

Russian / Literature 373

Modern Russian Literature from Chekhov to the Present

SPRING 2011
Prof. Zhenya Bershtein
Tu-Th 2:40-4:00
Vollum 110

Prof. Zhenya Bershtein
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Office hours: Monday, Wednesday 2-3 p.m. and by appointment

Full course for one semester. Survey of the modern Russian fiction, exploring the evolution of these genres in relation to historical and cultural developments, through a variety of critical approaches. The readings include the prose of Chekhov, Bely, Babel, Zamyatin, Olesha, Bulgakov, Kharmis, Nabokov, Solzhenitsyn, and Pelevin. **Workload:** extensive reading, oral presentations, five short papers and a ten-page final paper. An additional weekly section will be scheduled for students who take this class for Russian credit. Lecture-conference. Cross-listed as Literature 373. Your **evaluation** will be based on your class participation and written submissions.

Course Requirements

1. Students taking the course for "Russian" credit need to sign up for Russian 373. Prerequisite: students who wish to take the course for Russian credit must have completed Russian 220 or obtain the consent of the instructor.
2. All students are required to write five short "position papers" as per syllabus. These informal papers focus on a specific issue in the reading and present a coherent statement of the problem.
3. All students sign up to be "discussant" at a particular session and will be responsible for giving a concise, thoughtful exposition of the critical literature listed under "collateral reading." The presentation is not to exceed 15 minutes (20 minutes if there are two presenters working in a team). Each presenter should be prepared to take questions from the class.
4. The final paper of about 10 pages is due on **Monday, May 16 at 4:00 p.m.** in Prof. Bershtein's office (VOL 128).

Required Texts (available form the Reed bookstore)

Babel, *Collected Stories*
Bely, *Petersburg*
Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*
Chekhov, *Stories*
Kharms, *Today I Wrote Nothing*
Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading*
Olesha, *Envy*
Pelevin, *Omon Ra*
Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*
Zamyatin, *We*

All collateral readings for the class come from the Moodle.

Syllabus

Week 1

February 1: Introduction to the course:

The Twentieth-Century Russian Literary Canon as a Problem

February 3: **Topic : Anton Chekhov and the Poetics of Objectivity.**

Reading: Anton Chekhov, *Stories*, pp. 1-108. ("The Death of a Clerk," "Small Fry," "The Huntsman," "The Malefactor," "Panikhida," "Anyuta," "Easter Night," "Vanka," "Sleepy," "A Boring Story").

Week 2

February 8: Reading: Chekhov, *Stories*, pp. 109- 222 ("Gusev," "Peasant Women," "The Fidget," "In Exile," "Ward No. 6")

Collateral readings: John Hagan, "Chekhov's Fiction and the Ideal of 'Objectivity'."

Discussant:

February 10: Reading: Chekhov, *Stories*, pp. 223-332 ("The Black Monk," "Rotschild's Fiddle," "The Student," "Anna on the Neck," "The House with the Mezzanine," "The Man in the Case," "Gooseberries," "A Medical Case.")
First position paper is due (2-3 pages).

Week 3

February 15: Reading: Chekhov, *Stories*, p. 333-454 ("The Darling," "On Official Business," "The Lady with the Little Dog," "At Christmastime," "In the Ravine," "The Bishop," "The Fiancée.")
Collateral readings: Lev Shestov, "Anton Tschekhov (Creation from the Void)."
Discussant:

February 17: **Topic: Andrey Bely and the Symbolist Novel**
Reading: Introduction to Bely's *Petersburg*; Andrei Bely, *Petersburg* (Prologue, Chapters One and Two), pp. viii- 69.

Week 4

February 22: Reading: Bely, *Petersburg*: Chapters 3-4, pp. 70-140.
Collateral activity: study [the scholarly website devoted to the novel](http://stpetersburg.berkeley.edu/about.html) (<http://stpetersburg.berkeley.edu/about.html>)
Discussants (2):

February 24: Reading: Bely, *Petersburg*, Chapters 5-6, pp. 141-216.

Week 5

March 1: Reading: Bely, *Petersburg*: Chapters 7-8, and Epilogue, pp. 217-293.
Collateral reading: Olga Matich, "Poetics of Disgust: To Eat and Die in *Petersburg*."
Discussant:
Second position paper is due (2-3 pages).

March 3: **Topic: Revolution and Civil War: Isaac Babel**
Reading: I. Babel, "Red Cavalry" in *The Collected Stories*, pp. 197-261.
Collateral reading: Peter Stine, "Isaac Babel and Violence."
Discussant:

Week 6

March 8: Reading: Babel, "Red Cavalry," pp. 262-334.
Collateral reading: Efraim Sicher, "Art as Metaphor, Epiphany, and Aesthetic Statement: The Short Stories of Isaak Babel'," *Isaac Babel*, pp. 1-10.
Discussant:

March 10: Reading: Babel, stories from *The Collected Stories*: “The Story of My Dovecote” (365-376), “The Awakening” (392-398), “The Road” (423-430), “Guy de Maupassant” (443-450), “Di Grasso” (463-466), “My First Fee” (473-481).

Third position paper is due (2-3 pages).

Week 7

March 15: **Topic: Zamyatin's Dystopia**
Reading: E. Zamyatin, *We* (pp. 1-113)
Guest Instructor: Professor Caryl Emerson (Princeton University)

March 17: Reading: Zamyatin, *We* (pp. 114-232, finish reading)
Collateral reading: Zamyatin, "On Literature, Revolution, Entropy, and Other Matters," Efraim Sicher, “The Last Utopia: Entropy and the Revolution in the Poetics of Evgeny Zamiatin.”
Discussant:

SPRING BREAK

Week 8

March 29 : **Topic: New Economic Policy and the Prose of Equivocation**
Reading: Olesha, *Envy* (first half of the novel)

March 31: Reading: Olesha, *Envy* (finish reading)
Collateral readings: William E. Harkins, "The Theme of Sterility in Olesha's *Envy*."
Discussant:
Fourth position paper is due (2-3 pages).

Week 9

April 5: **Topic: Stalinism and Fantastic Realism**
Reading: Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, chapters. 1-12, pp. 7-132.

April 7: Reading: Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, chapters 13-23, pp. 133-275.
Collateral reading: Edythe C. Haber, "The Mythic Structure of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*."
Discussant:

Week 10

April 12: Reading: Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, chapter 24-epilogue, pp. 276-396.
Collateral reading: Stephen Lovell, "Bulgakov as Soviet Culture" (SEER, Vol. 76, No. 1, January 1998, 28-38).
Discussant:

April 14: **Topic: The Absurdism of Daniil Kharmis**
Reading: Kharmis, *Today I Wrote Nothing* (Introduction, "Events," "The Old Woman," and "The Blue Notebook"), pp. 11-126.
Collateral Reading: Neil Carrick, "Daniil Kharmis and the Art of Negation."
Discussant:

Week 11

April 19 : Reading: Kharmis, *Today I Wrote Nothing*. pp. 127-271. Select your favorite text(s) for an analysis in your position paper and in class.
Fifth position paper is due (2-3 pages).

April 21: **Topic: An Émigré's View of Utopia**
Reading: Vladimir Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading* (chapters 1-10).
Collateral reading: Nabokov, "Good Readers and Good Writers"
Discussant:

Week 12

April 26: Reading: Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading* (chapters 11-20)
Collateral reading: Robert Alter, "Invitation to a Beheading: Nabokov and the Art of Politics."
Discussant:

April 28 : **Topic: Solzhenitsyn and the Thaw**
Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*
Collateral Reading: Miriam Dobson, 'Contesting the Paradigms of De-Stalinization: Readers' Responses to "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich"' (*Slavic Review*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (Autumn, 2005), pp. 580-600).
Discussant:

Week 13

May 3: **Topic: Postmodernism, and Utopia Reassessed**
Reading: Viktor Pelevin, *Omon Ra* (pp. 3-90)

May 5: Pelevin, *Omon Ra* (pp. 91- 154 finish reading).
Collateral Reading: Jean Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations”
Discussants (2):

The final paper (approximately ten pages) is due on Monday, May 16, at 4:00 p.m. in Professor Bershtein's office (VOL 128). Electronic submissions are not accepted.