

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
Liberal Studies Program

Instructor: Elizabeth Zelensky
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***RUSSIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE THROUGH LITERATURE
AND FILM***

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course we shall study Russia from 1855-2014 as a traditional society confronted with the challenge of modernity. Our primary source materials will be taken from some of the major works of Russian literature and cinema of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Bulgakov, Solzhenitsyn, Pudovkin and Eisenstein, among others, will provide us with the living material through which we shall trace changes and continuities in Russian society over the last 150 years. In our post-Soviet unit we shall pay particular attention to the role of Ukraine in the formation of modern Russian self-identity, in view of current events.

COURSE PHILOSOPHY:

Hermann Hesse, in 1920, under the impact of the revolutionary events in Russia, said the following about the novels of Dostoevsky, *“And do these developments in the souls of imaginary characters of fiction really signify the Downfall of Europe? Certainly. They signify it as surely as the mind’s eye perceives life and eternity in a blade of spring and death in its inevitability in every falling leaf of autumn...already half of Europe, at all events half of Eastern Europe is on the road to chaos...Russia, in a state of drunken illusion is reeling into the abyss, and as she reels she sings a drunken hymn, such as Dmitry Karamazov sang. The respectable European bourgeois laughs off that song to scorn. The saint and the poet hear it with tears.”*

While documents and other material artifacts supply the “facts “ from which histories are written, humans create historical narratives through choosing to include or exclude particular materials in their understanding of their past. In this way, history is like a novel, a painting, or a film; it is a man-made construct organized around a particular narrative. Novels, poems, and films, tell us as much about the society which produced them as any number of academic histories. By applying a historical methodology to the works of Russia’s great writers and film directors we shall gain insight into Russia’s past and present.

We will follow a colloquium format in which we will discuss weekly readings and film viewings in class. Questions will be posted on Blackboard to serve as a starting point for these discussions. At the beginning of each Unit (Empire and Revolution) the instructor will give an Introductory lecture.

REQUIREMENTS

Class Participation-40%

- 1) Attendance
- 2) In class discussions based on but not limited to weekly questions posted on Blackboard
- 3) Discussion Board/Blog. Every week after class meets write 1-3 paragraphs in response to in-class discussion of readings/and or film. Include three quotations from assigned reading, or the description of three images from assigned film which illustrate or question the week's theme. You will choose your best three entries to be graded by instructor at the end of semester.20%

Empire-Anna Karenina Paper-(12 pages + endnotes and bibliography)-30%

Revolution- Soviet, or post-Soviet Era Film and Novel Paper (12 pages + footnotes and bibliography) - 30%

During the Revolution Unit students will be responsible for viewing films on their own, since we will be using class time for discussion and analysis of clips. I will have all the films on reserve in library or will provide links to view them online, through *Streaming* option.

Required Readings:

Leo Tolstoy ANNA KARENINA, trs. R.Pevear and L. Volokhonsky. ISBN 0-14-200027-2. \$16.00

THE WAY OF THE PILGRIM, tr. G. Pokrovsky ISBN1-893361-31-4. \$ \$10.17

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF IVAN DENISOVICH ISBN -10 0374529523. \$14.00

Stephen Kotkin,; ARMAGGEDON AVERTED: The Soviet Collapse 1970-2000. ISBN 0-19-516894-1. \$11.53

Anya Von Bremzen, MASTERING THE ART OF SOVIET COOKING ISBN 978-0-307-88681-1

For the Revolution unit you will read and write a paper on **ONE** of the following books. Since all of us won't be reading the same book I will not put the books from the "Revolution" unit on order for the book store. Amazon carries all of these books. I will

provide a brief synopsis of each in class to help you make your choice. You may also choose another book written between 1917 and 2012 in Soviet or post-Soviet Russia or Russia Abroad, after consultation with instructor. One copy of each of the books below will be ON RESERVE in Lauinger Library.

Vasili Aksyonov, The Burn or The Island of Crimea

Mikhail Bulgakov, The White Guard or The Master and Margarita

Il'ia Il'f and Evgeny Petrov, The Twelve Chairs

Vladimir Nabokov, The Gift or Glory or Pnin

Boris Pasternak, Doctor Zhivago

Boris Pilnyak, The Naked Year

Mikhail Sholokhov, The Quiet Don

Evgeny Zamiatin, We

Victor Pelevin, Homo Zapiens

Vladimir Sorokin, The Day of the Oprichnik

Plus articles on Lauinger Library e-reserve site for this course.

Optional: C.Evtuhov and R.Stites, A HISTORY OF RUSSIA Since 1800. ISBN 0-395-66073-4 \$61.00

This is a Russian history textbook. It is not mandatory. You may use any other Russian history textbook, or none at all. This is to help you with general orientation among the names, places and dates of Russian history. I will be providing the basic historical context necessary for each class meeting through my lectures.

*All Students Should Acquaint Themselves With the Georgetown University Honor Code. See GU HONOR SYSTEM website. Standards of Academic Integrity Will Be Strictly Applied in This Course.

*Disability Notice. If you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center(arc@georgetown.edu) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus

office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies

Office Hours: Please arrange to meet with me before or after class via e-mail
zelensky@georgetown.edu

CLASS SCHEDULE

UNIT I EMPIRE

Jan 17 Introduction to Russian History and Culture. Orthodoxy as a System of Values. Icons. Westernization as an Ideology. What is Modernity? The Structure of Empire. Poetry, fiction and cinema: literary genres and historical phenomenon. Semiotics as an analytical tool. Food as a Cultural Construct. In class reading of Virgin's Descent into Hell. Visuals. Clips from Sochi Olympics and "Oblomov". FILM STUDY GUIDE handed out

Jan 24 Russian High Society, Nobility. Bureaucracy, Moscow vs. Petersburg. Crimean War and Great Reforms. Railroads.

Readings: ANNA KARENINA(AK), Part I; Hamm, Moscow and Petersburg Chapters, e-reserve; Eklof, II e-reserve; Engelstein, e-reserve.

Jan 31 The Russian Countryside. The Country Estate. Serfdom. Zemstvo. The Problem of Underdevelopment. Going Abroad- Tourism as Modernity- the Spa.

Readings: AK Part II; THE WAY OF THE PILGRIM; Engelgardt, Letters I-3,7 e-reserve; Eklof, III e-reserve

Feb 7 The Woman's Question. Marriage and the Family as Religious, Legal and Social Institutions. The Tolstoy's Marriage. The Russian Army as Paradox- a Conservative Instrument of Modernization. The Guards Regiments. Visuals.

Readings: AK Part III; Wagner, Sect I (e-reserve), Stites, Women's Question e-reserve; Engelhardt Letter 10(e-reserve); Eklof Chapter VIII e-reserve.

Feb 14 Adultery as a Topic in Western Literature. The Ideology of Romantic Love
George Sand. Utopianism and Free Love. Esthetic Theories. Art and Literature as Civic
Space in Russia. Ivanov. Repin and the Travelers. Visuals.

Readings, AK, Part IV-V, ; Tolstoy, "What is Art" excerpt, e-reserve; Meyer Article-link
See "Madame Bovary"(Isabelle Huppert film-library *Streaming*) independently if you
have not yet read the book.

Feb 21 Zemstvo as pre-1917 school for self-government? Party Politics. Tver-Kashin.
Disorientation and the search for new values in post-emancipation Russia. Spiritualism.
Gambling. Modernism in art and music. Suicide as a Social Construct.

Readings: AK, Part VI, VII. Freeze, e-reserve; Morissey, e-reserve.

Arrangements for tour of Russian Orthodox Church Discussed

Feb 28 Epilogue. Tolstoy Biography. Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Russia's First
Industrialia. Pudovkin Photographs. Clips from "The Rite of Spring"

Readings: AK, Part VIII; Dostoevsky on AK, e-reserve; Dostoevsky's Pushkin Speech,
e-reserve; Stolypin, e-reserve; Witte, e-reserve.

March 14 ANNA KARENINA PAPERS DUE IN CLASS

UNIT II REVOLUTION

March 14 World War I, 1917 Revolutions and Civil War. Chronology. Symbols.
Historiography.

Readings: "The Twelve" e-reserve and Blok "Scythians", e-reserve; Mstislavsky, e-
reserve; Trotsky, e-reserve; Bogdanov, e-reserve; Daniels, October revolution(e-reserve)

March 21 Communist Dreams and Realities .Lenin. NEP. Building the New Soviet
State. Building the New Soviet Man and Woman- Engineers of Souls. Cinema-the Most
Revolutionary of the Arts.

Readings: Kronstadt Rebellion; e-reserve; Geldern,Intro, Marking the Center, Epilogue ,e-reserve ; Eisenstein, Cinematographic Principle and Dialectical Approach, e-reserve. Von Bremen, Chapt.1-2

Film Discussion: Eisenstein's "October, 1917; Heart of a Dog(Sobach'e Serdtse)

March 28 Stalin's Revolution. Collectivization and Purges. World War II

Readings: Stalin's revolution, Stalin on the Liquidation of the Kulaks, Stalin on Leninism,e-reserve; Ginsburg and Dolot,e-reserve; Akhmatova, Requiem-link. Von Bremen, Chapt 3-4

Film Discussion: "Mother"; "Volga, Volga"

April 4 Khrushchev. The Thaw. Brezhnev. The Era of Stagnation.In class clips from Tarkovsky's "Andrei Rublev "and "The Mirror"

Readings; Khrushchev, De-Stalinization, The Thaw in Cultural Life, e-reserve; Solzhenitsyn, One Day in the Life

Film Discussion: "Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears" ; Von Bremen, Chapt5-6

April 11 The End of the Road. Last Days of Empire. Gorbachev, Yeltsin and the Break-Up. Armageddon Averted. The Post-Modern Turn. Ukraine.

"Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors", "Generation II" clips in class

Readings: Kotkin; Dolot,(e-reerve,) Riabchuk(link) , Foreign Policy articles(link)

Film Discussion;Stilyagi; Holod 33

April 18 Russia Abroad. Emigres and Dissidents In class film clips from "The Flight" and "Window to Paris"

Readings: Shmelev, e-reserve, Berdiaev, e-reserve, Weidle, e-reserve; Solzhenitsyn at Harvard, e-reserve;

Film Discussion: Tarkovsky "Nostalgia"

April 25 RUSSIA POST-PUTIN AND THE FINAL SYNTHESIS

**SOVIET POST SOVIET NOVEL AND FILM PAPER DUE IN
CLASS. Arrangements for Von Bremen dinner discussed.**