RUSS/LITR 408:
Russian Decadent and Symbolist Culture in a European Context

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Full course for one semester. Conference. The course explores Russian Decadent and Symbolist literature and culture in a broad European context. We will study the philosophical foundations of Decadent culture (Nietzsche, Solovyov); the preoccupation with "degeneration," common in the European science of the fin de siècle (Nordau, Krafft-Ebing, Weininger); the "aestheticism" (J.-K. Huysmans, Oscar Wilde); the interpretations of sexuality (André Gide, Thomas Mann), Decadent mysticism, and other topics. The Russian component of the reading includes the works of Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, Vladimir Solovyov, Fedor Sologub, Mikhail Kuzmin, Mikhail Artsybashev, Aleksandr Blok, and Andrei Bely. This course will emphasize a research component: a twelve-page research paper will be due at the end of the semester. An additional weekly session will be scheduled for those students who take the course for Russian credit. In these sessions, we will focus on Russian Symbolist poetry (Solovyov, Valerii Briusov, Konstantin Bal'mont, Sologub, Zinaida Gippius, Bely, Viacheslav Ivanov, Kuzmin, Blok, et al). Prerequisite: RUSS 220 or consent of the instructor, if you take this course for Russian credit. **Texts**: literary texts; works of literary scholarship; medical, historical, and sociological writings; films, a slide show. **Workload**: extensive reading, oral presentations, three positions papers (about 3 pages each), and a research paper at the end of the semester (approximately 12 pages). Your evaluation will be based on your contribution to the conference, and your written submissions.

Books to buy:
J.-K. Huysmans, À rebours [Against Nature]
Leo Tolstoy, Tolstoy's Short Fiction
Vladimir Solovyov, The Meaning of Love
Fridrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy
Thomas Mann, Death in Venice [A Norton Critical Edition]
André Gide, The Immoralist
Oscar Wilde, De Profundis
Oscar Wilde, Salomé
Mikhail Artsybashev, Sanin
Andrei Bely, Petersburg
Anton Chekhov, Five Plays
Fyodor Sologub, Petty Demon
Mikhail Kuzmin, Wings.

All other reading assignments are available via Moodle or, in rare cases, distributed as handouts.

Syllabus

Topic One: Fin de Siècle, Decline, and Degeneration

Wednesday, January 25.
1. Introduction: Modernity, Modernism, Symbolism, Decadence.
Texts (to be distributed in class): Charles Baudelaire, "Correspondances" (1857), Paul Verlaine "Art poétique" (1882), Oscar Wilde, "The Preface" (1891) to The Picture of Dorian Gray.

2. Chekhov's Visions of Cultural Decline
Texts: Anton Chekhov, The Cherry Orchard [Вишневый сад] (1903),
Collateral reading: Chekhov, "The Black Monk" [Черный монах] (1893) (online: http://www.readprint.com/work-360/Anton-Chekhov).

Wednesday, February 1.
1. Degeneration.
Text: Max Nordau, "Fin-de-Siècle," Degeneration (1892), pp. 1-44.
Collateral reading: Arthur Symons, "The Decadent Movement in Literature" (1893)
Background reading: George Mosse, "Max Nordau and His Degeneration, " Max Nordau, Degeneration, pp. xiii-xxxvi.

2. Against Nature.
Text: J.-K. Huysmans, À rebours [Against Nature] (1884)

Topic Two: Psychopathia Sexualis

Wednesday, February 8.
1. Tolstoy on Sexual Morality.
Text: Leo Tolstoy, The Kreutzer Sonata [Крейцерова соната] (1889).
Background reading: the short essays by Olga Matich, Ruth Rischin, and Stephen Baehr in Tolstoy's Short Fiction, pp. 428–452.

2. Epidemic of Sexual Psychopathy.
Text: Richard Krafft-Ebing, selections from Psychopathia Sexualis (12th edition, 1903); Otto Weininger, selections from Sex and Character (1903).
Background reading: Harry Oosterhuis, Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity (The Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society), pp. 215-286 (Part IV, "Psychiatry and Sexual Identity in Fin de Siècle Culture"). **A position paper on Tolstoy's "The Kreutzer Sonata" is due.**

Topic Three: The Meaning of Love and Friendship

Wednesday, February 15.
1. Metaphysics of Love
Text: Vladimir Solovyov, The Meaning of Love [Смысл любви] (1892-94)
Background reading: Olga Matich, "The Meaning of Meaning of Love" (Chapter Two in her Erotic Utopia, pp. 57-88).

2. The Notions of "Friendship" and "Jealousy" in Decadent Theology
Text: Pavel Florenskii, The Pillar and Ground of the Truth [Столп и утверждение Истины] (1914), pp. 284-343 (Letter Eleven ["Friendship"] and Letter Twelve ["Jealousy"]).
Background reading: Richard Gustafson, "Introduction to the Translation," ibid., pp.ix-xxiii; Evgenii Bershtein, "The Notion of Universal Bisexuality in Russian Religious Philosophy," Understanding Russianness, Risto Alapuro, Arto Mustojaki, Pekka Pesonen, eds. London: Routledge, 2011, 210-231.

Topic Four: Dionysus and the Dionysian

Wednesday, February 22. The Birth of Tragedy
Texts: Fridrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy (1872).
Vladimir Solovyov, "The Idea of a Superman" [Идея сверхчеловека] (1899);
Viacheslav Ivanov, "Nietzsche and Dionysis" [Ницше и Дионис] (1904).

Wednesday, February 29. "Death in Venice"
1. Text: Thomas Mann, Death in Venice (1911) [A Norton Critical Edition]
Background reading: Manfred Dierks, "Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy and Mann's Death in Venice," pp. 130-149 in the Norton critical edition; T.J. Reed, "The Art of Ambivalence," ibid., pp. 150-177.

2. Discussion of Luchino Visconti's film Death in Venice (screening TBA)

A position paper on Mann's "Death in Venice" is due.

Topic Five: Immoralism

Wednesday, March 7.
1. Text: André Gide, The Immoralist (1902)

2. Text: Mikhail Artsybashev, Sanin [Санин] (1907)
Background reading: Laura Engelstein, The Keys to Happiness: Sex and Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia, pp. 359-420 (Chapter 10. "From Avant-Garde to Boulevard: Literary Sex")

SPRING BREAK

Topic Six: Aestheticism

Wednesday, March 21.
1. Wilde
Text: Oscar Wilde, De Profundis (1897, published in 1905)
Background reading: Adam Gopnik, "The Invention of Oscar Wilde," New Yorker, May 18, 1998, pp. 78-88; Evgenii Bershtein, "The Russian Myth of Oscar Wilde," Self and Story in Russian History, Laura Englestein and Stephanie Sandler, eds., Cornell UP, 2000, pp. 168-188.

2. The Russian Wilde
Text: Mikhail Kuzmin, Wings [Крылья] (1906)
Background reading: Donald Gillis, "The Platonic Theme in Kuzmin's Wings," Slavic and East European Journal 22, (1978): p. 336-47.

Topic Seven: The Demonic Woman

Wednesday, March 28.
Salomé: Screening and Discussion
Text: Oscar Wilde, Salomé (1894).
Film: Ken Russell (dir.), Salomé's Last Dance (1988)

Wednesday, April 4.
Film and discussion: Evgenii Bauer (director), Child of a Big City [Дитя большого города] (1915).
Collateral reading: Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903).
Background reading: Louise McReynolds, "The Silent Movie Melodrama: Evgenii Bauer Fashions the Heroine's Self," Self and Story in Russian History, pp. 120-140.

Wednesday, April 11.
Text: Fedor Sologub, The Petty Demon [Мелкий бес] (1906)
Background reading: the essays in the Ardis edition.
A position paper on The Petty Demon is due.

Topic Eight: Symbolism in the Arts

Wednesday, April 18.
1. The World of Art
Slide show and Discussion:
Gustave Moreau, Aubrey Beardsley, and the World of Art group.

2. Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes (1909-1929), guest instructor Hannah Kosstrin (the dance depatment).
Screening and discussion: "L'Après-midi d'un faun" (1912); "Le spectre de la Rose" (1911). Collateral reading: Isadora Duncan, "The Dancer of the Future" (1902), Mikhail Fokin, "The New Russian Ballet" (Letter to the editor of The Times [1919]).

[The reading assignment for this class is short, but please beging reading Bely's Petersburg, a long and exceptionally difficult text].

FRIDAY, April 20: the topics and outlines (2-3 pages) of students' final research papers are due. Over the course of the following week, please meet with the instructor to discuss your final paper-in-progress.

Topic Nine: Symbolism and the Russian Revolution
Wednesday, April 25.
Text: Andrei Bely, Petersburg [Петербург], 1913. Background reading: Robert Maguire, John Malmstad, "Translator's Introduction," ibid., viii-xx.

Final papers are due on **Wednesday, May 9** at noon in Prof. Bershtein's office. Electronic submissions are not accepted.

Suggested Secondary Reading

Russia

John E. Bowlt, The Silver Age: Russian Art of the Early Twentieth Century and the "World of Art" Group (Newtonville, Mass.1979).

Pamela Davidson, The Poetic Imagination of Vyacheslav Ivanov: A Russian Symbolist's Perception of Dante (Cambridge, 1989).

Lynn Garafola, Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* (Oxford, 1989).

Joan Delaney Grossman, Valery Bryusov and the Riddle of Russian Decadence (Berkeley, 1985).

Laura Engelstein, The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia (Ithaca, 1992).

Andrej Bely: Spirit of Symbolism, John E. Malmstad, ed.(Ithaca, 1987).

John E. Malmstad, Nikolay Bogomolov, Mikhail Kuzmin: A Life in Art (Harvard, 1999).

Olga Matich, Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia's Fin de Siècle (Wisconsin 2005).

Irene Masing-Delic, Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth of Russian Twentieth-Century Literature (Stanford, 1992).

Irina Paperno and Joan Delaney Grossman, eds., Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism (Stanford, 1994).

Avril Pyman, A History of Russian Symbolism (Cambridge, 1994).

Avril Pyman, A Life of Aleksandr Blok, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1979-1980).

Temira Pachmuss, Zinaida Hippius: An Intellectual Profile (Carbondale, 1971).

Nietzsche in Russia, Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed. (Princeton,1986).

Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, New Myth, New World: From Nietzsche to Stalinism (University Park, PA, 2002).

Russian Symbolists: An Anthology of Critical and Theoretical Writing, Ronal Peterson, ed. (New Arbor, 1986).

Michael Wachtel, Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition: Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Vyacheslav Ivanov (Madison, Wis., 1994)

James West, Russian Symbolism (London, 1970).

Europe

Aesthetes and Decadents of the 1890s: An Anthology of British Poetry and Prose, Karl Beckson, ed. (Chicago, 1981)

Charles Bernheimer, Decadent Subjects: The Idea of Decadence in Art, Literature, Philosophy, and Culture of the *Fin de Siècle* in Europe (Baltimore, 2002).

Bram Dijkstra, Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture (Oxford, 1988).

Richard Ellmann, Oscar Wilde (New York, 1988).

The Decadent Reader: Fiction, Fantasy, and Perversion from Fin-de-Siècle France, Asti Hustvedt, ed. (New York, 1998).

Daniel Pick, Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848-c.1918 (Cambridge, 1993).

Jean Pierrot, Decadent Imagination, 1880-1900, tr. Derek Coltman (Chicago, 1981).

Carl Schorske, Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture (NY, 1980).

Alan Sinfield, The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde, and the Queer Moment (London, 1994).

Elaine Showalter, Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle (NY, 1990)

Barbara Spackman, Decadent Genealogies: The Rhetoric of Sickness from Baudelaire to D'Annuzio (Ithaca, 1989).

Eugen Weber, France, Fin de Siècle (Cambridge, Mass., 1986).