

**Russian Literature and Revolution
RUSS 218, Fall Term 2024**

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Office hours

Tuesdays 10:00 to 11:00 am
Wednesdays 11:30 am to 1:00 pm
Or by appointment (by email)



Kazimir 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 late 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

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 feature a required powerpoint (aka slideshow) or other form of lecture preview. You are asked to prepare (read, watch or listen to) the required materials *before* the class meeting for a particular date. We will then be able to devote 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 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 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 prompt.

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>.

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. Materials will be regularly updated throughout the term, so please be sure to check before each class.

Required Texts: (at the LeJames Bookstore, 680 Sherbrooke West)

- 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>.

**Please use these editions. We will be aiming for lively and wide-ranging but *informed* discussions of texts, anchored in close readings and *specific* references. To do this we all need to be, literally, on the same page.

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.
- 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)

Attendance and participation	10%
Writing assignment № 1 due 26 September	10%
Writing assignment № 2 due 29 October	15%
Discussion prompts	10%
Reflection paper due 19 November	20%
Spot quizzes announced one week in advance	10 %
Take-Home Exam requested for 17 December 2 pm.	25%

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 in advance 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 (500-750 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 (750-1000 words) you will be asked to compare the treatment of a single motif or theme across two of the shorter texts.

Discussion prompts: (100 words). Students will be asked to contribute two discussion prompts in rotation in alphabetical order by surname. A discussion prompt looks ahead to a text or text excerpt to be discussed the following week in class. It is to be posted on a designated Discussion Board forum available on our MyCourses site. The prompt should pose a question of your own choosing (feel free to use the Reading Guides as a starting point), why you think it important, and a suggestion of how you would answer your own prompt yourself.

Reflection paper: (1250 words) Analysis of a specific theme, motif or trend with a primary focus on one of the three longer texts (Bulgakov or Olesha or Erofeev) and parallel or contrasting

examples drawn from three of the shorter texts discussed to that point in class. You may submit an optional outline, provided you email it to the instructor at least one week before the due date. A menu of suggested topics will be posted in advance.

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 two out of three.

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; the deadline, pending approval from the timetabling office, will be requested for Tuesday 13 December at 2:00 pm.

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).
- **GPT Disclosure Agreement:** This class maintains a policy that you may use AI writing tools to assist you in the writing process but that all artificially generated text needs to be explicitly labeled. In handing in your assignment, you agree to disclose the extent to which you used #chatGPT or other AI writing tools in your assignment. All text written by AI must be quoted with the source of the model in parentheses (chatGPT). At the end of your assignment please include the following statement. Failure to adequately disclose your AI use will result in a 0 for the assignment. "This paper used (did not use) AI for the following components of the writing process:" Choose none to three of the following: brainstorming, editing, sentence generation.
- 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*

Module	Date	Topic / Reading	Assignments
Background and Introduction	Th 29.08	Course Components Course content: overview of authors, reputations, period terms Diving into course themes	After class: Terras, “Realist Tradition” – see Reference Texts
Gorky and the coming storm	T 03.09	“Stormy Petrel” [1], <i>Lower Depths</i> , Act I [2]	Submit questionnaire (in the General Course Information folder on MyCourses)
	Th 05.09	<i>Lower Depths</i> , Acts II–IV [2]	
Bunin – above the fray	T 10.09	“Gentleman from San Francisco” [3]	After class: Russell, “Modernist Tradition” – See Reference Texts
Blok – over and into the storm	Th 12.09	“Girl was Singing” and “The Stranger” [4] “The Twelve” [5]	
	T 17.09		
Mayakovsky – drummer boy of the revolution	Th 19.09	“Slap” [6] “Cloud in Pants” [7]	
	T 24.09		
Babel – elegy on the frontlines	Th 26.09	“Crossing the Zbruch” [8] “My First Goose” [9] “Gedali” [10] “How it Was Done in Odessa” [11]	Writing assignment № 1 due 26.09
	T 01.10		
Olesha – left on the sidelines	Th 03.10	<i>Envy</i> , Part One, ch. I-VI [12]	After class: Parthé, “Soviet Literature”
	T 08.10	<i>Envy</i> , Part One, ch. VII-XV	
	Th 10.10	<i>Envy</i> , Part Two	
Fall Reading Break	T 15.10 Th 17.10	No classes	
Satire and the absurd	T 22.10 Th 24.10	Zoshchenko [13, 14] Teffi [15-16] Kharms miniatures [17-19]	
Platonov – the naif?	T 29.10	“Makar” [22] “River Potudan” [23]	Writing assignment № 2 due
Bulgakov – dealing with the devil	Th 31.10	Letter to the Government” [24] <i>Master and Margarita</i> , ch. 1-2	
	T 05.11	<i>Master and Margarita</i> , ch. 3-11	
	Th 07.11	<i>Master and Margarita</i> , ch. 12-20	
	T 12.11	<i>Master and Margarita</i> , ch. 21-32 and epilogue	
Shalamov – j’accuse	Th 14.11	“Sententious” [25] “Day Off” [26] “Prosthetic Appliances” [27]	

* 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.

Solzhenitsyn – the paragon	T 19.11	“Matryona’s Home” [28]	Reflection paper due
Venedikt Erofeev – down the bottle	Th 21.11 T 26.11 Th 28.11	<i>Moscow to the End of the Line</i>	
Pietsukh – the aftermath	T 03.12	“Central-Ermolaevo War” [29]	
Take-Home Exam	Requested for Tuesday 17 December, pending approval by the timetabling office.		

Here’s wishing you an enjoyable and productive term!