MIDWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY
A Member of the Texas Tech University System

Introduction to Russian Literature:

From Pushkin to Pelevin

ENGL 6003 X20

Spring 2026

Professor Kirsten Lodge

kirsten.lodge@msutexas.edu

218 Bea Wood Hall, (940) 357-4363

This course will introduce students to some of the greatest Russian writers from the nineteenth century to the present. We will situate these works in both the Russian and the European cultural and historical contexts, relating them to historical events and to the major cultural movements and trends from Romanticism to Postmodernism. Russian history is vibrant and fascinating, and we will examine how writers responded to tsarist oppression, bloody wars, the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the Stalinist Terror, the collapse of the Soviet Empire, and other momentous historical events. We will examine the profound philosophical questions raised by some of the works, and we will also look at the relation of the literary works to the other arts, especially the fine arts. Finally, we will emphasize major recurrent themes of the Russian literary tradition and develop skills in research, close reading, and interpretation. All readings are in translation.

Course Objectives

1) To familiarize students with the Russian literary tradition and its historical context;
2) To familiarize students with major European literary movements by examining them within the Russian tradition;
3) To develop skills in close reading and interpretation;
4) To develop skills in research and writing a formal academic paper.

Required Books

Alexander Pushkin. *Eugene Onegin*. Penguin, 2008.
Mikhail Lermontov. *A Hero of Our Time*. Penguin, 2001.
Ivan Turgenev. *Fathers and Children*. Norton, 2007 (recommended), or *Fathers and Sons*. Penguin, 2009.
The Dedalus Book of Russian Decadence. Dedalus Limited, 2007.

Tatyana Tolstaya. *The Slynx*. NYRB Classics, 2007.
Pelevin, Victor. *The Hall of the Singing Caryatids*. New Directions, 2011.

and:

[Broadview Bundle](#) (reduced price for this class--order well in advance!):

You must read the Broadview editions in full--not only the primary texts.

Recommended Books

Alexander Pushkin. *Selected Poems*. Penguin, 2020.
Nikolai Gogol. *The Diary of a Madman, The Inspector General, and Selected Stories*. Penguin, 2006.
Daniil Kharms. *Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings of Daniil Kharms*. The Overlook Press, 2009.
Caryl Emerson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Russian Literature*. Cambridge UP, 2008.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (Jan. 19-25): Alexander Pushkin, [“The Bronze Horseman”](#) (1837); [poetry](#) (see list on D2L)
Recommended: Emerson, pp. 1-10

Week 2 (Jan. 26-Feb. 1): *Eugene Onegin* (1825-32)
Recommended: Emerson, pp. 99-106
Paper proposal due

Week 3 (Feb. 2-8): Mikhail Lermontov, *A Hero of Our Time* (1840); [poetry](#) (see list on D2L)
Recommended: Emerson, pp. 108-14
Translation Comparison Due

Week 4 (Feb. 9-15): Nikolai Gogol, [“The Nose”](#) (1836) and [“The Overcoat”](#) (1842)
Recommended: Emerson, pp. 114-18

Week 5 (Feb. 16-22): Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Children* (1862)

Week 6 (Feb. 23-Mar. 1): Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground* (1864)
Recommended: Emerson, pp. 125-37, 153-55
Close reading paper due

Week 7 (Mar. 2-8): Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886); start reading *Hadji Murat*
Recommended: Emerson, pp. 137-46

Spring Break, March 9-15

Week 8 (Mar. 16-22): Tolstoy, *Hadji Murat* (1896-1904)
Recommended: Emerson, pp. 146-53

Week 9 (Mar. 23-29): Anton Chekhov, *Ward Six and Other Stories* (1880s-90s)
Recommended: Emerson, pp. 156-65
Annotated bibliography due

Week 10 (Mar. 30-Apr. 5): *The Dedalus Book of Russian Decadence*
Recommended: Emerson, pp. 166-71
Outline due

Week 11 (Apr. 6-12): Andreyev, *The Red Laugh* and "The Abyss"; modernist poetry (see list on D2L)
Post Rough Draft for Peer Review

Week 12 (Apr. 13-19): Zamyatin, *We* (1924)
Recommended: Emerson, pp. 171-75

Week 13 (Apr. 20-26): Kharms, *[The Old Woman](#)* and [stories](#) (1930s), start reading *The Slynx*
Rough draft due

Week 14 (Apr. 27-May 3): Tatyana Tolstaya, *The Slynx* (2000)

Week 15 (May 4-10): Victor Pelevin, *The Hall of the Singing Caryatids* (2008)
Recommended: Emerson, pp. 238-43, 247-49

Monday, May 11 at 11:59 p.m.: Final paper due

Course Requirements

1. Attendance, 5%. We will meet via Zoom on Mondays, 6-7 p.m. Our first meeting will be on Jan. 19 (Martin Luther King Day).

2. Discussion, 40%. There will be two discussion forums each week, as follows:

> **a) Open discussion questions (15%).** I will begin this forum by posting a question about the text. You should answer one question—mine or another student's, then post one question of your own. Responses should be at least 100 words in length and must supported with evidence from the text (also known as "textual support").
>
> Your question should stimulate open discussion. Therefore, it should not be a yes/no question, a factual question, or a hypothetical question. If you wish to ask a factual question, you may post it in the forum for me to answer, but it will not count toward the assignment. A hypothetical question is one that uses a "would have" construction, such as

"What do you think would have happened if Harry Potter's parents had not been magicians?" On the other hand, the phrase "do you think" often makes a question better. Compare, for instance, "Why does Harry disobey?" (implies one "correct" answer) vs. "Why do you think Harry disobeys?" (asks for an opinion). Personal questions may have their place, but consider whether they really involve critical thinking. Compare, for instance, "What would you do if you were fighting a dragon?" (poor) vs. "How would you compare the circumstances of the characters in Boccaccio's *Decameron* during the Black Plague to your experience during the Covid pandemic?" (good). Prompts do not necessarily need to be in question form; for instance, "Characterize Harry Potter" is a valid "discussion question."

You may opt not to participate in the general Q&A discussion five times during the semester. Specifically, at the end of the course, I will manually replace your five lowest grades for the general discussion requirement with 100%.

b) Close reading passages, 25%. I will begin the forum by posting a passage from the text. You should offer a close reading of one passage—mine or another student's, then post one passage of your own for close reading. Your close reading should be at least 200 words in length and be supported with evidence from the text. Later in the week, I may post a second passage for you to choose from.

You may opt not to participate in these discussions five times during the semester. Specifically, at the end of the course, I will manually replace your five lowest grades for the close reading passage discussion requirement with 100%.

Submit at least one initial response (general question or close reading), one general discussion question, and one close reading passage (that's at least three posts) each week by **Thursday at 11:59** at the latest. Then respond to at least one other question or close reading passage and continue the discussions with at minimum one other student (that's at least two more posts) by **Sunday at 11:59 p.m.** at the latest. One proven effective way that you may choose to use to respond to others is the "3C+Q method": Compliment, Comment, Critique, and Question. Please start working on the discussion early so that there will be posts for everyone to respond to. The sooner you start posting, the more productive our discussions will be. In general, as applicable, please try to cover the first half of the assigned work for the week in your initial posts and the second half in your second posts. You should also read all of the discussion posts for each week.

Your responses will be graded using a rubric. Grades will be based on the number of high-quality responses you post, your ability to develop discussions, your ability to support your points with textual evidence, and (least important) the mechanics and organization of your responses.

In addition to these forums, we will also have an ungraded "Student Lounge" forum where you may discuss anything you want.

3. Translation comparison, 10% (2-3 pp). You will write a comparison of two or more translations of a passage that I will provide for you. Use your close reading skills to discuss specific choices made by the translators and their effect. I will provide prompts to help guide you.

4. Close reading paper, 15% (3-4 pp.). You will write a formal close reading paper on a passage of your choice. You may choose to develop one of your discussion board responses, and you may use a passage that was posted on the discussion board. You may not use the passage on which you wrote the translation comparison paper.

5. Final paper, 30% (10-12 pp., not counting the Works Cited page). This will be your project throughout the semester. At the beginning of the semester, look through the reading list and secondary literature, do a little googling, and decide what you would like to write your paper on. Your paper must offer an interpretation of at least one of the works we have read for this course, and it must include at least one page in total of close reading in support of your thesis. Your thesis must be interpretative: this is not a fact-based research paper. You will integrate secondary sources into your paper, either using them as support for your argument or refuting them. You must use MLA format, including in-text citations. You will write the paper in several stages, as follows:

> **a) Proposal, not graded.** You will submit a proposal of about 200 words, and I will give you feedback.

> **b) Annotated bibliography, 5%.** You will submit an annotated bibliography of at least 5-7 peer-reviewed sources in MLA format. See my list of recommended secondary literature to get you started. You may use these sources for your paper, and you are welcome to include your own sources as well, if you wish.

> **c) Outline, 5%.** You will submit an outline of your paper, and I will provide feedback.

> **d) Peer Review, 5%.** You will post a rough draft to a forum for peer review, and comment on at least two other students' papers.

> **e) Rough draft, 5%.** You will submit a rough draft, and I will provide feedback.

> **f) Final draft, 10%.** Your final draft must use at least three peer-reviewed sources.

Course Policies

Individual Assistance: I will be more than happy to meet with you by Zoom or in person to discuss anything at all. Please email me to set up an appointment.

Late Assignment Policy: Late assignments will be marked down one third of a letter grade per day, including weekends and holidays (i.e., A > A-), unless you have a good reason for lateness and have preferably spoken to me about it beforehand. This includes discussion posts.

Academic Dishonesty: Plagiarism is the use of someone else's thoughts, words, ideas, or lines of argument in your own work without appropriate documentation (a parenthetical citation at the end and a listing on the Works Cited page), whether you use that material in a quote, paraphrase, or summary.

Since writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, AI-generated submissions are not permitted and will be treated as academic dishonesty, the

penalty for which is a zero on the assignment. However, you are permitted to use AI in an ethical manner, specifically:

- You may use Grammarly and/or other spelling and grammar checkers, including those on Google Docs, but you may not use them to "rewrite" your paper or change the "tone" (that is, to "make it sound more academic," etc.);
- You may use AI to generate ideas. For example, you may put your topic into ChatGPT and ask for some ideas, and you may ask it follow-up questions.
- You must always cite any AI usage in MLA style.

Be aware, however, of the following drawbacks of AI:

- AI is often inaccurate. Check everything you find through AI with other sources;
- AI tends to "hallucinate" sources—that is, it is known to come up with sources that do not actually exist;
- AI tends to confirm what you already believe ("confirmation bias");
- Grammarly may give you suggestions that actually change the meaning of what you wrote, so always check it carefully;
- Similarly, do not simply accept everything Grammarly suggests. You will not learn anything that way. Go over each suggested change and make sure you understand it and agree with it before you accept it;
- AI is NOT private. Do not put any personal information into AI chats.

Email Communication: I will communicate with you through D2L email. You should set up D2L so that D2L emails are delivered to your preferred email account. You are responsible for checking your email or D2L daily for any reminders, clarifications, or other communications from me.

Safe Zone Statement: This online course is a "safe zone" in which all students will be treated and will treat one another equally, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, political beliefs, age, or ability. Diversity of thought is encouraged.