



McGill

Department of Languages,
Literatures and Cultures
Russian Studies

Russian Literature and Revolution
RUSS 218, Fall 2020

Prof. Laura Beraha
T/Th 10:05—11:25 am Eastern Time Zone

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Virtual office hours (via Zoom)

T 4:30—5:30 pm / Eastern Time Zone

W 12:30—2:00 pm / Eastern Time Zone

Or by appointment (via email)



Kazemir Malevich, *Red Cavalry Riding*
(between 1928 and 1932)

Credits: 3

Prerequisites: None. While some background in Russian culture and/or Russian twentieth-century history is helpful, a totally new perspective (what Russians call a *svezhii glaz* or ‘fresh eye’) will certainly add to what I hope will be a rich diversity of insight and opinion in our group.

This course will be conducted in English.

Calendar Description: Dramatic developments in Russian literature of the 20th century, from revolution, through conformity, to the ironies and anxieties of the post-Soviet era. Comrades, iconoclasts, absurdists, proletarians and aesthetes; the Gulag, the literary café, the music of the spheres, the crumbling Russian village; the re-forging of humanity and the rediscovery of tradition.

Objectives: This course aims to help you--

- acquire a basic familiarity with the historical and literary context of the period
- enhance your skills in literary analysis and appreciation
- draw your own informed conclusions about the works and authors studied
- support those insights in well-argued essays and discussions
- experience some of the sheer intensity of the Russian twentieth century

Instructional Method

Remote learning is new to most, if not all of us. There might be some hiccups and glitches at the beginning, but our aim will be to work through this together in the spirit of friendly cooperation. While I look forward to and aim to incorporate your suggestions and your feedback, here’s the baseline we will be working from.

As you will see from the Target Term Schedule at the end of this syllabus, our course is divided into modules corresponding to the content headings on MyCourses. Each module will include readings from the required text(s), as well as a Reading Guide and required background reading for that author or text. (There are also some optional extras, some for the enthusiast or just for fun.) Each will also feature a required voice-over powerpoint (aka slideshow) or other form of lecture replacement. You are asked to prepare (read, watch or listen to) the required materials *before* the zoom class meeting for a particular date. We will then be able to devote our zoom class meetings to my overview and summary of the highlights of the topic at hand, your questions, close reading exercises, small-group and full-class discussions (using the chat function) and the like.

Questions on the Reading Guides are intended to provide food for thought and stimulate class discussion; you should choose one question (the one that most piques your interest or sparks your protest) or devise one of your own choosing and prepare a brief oral reflection to share, if called upon, in class. In order to promote the habit of close reading, your reflection (or your question) should be supported by a specific passage and/or motif, plot detail or twist, or reference to a period theme. If you do not have time to present your reflection during our class meeting, you can turn it into the basis of a discussion post.

Remote Learning Resources

MyCourses: All students registered in this course have automatic access to its online site on the MyCourses platform. The general address is <http://www.mcgill.ca/mycourses>. Here is where you will find instructions for getting on board: <https://www.mcgill.ca/mycourses/tips-students>.

MyCourses will be our hub for assignments, discussions, course materials (under Content), quizzes, announcements, emails and general course information – for everything you need to access on your own time. Please familiarise yourself with these basic functions on our site.

Zoom: We'll be holding online meetings* via Zoom, also accessible on our MyCourses site. 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](#). 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>
- 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 have privacy concerns

* If you are unable to attend a Zoom meeting in real time, recorded voice-over powerpoints are available on MyCourses in the Content modules for individual authors. Transcripts of the chats held in real-time meetings and other records will also be made available. I anticipate that we will use most of the hour and twenty minutes allotted on our course schedule for Zoom meetings at the beginning of the term. This might drop off as we get into an established rhythm. If you have any concerns please don't hesitate to email me or talk to me during my virtual office hours.

Zoom etiquette:

- only use your official McGill Zoom with your full name.
- upon entering, please write in the chat saying “here” or “present” or even just “hi” so I have a record of everyone who is there (I do not record the meetings, but I do keep the chats).
- 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, feel free to use the chat function to engage with the Zoom conversation. I will happily include chats into the broader discussion.
- I will not record class time to ensure the privacy of all students, and I do not consent to having the class recorded. Zoom discussions are live events and are meant to be ephemeral.

Required Texts

- RUSS 218 Course Pack
- Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, trans. Diana Burgin and Katherine Tiernan O'Connor. New York: Vintage Books, 1996. Also available in digital format at <https://www.ebooks.com/en-ca/book/209675012/the-master-and-margarita/mikhail>
- Venedikt Erofeev, *Moscow to the End of the Line*, trans. H. William Tjalsma. Evanston, ILL: Northwestern UP, 1994. **Also available as a supplemental Course Pack for this course.**

You can order the books and course pack online from the LeJames bookstore at <https://lejames.ca/textbooks>. Course packs are available only in digital format. Print copies of *Master and Margarita* can be picked up at the bookstore (<https://lejames.ca/find-us>) or shipped to you (<https://lejames.ca/shipping-information>).

A list of all course readings has been posted to the General Course Information folder on our MyCourses site. Because Russian twentieth-century literature is uniquely time-sensitive, this list includes the dates, where available, of writing or first publication.

Reference Texts:

These are short *optional* readings, excerpts from general histories of Russian twentieth-century literature. They are listed, together with their active URLs and tips on how to use them, in a .pdf file under this heading in the General Course Information module on MyCourses. Some are specified in the Reading Guides for individual authors and/or texts. They are intended to help you orient yourself in the ongoing and ever-evolving debate on the authors, trends and works we'll be discussing.

Topics:

Our course readings range from poems and manifestos, through half-a-page miniatures, to short stories, novellas, and one full-length novel. Areas of interest will include

- an introduction to some of the major figures of the period
- an overview of the central issues: collective vs. individual interests, artist vs. state, civic vs. aesthetic commitment, traditional values vs. the creation of a new art for a new era, democratic vs. avant-garde aims, philistines vs. proletarians; satire vs. the absurd, *byt* or mundane, everyday reality vs. revolutionary euphoria

- an outline of some of the competing literary trends and debates: the last hurrah of symbolism, neo-realism, futurism, ornamental prose, and the strange evolution from modernism through socialist realism to post modernism; a discussion of some of the literary-political catchwords (the positive hero, the Thaw, sincerity, varnishing reality, *samizdat* -- self-publishing, *tamizdat* -- publishing over there, i.e. in the West, *gosizdat* -- publishing via State channels; the 'one or two Russian literatures' debate; 'returned literature'; glasnost)
- the now two-plus-centuries-and-counting debate on the relationship of literature to reality – as reflection, comment, critique, correction or remaking of reality, and most recently, the exploration of alternative realities.

Evaluation method (see descriptions below)

Writing assignment № 1	10%
Writing assignment № 2	15%
Discussion posts	20%
Discussion responses	10%
Spot quizzes	15 %
Take-Home Exam	30%

Grade	Percentages
A	100% - 85%
A-	84% - 80%
B+	79% - 75%
B	74% - 70%
B-	69% - 65%
C+	65% - 60%
D	54% - 50%
F	49% - 0%

Due dates are indicated in the Target Term Schedule at the end of this outline. A topics menu, including guidelines and evaluation criteria (rubrics) will be posted for each assignment in the General Course Information folder on our MyCourses site. You are welcome to pursue a topic of your own choosing, provided you consult with me at least one week in advance of the due date, so that I can help you shape your choice to fit in with the course objectives and required word count.

Writing assignments: These should be **double-spaced** and submitted in **.docx** (Microsoft Word) format via the “Assignments Function” on MyCourses. Writing Assignment № 1 (500 words) will invite you to focus on a single image, motif or passage from a single text from the course readings. For Writing Assignment № 2 (750 words) you will be asked to compare the treatment of a single motif or theme across two of the shorter texts.

Discussion posts: (4 x 250 words). You will have the opportunity to post your reflections on topics, themes and authors covered in our course on the Discussion Board. There will be four occasions (‘topics’ in the MyCourses jargon), spaced throughout the term (see Target Term Schedule). Prompts will be based, sometimes verbatim, on concepts or issues mentioned in the Reading Guides, or—and this I particularly welcome—on your suggestions. You can use our less formal in-class discussions (as recorded in chat transcripts for those of you who cannot attend a Zoom meeting) as a springboard.

Discussion responses: (2 x minimum 100 words). Your thoughtful response to a Discussion post or posts by your fellow students. Cut-off points are indicated on the Target Term Schedule at the end of this syllabus.

Spot quizzes: These will be held online (look at the Quiz function in the top navigation bar on our MyCourses site) at random points throughout the term. Each will be announced a week in advance, will be available on MyCourses for 72 hours, and will

have a set time for completion (usually, in the area of one hour). They will feature short-answer questions on period terms, passage identification, passage or theme analysis geared to specific texts discussed to date in class. You will be assessed on the best three out of four.

Take-home exam (to be set by the University in the examination period). Focusing on the longer works studied this term, two questions will be set – one tracing a central theme over several works, the other concentrating on a theme, image or feature of style in a chosen novella or novel. The topics menu will be posted on the last day of classes; I will ask for a due date at least 10 days after our last class on 01 December.

Administrative Notes:

- 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.
- McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <http://mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest> for more information).
- Note that to support academic integrity, your assignments may be submitted to text-matching or other appropriate software (e.g., formula-, equation-, and graph-matching).
- In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.
- All slides, video recordings, lecture notes, etc. remain the instructor’s intellectual property. As such, you may use these only for your own learning (and research, with proper referencing/citation) ends. You are not permitted to disseminate or share these materials; doing so may violate the instructor’s intellectual property rights and could be cause for disciplinary action.

Target Term Schedule

Numbers in square brackets refer to the texts to be found in the Course Pack

Titles without numbers in square brackets = books under separate cover

Course Materials to prepare before class are found in the relevant module on MyCourses

Each module will include an overview of its concepts and contents.

Module	Date	Topic / Reading	Assignments
1. Introduction	Th 03.09	Course Components: working with MyCourses and Zoom Course content: overview of authors, reputations, period terms Diving into course themes	Submit questionnaire (in the General Course Information folder on MyCourses) After class: Terras, “Realist Tradition” – see Reference Texts
2. Gorky and the coming storm	T 08.09	“Stormy Petrel” [1], <i>Lower Depths</i> , Act I [2]	
	Th 10.09	<i>Lower Depths</i> , Acts II—IV [2]	After class: Russell, “Modernist Tradition” – See Reference Texts

3. Bunin – above the fray	T 15.09	“Gentleman from San Francisco” [3]	Discussion topic № 1 opens
4. Blok – over or into the storm	Th 17.09	“Girl was Singing” and “The Stranger” [4] “The Twelve” [5]	
5. Mayakovsky – drummer boy of the revolution	T 22.09	“Slap” [6] “Cloud in Pants” [7]	Discussion topic № 1 closes
6. Babel – elegy on the frontlines	T 29.09	“My First Goose” [8] “Gedali” [9] “How it Was Done in Odessa” [10]	Writing assignment № 1
7. Olesha – left on the sidelines	Th 01.10	<i>Envy</i> , Part One, ch. I-VI [11]	
	T 06.10	<i>Envy</i> , Part One, ch. VII-XV [11]	Discussion topic № 2 opens
	Th 08.10	<i>Envy</i> , Part Two [11]	After class: Parthé, “Soviet Literature”
8. Satire, the absurd, the metaphysical	T 13.10 Th 15.10	Zoshchenko [12, 13] Kharmis miniatures [14-17] Krzhozhanovsky [18]	Discussion topic № 2 closes
9. Pilniak – the anarchist who came in from the cold	T 20.10	“Mahogany” [19]	
10. Platonov – the naif?	Th 22.10	“Makar” [20] “River Potudan” [21]	Writing assignment № 2
11. Bulgakov – dealing with the devil	T 27.10	“Letter to the Government” [22] <i>Master and Margarita</i> , ch. 1-2	Cut-off point for Discussion Response № 1.
	Th 29.10	<i>Master and Margarita</i> , ch. 3-11	Discussion topic № 3 opens
	T 03.11	<i>Master and Margarita</i> , ch. 12-20	
	Th 05.11	<i>Master and Margarita</i> , ch. 21-32 and epilogue	Discussion topic № 3 closes
12. Shalamov – j'accuse	T 10.11	“Sententious” [23] “Day Off” [24] “Prosthetic Appliances” [25]	
13. Solzhenitsyn – the paragon	Th 12.11	“Matryona’s Home” [26]	Discussion topic № 4 opens
14. Venedikt Erofeev – down the bottle	T 17.11	<i>Moscow to the End of the Line</i>	
	Th 19.11		Discussion topic № 4 closes
	T 24.11		
15. Pietsukh – the aftermath	Th 26.11	“Central-Ermolaevo War” [27]	Cut-off point for Discussion Response № 2.
16. Course wrap up	T 01.12		
Take-Home Exam	TBD		

Here’s wishing you an enjoyable and productive term!