

Survey B: Literature in Translation LIT 2321.001
Russian Literature Survey from Kyivan Rus to Russia's 2022 Invasion of Ukraine
Professor Will Evans
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PHY 1.103 | MW 1:00-2:15
Office Hours: By Appointment Only

Russian Literature Through the Lens of the Ukraine War

Short Course Description

The goal of this course is for students to be introduced to — and to completely fall in love with — Russian literature (and ideally for them to become as obsessed with Russian literature as their professor is!) We will read literary work from medieval times through the present day through the lens of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the war ongoing there today. The main focus of the class is to experience the joy of reading and discovering new writers and new perspectives, and the discussions that follow each reading examine the application of literary texts into “real-world” discourses of history, politics, and culture in Russia, the former Soviet Union, and the former Russian Empire. By the end of the class, students will be familiar with many of the great Russian and Ukrainian writers, and will have a nuanced perspective of the historical and cultural issues between Russia and Ukraine to better understand and explain this moment in history.

Full Course Description

When Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the world was shocked, and turned to literature to answer the questions of why such a thing can happen. Russian literature provides a

This course will explore the rich and complex landscape of Russian literature, examining its enduring themes, historical contexts, and cultural significance. Through a close reading of selected works from various literary periods, we will engage with the diverse voices that have shaped Russian literature and consider how they resonate with the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

The course will begin by delving into the foundations of Russian literature, starting with some of the earliest medieval texts of Kyivan Rus', before jumping ahead to the birth of modern Russian literature with Pushkin in the early 1800s. The course will touch on major and influential writers through Russia's past two centuries, including writers of the 19th-century “Golden Age,” such as Lermontov, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Chekhov; and those of the “Silver Age” (first half of the 20th century) such as Blok, Akhmatova, Mayakovsky, Tsvetaeva, Bulgakov, and Pasternak; before culminating in late-Soviet and post-Soviet writers such as Erofeev, Brodsky, Sorokin, and Ganieva.

The course will also touch on the Ukrainian literary tradition — which deserves its own course entirely — tracing its development from early chronicles and folk tales to Shevchenko through modern Ukrainian writers, including Kurkov, Zhadan, and Lutsyshyna. We will examine how Ukrainian literature has grappled with issues of national identity and cultural independence

through centuries under the cultural domination of Russia's empires, and the surprising Ukrainian background of many of the Russian writers mentioned above.

We will analyze their exploration of themes such as empire, nationalism, ethnic and linguistic minorities, social injustice, and the individual's struggle against oppressive forces that make Russian literature an endless source of inspiration for readers in languages around the world. These themes continue to reverberate in contemporary Russian literature, and at the end of the course we will examine how contemporary Russian and Ukrainian writers address them in light of the current crisis.

Throughout the course, we will consider how literature can serve as a powerful tool for understanding complex historical and political events. We will analyze how literary texts can reflect and shape collective memory, influence public opinion, and contribute to the construction of national identities.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Analyze and interpret major works of Russian literature from various literary periods.
- Identify and discuss recurring themes and motifs in Russian literature.
- Understand the relationship between Russian literature and Russian history and culture.
- Examine the impact of the Ukrainian crisis on contemporary Russian literature.
- Analyze how literature can be used to understand and interpret complex historical and political events.

Course Requirements

Students must come ready to read and discuss in every class.

Staying Engaged:

- 50% Classwork & Quizzes:
 - Do the readings and attend class: Daily quizzes test your understanding, so consistent engagement is key.
 - Skip the shortcuts: Focus on the assigned readings & supplemental materials, not summaries or Wikipedia.
 - Quizzes are essential: Two lowest grades or absences (daily zeroes) are dropped, but make-ups are not allowed.
 - Participation counts: Show up, take notes, and contribute thoughtfully. Even silence can earn an A.
 - Challenges? Contact your dean to seek support early for any issues affecting your studies.

Expressing Yourself:

- 20% Writing Reflections:
 - Track your learning: Reflect on the readings, discuss any additional sources you may consult, and extrapolate on in-class discussions.

- Flexible format: Submit your writing on Blackboard before each daily class by 12pm, with entries averaging 150 words.
- Quality over quantity: Content counts more than word count; good work might earn extra points.

Exploring in Depth:

- 30% Final Project: Explore the history of Russian and Ukrainian literature. Options include:
 - Compare Russian literature and its themes and history to another literature from elsewhere in the world.
 - Dive deep into one or more Russian books.
 - Applying scientific, economic, or computational models to literary works.
 - Researching Russian history through literature: pick an era, a person, a theme, and have fun.
 - Analyzing specific literary or historical themes in literature.
 - “Big data” analysis of online literary texts.
 - Creative projects (fiction, poetry, film, etc.) are welcome, but will require stricter evaluation standards.
 - Group projects allowed, with individual participation reports and fair grading rubrics.

Remember:

- No final exam! Course projects are due on May 8th by 12pm. If late, points will be deducted.
- 70% of your grade is quantitative: Read, attend class, and write; the rest will follow naturally.
- Let’s have some fun with this!

This syllabus highlights the key requirements and overall framework for our Russian literature course. Readings may change throughout the course of the semester.

Embrace the readings, ask questions, participate actively, and enjoy the journey of exploring the literary history of Russia and Ukraine!

Required Books

- *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol* by Nikolai Gogol, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky
- *Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov, translated by Burgin & O’Connor.
- *Moscow to the End of the Line* by Venedikt Erofeev, translated by H. William Tjalsma.
- *Grey Bees* by Andrey Kurkov, translated by Boris Dralyuk.

Recommended Books

- *The Queen of Spades* by Alexander Pushkin translated by Anthony Briggs (Pushkin Press)
- *Eugene Onegin* by Alexander Pushkin, translated by Vladimir Nabokov (with commentary)
- *A Hero of Our Time* by Mikhail Lermontov, translated by Marian Schwartz
- *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol* by Nikolai Gogol, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky
- *Dead Souls* by Nikolai Gogol, translated by Donald Rayfield (NYRB edition)
- *The Complete Kobzar: The Poetry of Taras Shevchenko* by Taras Shevchenko, translated by Peter Fedynsky
- *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky
- *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky
- *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy, any translation really
- *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy, any translation
- *Fifty-Two Stories* by Anton Chekhov, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky
- *Odessa Stories* by Isaac Babel, translated by Boris Dralyuk
- *Red Cavalry* by Isaac Babel, translated by Boris Dralyuk
- *Chevangur* by Anton Platonov, translated by Elizabeth & Robert Chandler
- *Life and Fate* by Vasily Grossman, translated by Robert Chandler
- *Stalingrad* by Vasily Grossman, translated by Elizabeth & Robert Chandler
- *Voroshilograd* by Serhiy Zhadan, translated by Reilly Costigan-Humes and Isaac Wheeler
- *The Mountain and the Wall* by Alisa Ganieva, translated by Carol Apollonio

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to Russian Literature and the Ukrainian Crisis

January 17:

Reading: Zenkovsky pp. 1-17 “The Literature of Medieval Russia”
 65-71 (“Vladimir Christianizes Russia”)
 101-105 (“The Martyrdom of Boris and Gleb”)
 167-193 (“The Lay of Igor’s Campaign”)
 Putin’s Essay “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”

Week 2: Introduction to the Golden Age of Russian Literature

January 22: Pushkin: “The Queen of Spades;” “The Bronze Horseman,” *Eugene Onegin* (excerpts)

January 24: Lermontov: *Hero of Our Time*, “The Sail,” “The Prophet” and “The Death of a Poet”

Week 3: Gogol, the Ukrainian Cossack Who Shaped All Russian Literature to Come, & Shevchenko

January 29: Ukrainian Tales (“Viy,” “The Story of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich”), Shevchenko Poems

January 31: *Dead Souls* (excerpts) Petersburg Tales (“The Overcoat,” “The Nose,” “Nevsky Prospect”)

Week 4: Dostoevsky, Chernyshevsky and the Search for Meaning

February 5: *Crime and Punishment* (excerpts); Translation Comparisons

February 7: *Brothers Karamazov* (excerpts); *Notes from Underground* (excerpts), Chernyshevsky’s *What is To Be Done?*

Week 5: Turgenev and the European Novel

February 12: *Sketches from a Hunter’s Album* (excerpts)

February 14: *Fathers and Children* (excerpts)

Week 6: Tolstoy, Gorky, and the Russian Peasant and the Russian Soul

February 19: *Anna Karenina* (excerpts), *War and Peace* (excerpts)

February 21: “Kreuzer Sonata,” *Resurrection* (excerpts), “The Kingdom of God is Within You,” Gorky Stories

Week 7: Chekhov, Bunin, & the Russian Short Story

February 26: Chekhov Stories

February 28: Bunin: “Dark Alleys,” “The Gentleman from San Francisco,”

Week 8: The Silver Age of Russian Literature

March 4: Blok, Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva, Mayakovsky (Poetry)

March 6: Ilf & Petrov: *The Golden Calf* (excerpts)

Spring Break, March 11-15

Week 9: Russian Civil War & World War II (The Great Patriotic War)

March 18: Isaac Babel: *Red Cavalry*

March 20: Vasily Grossman: *Life and Fate* (excerpts); *Stalingrad* (excerpts)

Week 10: Stalinist-Era Novels with Bulgakov and Pasternak

March 25: Bulgakov: *Master & Margarita* (excerpts), *Heart of a Dog* (excerpts)

March 27: Pasternak: *Doctor Zhivago* (excerpts)

Week 11: Gulag Stories

April 1: Shalamov: *Kolyma Tales* (excerpts)

April 3: Solzhenitsyn: *Gulag Archipelago* (excerpts); *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (excerpts)

Week 12: Soviet Literature, Socialist Realism, and Anti-Socialist Realism

April 8: Sholokhov: *Quiet Flows the Don* (excerpts), Platonov: *Chevengur* (excerpts); *The Foundation Pit* (excerpts)

April 10: Erofeev: *Moscow to the End of the Line/Moscow Circles*; Brodsky Poetry

Weeks 13 & 14: Post-Soviet Literature and the Search for Identity

April 15: Sorokin: *Blue Lard* (excerpts); *Telluria* (excerpts)

April 17: Ganieva: *The Mountain and the Wall*

April 22: Shishkin: *Maidenhair* (excerpts)

April 24: Zhadan: *Voroshilovgrad* (excerpts); Kurkov: *Grey Bees* (Part One)

Week 15: Literature, History, and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine (2014 and 2022)

April 29: Kurkov: *Grey Bees* (Part Two); Sentsov: *Diary of a Hunger Striker* (excerpts)

May 1: Class Visit from Translator Boris Dralyuk (Kurkov, Babel, etc.)

Final Project due May 8, 12pm.

Supplemental Readings

General:

- Berlin, Isaiah. *Russian Thinkers*. Harmondsworth, 1978.
- Frank, Joseph. *Through the Russian Prism*. Princeton, 1991.
- Hoisington, Sona Stephan, ed. *A Plot of Her Own: The Female Protagonist in Russian Literature*. Evanston, 1995.
- Heldt, Barbara. *A Terrible Perfection*. Bloomington, 1987.
- Kelly, Catriona. *History of Russian Women's Writing, 1820-1992*. Oxford, 1994.
- Mirsky, D. S. *A History of Russian Literature*. Evanston, 1999 [1958].
- Moser, Charles A., ed. *Cambridge History of Russian Literature*. Cambridge, 1992.
- Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lectures on Russian Literature*. New York, 1980.
- Riha, Thomas, ed. *Readings in Russian Civilization (rev. edn.), vol. 2*. Chicago, 1969.
- Terras, Victor. *A History of Russian Literature*. New Haven, 1991.
- Todd III, William Mills. *Fiction and Society in the Age of Pushkin*. Cambridge, MA, 1986.

Pushkin:

- Bayley, John. *Pushkin: A Comparative Commentary*. Cambridge, 1971.
- Bethea, David M., ed. *Puškin Today*. Bloomington, 1993.
- Briggs, A. D. P. *Alexander Pushkin: Eugene Onegin*. Cambridge, 1992.
- Debreczeny, Paul. *The Other Pushkin: A Study of Alexander Pushkin's Prose Fiction*. Stanford, 1983.
- Hasty, Olga Peters. *Pushkin's Tatiana*. Madison, 1999.
- Hoisington, Sona Stephan, ed. & trans. *Russian Views of Pushkin's Eugene Onegin*. Bloomington, 1988.
- Leighton, Lauren. *The Esoteric Tradition in Russian Romantic Literature: Decembrism and Freemasonry*. University Park, PA, 1994.
- Nabokov, Vladimir. *Eugene Onegin (rev. edn., 2 vols.)*. Princeton, 1975.
- Seth, Vikram. *The Golden Gate*. New York, 1986.
- Wigzell, Faith. *Reading Russian Fortunes: Print Culture, Gender, and Divination in Russia from 1765*. Cambridge, 1998.

Lermontov:

- Eikhensbaum, Boris. *Lermontov: A Study in Literary-Historical Evaluation*. Ann Arbor, 1981.
- Powelstock, David. *Becoming Mikhail Lermontov: The Ironies of Romantic Individualism in Nicholas I's Russia*. Evanston, 2005.
- Allen, Elizabeth Cheresch. *A Fallen Idol Is Still a God: Lermontov and the Quandaries of Cultural Transition*. Stanford, 2006.

Gogol:

- Fanger, Donald. *The Creation of Nikolai Gogol*. Cambridge (MA), 1979.
- Maguire, Robert A. *Exploring Gogol*. Stanford, 1994.
- Maguire, Robert A., ed. *Gogol from the Twentieth Century*. Princeton, 1974.
- Nabokov, Vladimir. *Nikolai Gogol*. New Directions, 1944.

Turgenev:

- Costlow, Jane. *Worlds Within Worlds: The Novels of Ivan Turgenev*. Princeton, 1990.
- Ripp, Victor. *Turgenev's Russia: From Notes of a Hunter to Fathers and Sons*. Ithaca, 1980.

Dostoevsky:

- Frank, Joseph. *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849*. Princeton, 1976.
- Frank, Joseph. *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1850-1859*. Princeton, 1983.
- Frank, Joseph. *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865*. Princeton, 1986.
- Frank, Joseph. *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1866-1870*. Princeton, 1995.
- Frank, Joseph. *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871-1881*. Princeton, 2002.

Tolstoy:

- Bayley, John. *Tolstoy and the Novel*. London, 1966.
- Christian, R. F. *Tolstoy: A Critical Introduction*. London, 1969.
- Gustafson, Richard. *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*. Princeton, 1986.
- Steiner, George. *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: An Essay in the Old Criticism (2nd Edition)*. Yale, New Haven, 1996.

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