

The Russian Short Story in Context, Russian 0325
Class Number 25860, 2131-Fall Semester 2012
(Last revised: August 27, 2012; Subject to Revision)

Two Class Contacts:

Name _____ Tel _____ Email _____

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Course Description and Objectives: [Literature, Foreign Cultures, W-course Requirements]

This course will be devoted to reading short stories from 19th and 20th century Russian literature. The course is limited in size so that we can spend a good portion of our class sessions discussing the readings. The authors we will read range from 19th century masters—Karamzin, Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Chekhov—to 20th century favorites—Bulgakov, Bunin, and Gorky—right up to the popular writers in contemporary Russia like Pelevin. You will also have the opportunity to see one or more video representations of Russian short stories for comparative purposes and/or videos for providing historical and emotional context.

Russians have always valued the short story as a source of wisdom and knowledge as well as entertainment and esthetic pleasure, as a resource for understanding individuals in a complex society, as a means for analyzing social behavior and psychological relationships, and as a place for airing cultural issues and matters of political and social concern.

We will be asking why these authors selected the short story rather another genre for their inventions and fantasies, philosophies and teachings, and why and how they expressed their views as they did using particular forms of language, literary techniques, imagery, and narrative structures. We will compare Russian and American ideas and values, considering cultural similarities as well as differences. We will examine common and uncommon emotions and passions, customs and mores, beliefs, fantasies and dreams. And we will discuss the themes and values expressed in these stories, both those which we share and those which we may identify with particular national stereotypes or peculiar "Russian" or "American" characteristics. Finally, we will endeavor to draw conclusions about our own values, feelings, assumptions, reactions and prejudices and try to identify their sources as we respond to the expression of a great variety of short stories from a fascinating and different culture.

Requirements

Students will be required to keep a journal, recording responses to the stories we read. These responses will also be used to stimulate class discussion. Journal assignments [See below] will help students to prepare for class discussion, and to review for hour exams.

Reading all assignments, Attendance and Participation in class discussion are mandatory. Students will be granted one unexcused absence during the semester. Any subsequent absence must be approved by the instructor and accompanied by a physician's written excuse or other appropriate documentation. While one unexcused absence is allowed, three absences will affect your grade, and four absences may result in failure of the course. If serious illness prevents class attendance, documentation of that fact must be presented in the form of a doctor's letter, stating that on the day and time the class meets the student was too ill to attend. These letters must be submitted to the instructor on the day the student returns to class or they will not be accepted.

Please inform me in advance if you must arrive late to class or leave the classroom early.

Punctual attendance and collegiality to one's classmates, instructor, and guests are obligatory. Students that arrive late, and do not return to class after exams, or who leave the classroom without returning during film screenings, etc., may be considered absent for the entire class meeting, with the absence factored into their grades accordingly. Inappropriate, distracting, inattentive, rude, and disruptive behaviors, e.g., talking out of order, surfing the internet, texting, sleeping, etc., are potentially serious infringements of the University's Academic Integrity Code and will not be tolerated.

Please check your Pitt email and CourseWeb announcements frequently for important information and updates on course content and administration.

Quizzes and the writing of in-class paragraphs and other brief assignments and homework may be used to clarify certain aspects of the stories and to further stimulate class discussion. Missed quizzes will not be made up. Makeup exams will not be given, except at the instructor's discretion under extreme circumstances and with appropriate documentation for the day of the missed exam submitted the day the student returns to class.

Specific W-Course requirements: see below.

Grading Policy and Requirements

Reading, Attendance and Participation in Class Discussion	20%
Analytical Journals, turned in and graded three times, see below	25%
Occasional in-class Quizzes and/or Paragraphs; other assignments	10%
Hour Exams [3], each 15%	45%

Journals are due on exam days. See below for **Journal Assignments** (others may be made in class.)

Quizzes may be given at random intervals; they may consist of short factual questions or require a paragraph or page in response to a general question. I may also assign other brief homework and assignments including partner and group work (details TBA).

Exams: there will be three In-class Hour exams [in lieu of a midterm or final]. Your journals should help you prepare for the exams.

In-Class Exam and Journal Due Dates

Exam 1, Journal 1: Tuesday, October 9

Exam 2, Journal 2: Monday, November 12

Exam 3, Journal 3: Monday, December 10

Analytical Journal Assignments

Journal entries should be **focused and analytical**. Typed journal entries will be handed in 3 times during the semester. Some additional assignments may be made to help students organize their thinking about the short story as a literary form, as a means of entertainment, and as a source of particular insights into the range and depths of the human imagination, but students should feel free to think about the stories in their own way and to develop their own ideas. However, journal entries must be logical, thoughtful, and analytical. Your journal entries must be printed out in 11-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced and left aligned.

Write up journal commentaries covering **at least 6 stories/4 authors** in each of the three segments of the course. Each of the three Journals should be a minimum of ten pages (approximately 1-3 pages/per story). Each commentary should have its own theme, although you may compare two or more stories in one entry for a richer discussion, e.g., Discuss characterization of Russian women or Russian men in 2-3 stories by two different authors; or the Construction of Plot in two stories by

two different authors; or Point of View or Recurrent Theme and its representation in 2 or more stories; or Use of Symbolism or Use of Setting by different authors; or Comic elements in Gogol; or contrast differences and similarities in a story and its film version, etc.

Some students in the past have chosen to hand in submissions, which are closer to “papers” that “journals.” This is also acceptable as long as the 6 stories/4 authors guidelines are met. This is your choice.

Refer to “Journal Writing Guide” (see CourseWeb) for terms, further suggestions.

SYLLABUS (Last Revised August 26, 2012; Subject to Revision)

General Information

Instructor: Robert Carl Metil, PhD
Office: 1433 CL, Stairwell A
Office Hours: TBA

Time: 6:00-8:30; **Place:** 249 CL

Email: rcm6@pitt.edu

Voice-mail: x45906

Required Readings:

I will provide the majority of readings through CourseWeb and other online sources. You must print and bring all your assigned readings to class with you.

I reserve the right to modify the syllabus and assigned readings at any point in the semester, as circumstances demand. I will announce any changes through email and/or in class in advance of implementation. Please complete assigned readings for the date under which they appear below. If I decide to order any other books in the course of the semester I will inform you.

Be aware that translations often differ substantially from one another, so **please read only the translation I have assigned**, or you will miss valuable nuances and be out of sync with your classmates and me.

You are **required** to purchase the following work, available at the Book Center:

Mikhail Bulgakov, *Heart of a Dog*. **Translation by Mirra Ginsburg only.** Publisher: Grove Press, 1987. ISBN: 10-0802150594

Recommended reading: The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers

PROPOSED READING SCHEDULE (Last Revised August 26, 2012; Subject to Revision)

Week 1

Aug 27. Shukshin “Chudik”

Week 2

LABOR DAY, NO CLASS! Sept 3

Week 3

Sept 10. Karamzin “Poor Liza” and “Isle of Bornholm.” Pushkin “Queen of Spades.”

Week 4

Sept 17. Pushkin “Tales of Belkin”: “The Shot,” “The Snowstorm,” “The Undertaker,” “The Postmaster,” “Mistress into Maid”

Week 5

Sept 24. Lermontov “Introduction to Pechorin’s Journal,” “Taman,” “Bela,” “Maksim Maksimich”

Week 6

Oct 1. Lermontov “Princess Mary,” “Fatalist”

Week 7

TUESDAY! Oct 9. Gogol “Nevsky Avenue,” “The Portrait,” other Gogol TBA
FIRST HOUR EXAM. FIRST JOURNAL is due

Week 8

Oct 15. Turgenev “Asya” and Tolstoy “Father Sergius”

Week 9

Oct 22. Tolstoy “Kreutzer Sonata,” “The Devil”

Week 10

Oct 29. Dostoevsky “A Gentle Creature,” “The Grand Inquisitor”

Week 11

Nov 5. Chekhov “Anna on the Neck,” “An Artists’s Story,” About Love,” “The Lady with a Lapdog”

Week 12

Nov 12. Gorky, “Twenty-Six Men and a Girl.” Zamyatin “The Flood.”
SECOND HOUR EXAM. SECOND JOURNAL is due

Week 13

Nov 19. Bunin “Light Breathing,” “Tanya,” “Mitya’s Love”

Week 14

Nov. 26. Bulgakov “Heart of a Dog”

Week 15

Dec. 3. Aksyonov “Daddy, Put It Together!” Tolstaya “Date with a Bird” and “The Poet and His Muse.” Pelevin, “The Werewolf Problem in Central Russia.”

Week 16

Dec. 10. **THIRD HOUR EXAM. THIRD JOURNAL is due**