load varies depending on what works we are reading. Please plan your schedule accordingly.
2. **Attendance and Participation.** Coming to class prepared and ready to participate is an important part of this course. It is difficult to participate if you’re not here.
3. **Journals.** Journal entries must be written **before** each class (they are for each night’s reading, not each work). Some days have more than one journal assigned. Journal entries should consist of thoughts or questions concerning the readings that might stimulate class discussion. They are a good place to start working out paper ideas. Try for half a page at least. Please keep these journals on loose sheets of paper and write legibly (or type). Journal entries will be collected every class. A journal that is one class late will receive half credit; later than that, no credit. Please do not hand me a stack of journals after we have completed a book and expect to receive credit.
4. **Quizzes.** I reserve the right to give unannounced quizzes on the readings at any point in the semester.
5. **Papers.** You will write three papers in this course: a one-page, two-page, and five-page paper. They must be no longer than that (not even by one word). Please note now when they are due. These should be “think” papers in which you develop your own personal interpretation of a work or episode in a work, your own discussion of a theme or image in one or several works. Your paper must contain a clear thesis statement and then use the text(s) to support it. I would rather you do not use outside sources; if you do, do not forget to cite them; failure to do so is **plagiarism!!!** Try to write on something we have not extensively discussed in class. If you have any doubts or questions about your topic, or if you are having trouble coming up with a topic, please come see me. Often thinking up a topic is the hardest part of such papers: you are free to write on whatever interests you, but I will gladly suggest topics. Do not forget that your daily journals are a good place to start developing paper topics. While you are reading, taking notes, and writing your papers, remember to ask yourself “what’s the point of what I’m doing and how is it relevant to the text and to the point of my paper?” This will help you take better notes, select quotes that support your thesis (and not just fill space), and it will help you

formulate that thesis better and not stray from it. We will discuss paper writing in more detail as the due dates approach.

I will return papers with comments as soon as possible after the due date. At that point you will have the option of rewriting/revising it for a possible higher grade within one week of when I return them. I will say more on grading criteria and revising papers.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty please ask me. Please also familiarize yourself with the MSU Ombudsman's resources on plagiarism:
<http://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/plagiarism.html>

Final Exam. There will be a final exam in this course, which will consist of essay questions and ID's from the readings. Possible essay questions will be handed out ahead of time. We will discuss the exam on the last day of class. The gradebook closes at the start of the final exam.

Honors Option. If you are eligible and want to complete an Honors Option for this course, please do so now. The process is initiated by the student and has strict deadlines.

YOUR GRADE:

Attendance:	10%	Paper Two (2 page)	15%
Journals:	25%	Paper Three (5 page)	20%
Paper One (1 page)	10%	Final Exam	20%

GRADING SCALE:

92-100 = 4.0	76-81 = 2.5	60-64 = 1.0
87-91 = 3.5	70-75 = 2.0	00-59 = 0.0
82-86 = 3.0	65-69 = 1.5	

BOOKS. The following books have been ordered for this course. Please try to obtain these specific editions, because we will make frequent reference to specific pages during class discussion:

- Bulgakov, Master and Margarita, Viking Penguin, ISBN #0141180145
Chekhov, Anton Chekhov's Plays, Norton, ISBN #0393091635
Erofeev, Moscow to the End of the Line, Northwestern University Press, 0-8101-1200-0
Nabokov, Despair, Vintage Books, 0-679-72343-9
Pasternak, Doctor Zhivago, Pantheon Books, 0679774386
Solzhenitsyn, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, Penguin USA, 0451527097
Zamiatin, We, Penguin USA, 0140185852

The New Testament. Be familiar with the Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Revelation (i.e. the four Gospels and the last Book of the Bible).

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. If you have a disability that may prevent you from fully demonstrating your abilities in this course, you should contact me as soon as possible so we can arrange the appropriate accommodations necessary to complete the course requirements.