

RUSSN-UA 852-001
Soviet and Post-Soviet Literature
Fall 2012

TR 2-3:15

Prof. Eliot Borenstein
Russian & Slavic Studies
19 University Place, Room 210

Office Hours:
Wednesday 2:00-3:00
Thursday 12:30-1:30
Or by appointment

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In this course, we will examine some of the greatest literary works to come out of Russia in the twentieth century. Though nineteenth-century writers such as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy are better known in the West than their twentieth-century successors, the literature of the present century is remarkable for stylistic and thematic innovations that, while continuing the Russian literary tradition, explore territory unknown the “classic” authors.

Most of the novels and stories we will read are a produce of the Soviet period, a time of unparalleled cultural, political, and psychological upheaval. The early years of Soviet power also roughly coincide with the advent of modernism in world literature, a phenomenon marked by a strong sense of cultural crisis. In the Soviet context, this cultural crisis would take particularly Russian forms; Bolshevik ideology held that the Old World would be utterly destroyed, to be replaced by a new society populated by New Soviet Men. The experience of Russia in the twentieth century can be viewed as the failed attempt to put radical theory into everyday practice, a grand scheme of social engineering that would inevitably be reflected in the country’s literature.

Though this course will provide a historical overview of twentieth-century Russian literature, we will concentrate most of our attention on the two periods of greatest cultural ferment: 1920s modernism and late/post-Soviet postmodernism. Because this is a course in translation, we will be reading only a small selection of poetry.

Course Requirements: Students should come to class having read the assigned materials and ready to discuss them. Class participation is a required and graded part of the class.

No knowledge of any foreign language is expected, as all works will be read and discussed in English. It is essential that you keep up with the reading assignments and come to class prepared either to make observations or ask questions. Attendance is, of course, mandatory.

Blackboard and the Internet. Blackboard, which is accessible through the "Academics" tab of NYU Home, is an important part of course, facilitating announcements and the distribution of course materials.

Please keep in mind that, by default, Blackboard uses your NYU email account. Many of you may have other email accounts that you use. If so, it is a quite simple matter to arrange for your email from one account to be forwarded automatically to the other. I strongly urge you to do so. It is **your responsibility** to make sure that you are receiving official email sent to your NYU account.

Writing Assignments: There will be two short papers, a midterm paper (5-7 pages), and a final paper (8-10).

The *short analysis papers* may be no longer than *three* pages, and they can be about any of the works we are reading. These papers are a tool to help you think about an aspect of the text that interests you, and any ideas you generate in the course of these assignments would be welcome contributions to class discussion. You must turn in the short paper by the beginning of the last class during which the text is being discussed, and you must show up for that class. That is, if you want to write a short paper about *Envy*, you must turn this paper in no later than **September 27**. If we are only spending one class period on the work, then you must turn in the short paper at the beginning of that class. If you do turn in a short paper and don't show up for class, your grade for the assignment goes down by one letter. A letter is also dropped for each day the short paper is late.

You may not wait until August to turn in three short papers. The semester has been divided into two parts, and you must write one short paper by each of these two deadlines. That is, your first short paper must be turned in no later than **October 4**, your second no later than **November 8**, and your third is due no later than **December 13**. Though you are not allowed to wait to do all the short papers until the end of the course, if you feel you would rather do your short papers earlier (turning two short papers during the first segment of the course), you are free to do so.

The topics of your *midterm paper* and *final paper* are yours to choose, but you must come talk to me about them in advance. It is hoped that the short papers will lead you toward topics for your longer papers. Both your mid-semester and your final papers can be based on two-page papers, as long as you are not tapping the same paper for both longer works.

The midterm paper is due on **October 30** and the final must be turned by **December 13**.

I welcome full or partial drafts of any of these writing assignment. Drafts of the papers must be shown to me no later than one week before the due date..

Electronic submission of written assignments. You are welcome to submit hard copies of your short and long papers. However, I prefer to receive students' papers electronically. Blackboard has a "digital drop box" feature, but I have not found it to be particularly reliable. Therefore, please send me your assignments by email, as attachments. The preferred format is any version of Word (97 or above, any platform)--such documents usually take the ".doc" extension. Failing

that, .rtf files (which can be generated by most word processing programs) are also fine. I can open most other formats as well, including Word Perfect (.wpd), but this requires some extra effort on my part. Please feel free to consult with me about file format questions.

When you submit a paper electronically, please give it a descriptive filename. I have dozens of students, and if all of you send me files called "Russia Assignment" or "Bulgakov Paper," this will be confusing and frustrating. After the first time you make this mistake, I will not accept another paper with an unidentifiable file name.

The preferred (but not required) format for file names is <Student last name> <Type of assignment> <Assignment number> <Topic >. Examples: if Bonnie Tyler has written a second short paper on Bulgakov the file should be something like "Tyler Short Paper 2 (Bulgakov).doc". If Eric Roberts has written a midterm paper on Tatyana Tolstaya, then the file should be something like "Roberts Midterm (Tolstaya).doc". A final paper on Yuri Olesha by Scott Baio would be "Baio Final (Olesha).doc".

Finally, please note that I have two different email accounts (eb7@nyu.edu and eliotb2002@me.com). The NYU account automatically forwards mail to the me account. Please do not send email to both accounts at once ("cc"); if you do, I will end up with three copies of your message.

Final Grade. Your final grade will be determined as follows:

Class participation:	20%
Two-page papers:	30%
Midterm paper:	20%
Final paper:	30%

Class participation. Most class periods will be a mix of lecture and discussion; only occasionally will I spend the entire class giving a lecture. Everyone is encouraged to participate in discussion, which will be facilitated by questions that I will be distributing in advance over electronic mail, and by the short papers.

Active and constructive class participation can significantly improve your final grade. Frequent absences can have a negative effect on your final grade.

Editions: Many of these books come in different editions and different translations, and I understand that you might prefer to buy used copies of these editions to save money. Therefore I am including my recommendations/warnings about the various editions of each of these books.

Babel, Isaac. *Red Cavalry and Other Stories..* There are two different translations of Babel, and each has its faults--feel free to buy either one.

Bulgakov, Mikhail. *The Master and Margarita.* There are three translations of Bulgakov, but the Burgin-O'Connor edition is not only the best,

but is also the only one using the complete, uncut text; I highly recommend sticking with this edition.

Erofeev, Venedikt. *Moscow to the End of the Line*. There are several different editions of this book, and, I believe, two translations (as well as an alternate title, "Moscow Circles"). Feel free to buy whatever you want, but if your edition is different from that of the class, it will be *very* difficult to find particular passages in this stream-of-consciousness narrative.

Kurkov, Andrey. *Death and the Penguin*. Any edition

Nabokov, Vladimir. *Invitation to a Beheading*. Any edition

Olesha, Yuri. *Envy*. The edition I've ordered, translated by Schwartz, is the second-best translation available. The best one, by Clarence Brown, is in his *20th Century Reader*. But it costs a good deal more.

Pelevin, Victor. *Buddha's Little Finger*. Also known in English as *The Clay Machine Gun*. Any edition will do.

***Platonov, Andrei.** *The Foundation Pit*. There are two translations of this book, and I have chosen the better of the two. Please use this translation.

Solzhenitsyn, Alexander. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. There is only one translation, but several editions. Use whichever one you want. However, since this short novel has no chapters, it will be difficult for you to find specific passages in class if you use a different edition.

Ulitskaya, Ludmila. *The Funeral Party*. Any edition.

Zamyatin, Yevgeny. *We*. There are at least four translations of this novel, and several editions in print. However, Clarence Brown's recent translation is *much* better than all the others. This edition is highly recommended. Avoid Zilboorg's translation like the plague.

eBooks. Many of these texts are available as eBooks. Feel free to purchase the electronic edition instead, but then make sure to bring the text with you to class, just as you would a physical book.

Blackboard

Petrushevskaya, Ludmila. "Our Crowd." Translated by Helena Goscilo.

Petrusevskaya, Ludmila. *There Once Lived a Woman Who Tried to Kill Her Neighbor's Baby. Scary Fairy Tales*. Translated from the Russian by Keith Gessen and Anna Summers New York: Penguin Books, 2009 (Excerpts)

Summary of *Chapaev*.

Tolstaya, Tatyana. "Peters"

Tolstaya, Tatyana. "The Poet and the Muse"

Russian Futurism Assignment (2/27):

(from Lawton):

D. Burluk, *et al.* "Slap in the Face of Public Taste." (51-52)

"The Word as Such"

(from Markov and Sparks):

Velimir Khlebnikov:

"Incantation by Laughter" (326-327)

"The elephants were fighting with their tusks" (326-327)

"Bo-ay-o-be, lips were singing" (328-329)
"A monster with a horrid butt " (328-329)

Aleksei Kruchenykh
"Dur bul shcyl"
"Heights " (360-361)

Vasilisk Gnedov
"Poem of the End " (362-363)
Vladimir Mayakovsky
"What About You?"
(from *The Bedbug and Selected Poetry*):
"I" (53-50)

eBooks

Some of you might prefer to read the required texts as eBooks. You should feel free to do so. Many of the books ordered at the NYU bookstore are available as eBooks from various Internet vendors (Amazon, eReader, Fictionwise, iBooks, etc.).

If you are using eBooks, make sure to bring the text with you to class, just as you would a physical book.

In addition, I have made all of the Blackboard readings available in the "Course Documents" tab as eBooks.

I have made them available in three different formats:

- 1) Mobi format. This is the format that Amazon acquired for the Kindle, and can be read natively by any Kindle application.
- 2) Epub format. This is the format that was designed to be an industry standard. It is the only format read by Apple's iBooks app, and can also be read in virtually any other ereading app.

CLASS SCHEDULE

<p>September 4 (T) Introduction</p>	<p>October 9 (T) Platonov ▼ For Today: ✪ Read <i>The Foundation Pit</i> (Part I)</p>
<p>September 6 (Th) Futurism and the Avant-Garde Film; <i>Victory Over the Sun</i> ▼ For Today: ✪ Read Selected Poetry</p>	<p>October 11 (Th) Platonov ▼ For Today: ✪ Read <i>The Foundation Pit</i> (finish)</p>
<p>September 11 (T) Zamyatin (1) ▼ For Today: ✪ Read Brown, Introduction to <i>We</i> ✪ Read <i>We</i> (Records 1-18)</p>	<p>October 16 (T) FALL BREAK ▼ For Today: ✪ NO CLASS</p>
<p>September 13 (Th) Zamyatin (2) ▼ For Today: ✪ Read <i>We</i> (finish)</p>	<p>October 18 (Th) Bulgakov (1) ▼ For Today: ✪ Read <i>The Master and Margarita</i> (Chapter 1-12)</p>
<p>September 18 (T) Babel (1) ▼ For Today: ✪ Read From "Crossing the Zbrucz" through "Berestczko,"</p>	<p>October 23 (T) Bulgakov (2) ▼ For Today: ✪ Read <i>The Master and Margarita</i> (Chapters 13-18)</p>
<p>September 20 (Th) Babel (2) ▼ For Today: ✪ Finish <i>Red Cavalry</i></p>	<p>October 25 (Th) Bulgakov (3) ▼ For Today: ✪ Read <i>The Master and Margarita</i> (finish)</p>
<p>September 25 (T) Olesha (1) ▼ For Today: ✪ Read <i>Envy</i> (Part One)</p>	<p>October 30 (T) Solzhenitsyn (1) ▼ For Today: ✪ Read <i>One Day..</i> (half) Mid-semester Paper Due</p>
<p>September 27 (Th) Olesha (2) ▼ For Today: ✪ Read <i>Envy</i> (finish)</p>	<p>November 1 (Th) Solzhenitsyn (2) ▼ For Today: ✪ Read <i>One Day..</i> (finish)</p>
<p>October 2 (T) Socialist Realism Film: Chapaev (excerpt) ▼ For Today: ✪ Read Summary of <i>Chapaev</i> (the novel) ✪ Start reading Nabokov</p>	<p>November 6 (T) Erofeev (1) ▼ For Today: ✪ Read <i>Moscow to the End of the Line</i> (half)</p>
<p>October 4 (Th) Nabokov ▼ For Today: ✪ Read <i>Invitation to a Beheading</i> Final Deadline for Short Paper #1</p>	<p>November 8 (Th) Erofeev (2) ✪ Read <i>Moscow to the End of the Line</i> (finish) Final Deadline for Short Paper #2</p>

November 13 (T) Sinyavsky/Tertz

▼ For Today:

⊕ Read "Pkhentz"

November 15 (Th) NO CLASS

November 20 (T) Ulitskaya

▼ For Today:

⊕ Read *The Funeral Party*

November 22 (Th) THANKSGIVING

▼ For Today:

⊕ NO CLASS

November 27 (T) Pelevin (1)

▼ For Today:

⊕ Read *The Buddha's Little Finger*
(half)

November 29 (Th) Pelevin (2)

▼ For Today:

⊕ Read *The Buddha's Little Finger*
(finish)

December 4 (T) Kurkov (1)

▼ For Today:

⊕ Read *Death and the Penguin* (half)

December 6 (Th) Kurkov (2)

▼ For Today:

⊕ Read *Death and the Penguin*
(finish)

December 11 (T) Petrushevskaya

▼ For Today:

⊕ Read Stories

December 13 (Th) Tolstaya

▼ For Today:

⊕ Read Stories

**Final Deadline for Short
Paper#3**