

**RUSS 217 Russia's Eternal Questions
Fall 2021****Prof. Laura Beraha**
688 Sherbrooke West, Room 335
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Mikhail Nesterov, *In Rus': The Soul of the Russian People*
(1914-1916)

Office hours

Wednesdays: 11:30am—2:00pm (in person)
Thursdays: 7:00—8:00pm (online)
or by appointment (by email)

Class schedule

T/Th 1:05—2:25pm
Tuesdays online
Thursdays on campus (688 Sherbrooke West, Room 491)

Pre-Requisites: None.**Credit Weight:** Three

Calendar Overview: Exploration of cultural archetypes defining continuity and change from Peter the Great to the present; the Russian national identity, double-faith, Western and Slavophile interests, Mother Russia, superfluous men and the Eternal Feminine, anarchism, Stalinism. Recurring themes traced in literature, art, film, music, pop culture and the applied arts.

Course Delivery: This course has been designated as a hybrid or blended course, with Tuesday classes held online via Zoom and Thursday in-person meetings on campus. Required texts are available for purchase at the LeJames bookstore (see below), all other course materials have been posted online, including the shorter required texts, films, film clips and powerpoints that offer previews for and reviews of lectures. The online platform will be MyCourses.

Course content is divided into separate modules, each with primary texts (original works of literature, film, music and art); background readings; fact sheets to help you keep track of terms, dates and the like; reading guides, and powerpoint previews.. In the General Course Information module you'll find, besides this Course Outline, topic menus and guidelines for all assignments, and a Target Term Schedule.

Instructional method:

Russian culture sees itself as an ongoing quest for meaning. These are its “eternal questions,” and our goal will be to engage with it, even argue back on these, its own terms. So for each class, online or on campus, come prepared for an *informed* debate; read, watch or listen to the required materials as set out on the Target Term Schedule.

Reading Guides will be posted in the relevant modules. The questions on them do not require written answers; rather they are intended to serve as conversation starters, to provide food for thought and stimulate class discussion. They are also reflected in the powerpoint previews and fact sheets supplied in each module.

In class, -- again, either online or on campus, -- we'll start with a review of the assigned readings, your questions on them and/or points that need to be clarified from previous sessions. From the powerpoint preview, I will summarise the key concepts and points of interest. We'll pause for further questions, often breaking into small discussion groups or conducting in-class polls.

MyCourses: All students registered in this course have automatic access to its MyCourses site. The general address is <http://www.mcgill.ca/mycourses>. I will be updating course materials (assignment topics, reading guides, fact sheets, powerpoint preview printouts, etc.) *regularly* throughout the term, so be sure check in good time before *each* class. Class announcements will be posted on a regular basis in the ‘Announcements’ section of the home page; the site also includes an email function for contacting me, the instructor.

Zoom

Here’s what you will need to do before the start of classes:

- create a basic account by clicking on the following link: <https://mcgill.zoom.us/>. You must sign in with your McGill username/password.
- read this article on [getting started](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362033-Getting-Started-on-Windows-and-Mac). If the link does not work, go to: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362033-Getting-Started-on-Windows-and-Mac>
- you can also check out the McGill-specific tips and guidelines at <https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources/learning-zoom>,
- please note: if for technical reasons (insufficient bandwidth, lack of a microphone or built-in camera) you cannot participate in an online discussion on Zoom, you can always use the chat function to raise a question during our online meetings. Please let me know if you have any concerns in this area.
- the above applies as well to those of you who have privacy concerns

Zoom etiquette:

- use only your official McGill Zoom with your full name.
- if you so choose, you do not need to use your camera over Zoom.
- please turn your microphone off when you are not speaking.
- please use the wave hand signal or the chat to alert me that you have a question or want to make a comment. I will call on you.
- if you do not have a microphone, you can use the chat function to engage with the Zoom conversation. I will happily include chats into the broader discussion.

Polling

We’ll be using in-class polling to jump start discussions, compare opinions, gather feedback – in a word, to keep things truly interactive. For on-campus classes you’ll need to bring your personal devices (smartphone, tablet or laptop) and make sure they are charged. To participate in polling sessions, you *must* first register for an account by clicking on Register Your Account at www.mcgill.ca/polling and log in with your McGill username and password. Follow the prompts to agree to the terms of use and create your account.

For more information, please visit the Getting Started for Students section at www.mcgill.ca/polling. For any technical problems contact the IT Service Desk: <http://www.mcgill.ca/it/get-started-it/need-help>. If you do not have a phone, tablet, or laptop to use to respond to polling questions, please contact me immediately in order for appropriate arrangements to be made.

To maintain a safe and respectful classroom environment, please ensure that any polling responses you submit are appropriate and relevant to the question asked. Please note that unless the poll is labelled as anonymous, your responses are identifiable to the instructor. Please see the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#).

Required Texts: available at Le James bookstore: <https://lejames.ca/> use the search term RUSS 217 001

- Anton Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard* in his *Five Plays*, trans. Ronald Hingley (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008) \$8.95
- Boris Pilnyak, *Naked Year* (New York: Overlook Press, 2013) \$24.00
- Please be sure to buy these editions, so that we can anchor our discussions in specific page references.

Required Film-Screenings: see the Reserve function in the top navbar on our MyCourses home page.

- By or before 16 September: Andris Liepa, re-creation (2002) of the 1910 *Ballets russes* production of *Firebird* (choreographer Michel Fokine, composer Igor Stravinskii)

- By or before 16 November— Georgii Danelia, *Autumn Marathon* (1979)
- By or before 02 December — Aleksandr Sokurov, *Russian Ark* (2002)

➔ You will be required to watch the films above by or before their in-class discussion due dates. Filmed materials are an important part of this course. Their content will show up on pop quizzes and should be reflected in your essay, at least one of your Reading Responses (see below) and written taken-home exam.

Topics: The required readings will proceed in a loose chronological order, with parallels drawn from earlier and later periods. The concept areas below represent recurring and intricately overlapping themes that will help us to define patterns of continuity and change in Russian culture. While they have been keyed to the required readings, they are by no means limited to the individual texts--in fact, the aim is to encourage you use these concept areas to make links and associations among and around the required texts and background readings.

Concept Areas

- National Identity (Land and People)
- Folk and Faith (Russian folk culture, “dual-faith”)
- Class issues (peasantry, nobility, intelligentsia)
- East vs. West (Europe vs. Asia, Slavophiles vs. Westernisers)
- Continuity and Change

Method of evaluation: see detailed descriptions below

Reading Responses (200 words) by or before 28 September, 21 October, and 09 November	20%
Essay (7 pages, 1750 words) due 18 November	25%
Pop quizzes (four at intervals throughout the term)	15%
Participation / contributions	15%
Take-Home Exam set by the University at the end of term, requested for 13 December	25%

McGill’s Teaching and Learning Services office stipulates that one credit requires about 45 hours of student work, which comes to 135 hours over the entire term. These 135 hours include all contact time for a course (i.e. class meetings), as well as the time you spend doing assignments and preparing and reviewing for the course as a whole.

READING RESPONSES

(200 words) to be posted on the Discussion Board of our MyCourses site, in three separate forums, closing on 28 September, 21 October and 09 November). This is your opportunity to dig deeper into and engage on a more independent level with into our course texts. For the purposes of this exercise a *cultural text* is a literary work, a scholarly article, picture, painting, sculpture, song or even a building. A strong response will point to a passage or aspect of the text that strikes you challenging, paradoxical or simply overlooked in class discussions; it will explain why the issue or passage strikes you as significant to the development of the broad concepts discussed in class to date and will offer a possible solution or approach to resolving the issue. You are asked to focus your response in three categories, in the order which best suits your interests. In other words, any category can be used in any forum. The categories are: visual (film, film clips, works of art; a literary text other than “Bronze Horseman,” “Lefty” and *Cherry Orchard* and background readings (see the Course Materials List). Note that in each category you are *strongly* encouraged to draw links between themes or motifs reflected across different media (literature, film, painting, etc.).

Evaluation criteria include clarity, specificity, lack of repetition or unfounded generalisations, appropriateness of your choice of supporting examples.

On the class after a reading response forum closes, you will be polled, anonymously, on the post you found most useful (insightful, intriguing or engaging). We will then discuss the three top posts in a subsequent class. The forums will later be re-opened so that you can refer back to them, even add comments to them.

ESSAY

(5 pp, double-spaced, standard 12-point font, 1250 words, 19 November)

Topics based on the reading guides for three of the major literary texts from the Required Readings (Pushkin's "Bronze Horseman," Leskov's "Lefty" and Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard*) will be posted in advance. The essay will challenge you to combine a close reading of your chosen work with parallels in other texts and/or media from among the course materials discussed over the term. Please feel free to consult me if you would like assistance in formulating your argument. A two-page, point-form outline is due one week in advance. Evaluation criteria will include accuracy in referring to concepts, terms and time frames; lack of superficial generalisation; selection and scope of supporting evidence drawn from course materials; originality and persuasiveness of your argument; evidence of independent research and engagement with the material.

POP QUIZZES

4 quizzes will be held online at random intervals throughout the term. You will be assessed on a best 3 out of 4. Content may include analysis of brief passages from a text or film, individual paintings or posters, definitions of terms presented in class or in the assigned readings. Evaluation criteria will include accuracy in referring to assigned concepts, terms and time frames, as well as lack of superficial generalization.

PARTICIPATION / CONTRIBUTIONS : Regular and focused engagement are essential components of this course. Although I will not be taking formal attendance this term, I will be tracking it for my own reference. Instead of the assessing you under the usual 'attendance and participation,' we will concentrate on your *robust* participation: impromptu questions you would like to raise, either in person on campus or in the Zoom chatroom for online meetings; your participation in class discussions and polling exercises.¹ There will be an open (no date restrictions) forum on the Discussion Board for your voluntary contributions, such as web discoveries (new online blogs or sites relevant to our course), parallels with other cultures or other approaches in other disciplines (cultural studies, history, etc.)

TAKE-HOME EXAM (To be posted online, submission date set by the University Schedule)

Short essay questions designed to stimulate your drawing links between two or three concept areas developed over the term. No new research is required; rather you will be asked to reflect your term's work over as broad as possible a range of sources: the course materials, your own preparation, your independent development of class discussions, as well as relevant postings in the Reading Responses section of the Discussion Board of MyCourses. The exam will be posted on line and is to be submitted electronically, via the Assignments folder on our MyCourses site.

Reference Texts on Reserve: (available at Humanities and Social Sciences Library Reserve Desk)

- Billington, James H. *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture*. New York: Vintage Books, 1970. DK 32.7 B5 1970
- Evtuhov, Catherine and Richard Stites, ed. *A History of Russia: Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces Since 1800*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004. DK 189 E94 2004
- Figes, Orlando. *Natasha's Dance*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002. DK32 F54 2002
- Hosking, Geoffrey. *Russia: People and Empire 1552-1917*. London: Harper Collins, 1997. DK49 H68 1997
- Helleberg-Hirn, Elena. *Soil and Soul: The Symbolic World of Russianness*. Aldershot, UK and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998. DK 510.33 H45 1988
- Milner-Gulland, Robin. *The Russians*. Oxford, UK and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997. DK 32 M626 1997
- Rzhnevsky, Nicholas, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1998 DK32 C33 1998
 - Sarabianov, Dmitrii V. *Russian Art: From Neoclassicism to the Avant-Garde, 1800-1917, Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*. New York: Abrams, 1990. N6987 S27 1990

¹Transcripts from the chatroom will be posted on MyCourses after each class. Polls will invite either anonymous or named responses.

- Tolz, Vera. *Russia: Inventing the Nation*. London and New York: Oxford UP, 2001. DK61 T64 2001

Administrative notes:

- In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.
- In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.
- Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue)
- McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offenses under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures. For more information, see <http://mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest>.
- L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).
- Since polling records may be used to compute a portion of course grades, **responding as someone other than yourself is considered an academic offense**. During class, possession of more than one response device or using the credentials of another student will be interpreted as intent to commit an academic offense. Please refer to McGill's policy on Academic Integrity and Code of Conduct.
<http://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/plagiarism>
<http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest>
- Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of [copyright](#) can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures."

On another note:

- Here's wishing you an enjoyable and productive term!

Supplemental (optional) reference texts (on Reserve)

References to these texts will occasionally appear in the Reading Guides. They are intended for the enthusiasts who wish to pursue an issue further or to help you prepare your Reading Responses and Essay.

- Billington, James H. *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture*. New York: Vintage Books, 1970. DK 32.7 B5 1970
- Evtuhov, Catherine and Richard Stites, ed. *A History of Russia: Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces Since 1800*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004. DK 189 E94 2004
- Figes, Orlando. *Natasha's Dance*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002. DK32 F54 2002
- Hosking, Geoffrey. *Russia: People and Empire 1552-1917*. London: Harper Collins, 1997. DK49 H68 1997
- Helleberg-Hirn, Elena. *Soil and Soul: The Symbolic World of Russianness*. Aldershot, UK and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998. DK 510.33 H45 1988
- Milner-Gulland, Robin. *The Russians*. Oxford, UK and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997. DK 32 M626 1997

- Rzhevsky, Nicholas, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1998 DK32 C33 1998
- Sarabianov, Dmitrii V. *Russian Art: From Neoclassicism to the Avant-Garde, 1800-1917, Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*. New York: Abrams, 1990. N6987 S27 1990
- Tolz, Vera. *Russia: Inventing the Nation*. London and New York: Oxford UP, 2001. DK61 T64 2001