



## Petersburg: City of Myth From Peter to Putin



A Fantasy of St. Petersburg, 1942 - Marc Chagall

RUSS 333 - Fall 2022

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Meeting Times and Location: MW 4:05-5:25 p.m., LEA 110

Office Hours: Mondays 10:35-11:35 a.m. and Wednesdays 3:00-4:00 p.m., or by appointment

“St. Petersburg will be my window to Europe.”—Peter I

“St. Petersburg, the most abstract and intentional city on the entire globe.”—Fyodor Dostoevsky

“Everything can change in Petersburg except its weather. And its light. It's the northern light, pale and diffused, one in which both memory and eye operate with unusual sharpness. In this light, and thanks to the directness and length of the streets, a walker's thoughts travel farther than his destination.”—Joseph Brodsky

**Course Description:** This course examines Russian culture through the lens of Saint Petersburg. Saint Petersburg and Moscow have been the two most important cities in Russian history and culture since Peter the Great moved his capital to the newly founded city in the north. Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky, Andrei Bely, Anna Akhmatova, and Josef Brodsky all lived and worked in the city, and all were inspired by it, although not always in a complimentary fashion. Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Modest Mussorgsky, and Dmitri Shostakovich called the city home. Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7 premiered in Leningrad in 1942 in the midst of the 872-day siege of the city during the Second World War. During the late Soviet Period, Petersburg became the epicenter of the burgeoning rock scene, with acts like Victor Tsoi's Kino and DDT. The course will include literature, music, and art works to provide cultural insight into the multi-faced culture of Saint Petersburg. No knowledge of Russian required.

Some big questions we will ponder include: What makes a city? What is it about Saint Petersburg that makes it special? How do history, politics, culture, and/or people affect the structure of a city? How does the actual space, both geographical and constructed, affect the culture, history, politics, and people within a city?



## **Course Objectives:** Students will

- become acquainted with the general topography of Saint Petersburg;
- get to know the general cultural history of Russia and the more specific history of Saint Petersburg over the last three hundred years;
- understand the mythology of Saint Petersburg and its place in Russian (and world) culture;
- learn about the high and low culture of the city, the infrastructure, the languages, the literature, the architecture, the fine arts, the opera, and various other cultural elements;
- learn about the importance of cities more broadly; and
- become well acquainted with the city in the broadest possible way, so that you may ask intelligent questions of native Petersburgers.

## **Structure of the Course and Course Policies**

- Class time will be a mixture of lecture, presentation, discussion, film/media, and other activities designed to hone our skills in literary analysis.
- I am available and always happy to see you in my scheduled office hours, or by appointment if you have a conflict that does not allow you to come at those times. I can be reached by email as well. However, I have a 48-hour email rule, meaning that I may not respond to any given email before 48 hours. If I do not respond before that point, you may email me with the title 48-Hour Rule, and I will respond as quickly as possible.
- No late assignments will be accepted without prior written consent. If you feel you may need an extension, please speak to me well in advance of the deadline.
- In this class we will be discussing cultural and political issues. While robust debate is good, you are expected to respect your classmates' rights to their opinions and beliefs. This includes not interrupting people, dominating the floor, raising your voice, insulting, threatening, etc. University is a place where we are expected to experiment with ideas, meaning that we are free to be wrong.
- You may bring a laptop to class, but please restrict use to class-related activities. Under no circumstances should you be texting, playing games, checking social media, checking your email, surfing the web, talking on the phone, or otherwise engaging in activities that are unrelated to what is happening in class.
- Please turn off your phone when you enter the classroom.

## **Assignments**

- **Class Participation:** This course is based on the premise that Russian literature cannot be passively absorbed but must be actively engaged with. To that end, attendance and class participation are essential components of the class. You are expected to have completed the assigned reading before coming to class and to arrive each day prepared to discuss it. Please bring the reading with you to class.
- **Quizzes:** As a way of ensuring that students have done all the readings, there will be a series of short quizzes randomly distributed throughout the semester. Cumulatively, these will account for 20% of your grade. To fail one or two will not make much difference in your final grade, but to fail several will.

- **Midterm:** The midterm will be a 5-7-page paper on the literary readings from the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the course. More details will be handed out as we finish Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk*.

Grade	Percentages
A	100%-85%
A-	84%-80%
B+	79%-75%
B	74%-70%
B-	69%-65%
C+	64%/-60%
C	59%-55%
D	54%-50%
F	49%-0%

- **Presentation:** Your presentation may take the form of Pecha Kucha - a presentation format in which a speaker shows 20 images for 45 seconds each.

The images advance automatically, and the speaker talks along to the images. The rigid format forces the speaker to be both creative and disciplined. You will create a Pecha Kucha presentation based on library research. The assignment is designed to help you both deepen your knowledge of the course material and refine and practice your oral presentation skills. You are encouraged to pick a topic that connects to your personal or academic interests. See the assignment sheet for details.

- **Final Project:** The final project will be in a form of your choosing: an essay, a video essay or documentary, infographic, podcast, interactive timeline—or another medium that I can bring home to grade. The project will be accompanied by an **artist's statement** of about 3 pages. In it you will explain 1. Why the medium is a good fit for your argument, 2. How you see your argument enhanced by the medium, and 3. How the medium limits your argument. The topic and format must be approved by the instructor by **Wednesday, November 16** at the very latest.

**A Quick Word on the Assignments:** I have chosen a variety of assignments for this course because the standard literary analysis essay is less useful in a variety of careers than it once was. Instead, I am trying to offer other writing/analytical formats that will help students in a variety of careers.

### **Final Grade Breakdown**

- Attendance and participation: 10%
- Quizzes: 20%
- Presentation: 15%
- Midterm Paper: 20%
- Final project: 35%

### **Required Materials:**

Three essential books are available for purchase at The Word (469 Milton St, Montreal, QC, H2X 1W3). I have chosen to have the books for purchase at The Word because it supports an independent, local bookstore. Please be aware that The Word takes **cash or check only**.

- Alexander Pushkin, *The Queen of Spades and Other Stories*, trans. by Alan Myers, Oxford, 2009
- Nikolai Gogol, *The Diary of a Madman, The Government Inspector, and Selected Stories*, trans. by Ronald Wilks, Penguin Classics, 2005
- Fedor Dostoevsky, *White Nights and Other Stories*, trans. by Constance Garnett, Dover, 2008

- Fedor Dostoevsky, *Poor Folk and Other Stories*, trans. by David McDuff, Penguin Classics, 1989

These books are also available at the Humanities and Social Sciences Library.

All other readings and videos will be made available to students via myCourses.

### **McGill policy statements:**

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 [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information). (approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)

*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/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)).*

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As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009.

End-of-course evaluations are one of the ways that McGill works towards maintaining and improving the quality of courses and the student's learning experience. You will be notified by e-mail when the evaluations are available on Mercury, the online course evaluation system. Please note that a minimum number of responses must be received for results to be available to students.

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. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives. (Approved by Senate on 21 January 2009 - see also the section in this document on Assignments and Evaluation.)

*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 is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

*L'Université McGill est sur un emplacement qui a longtemps servi de lieu de rencontre et d'échange entre les peuples autochtones, y compris les nations Haudenosaunee et Anishinabeg. Nous reconnaissons et remercions les divers peuples autochtones dont les pas ont marqué ce territoire sur lequel les peuples du monde entier se réunissent maintenant.*

### **Health and Wellness Resources at McGill**

Student well-being is a priority for the University. All of our health and wellness resources have been integrated into a single Student Wellness Hub, your one-stop shop for everything related to your physical and mental health. If you need to access services or get more information, visit the Virtual Hub at [mcgill.ca/wellness-hub](http://mcgill.ca/wellness-hub) or drop by the Brown Student Services Building (downtown) or Centennial Centre (Macdonald Campus). Within your faculty, you can also connect with your Local Wellness Advisor (to make an appointment, visit [mcgill.ca/lwa](http://mcgill.ca/lwa)).

Additional policies governing academic issues which affect students can be found in the McGill Charter of Students' Rights" (The Handbook on Student Rights and Responsibilities is available here <https://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/rights>).

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

### **Daily Schedule:**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Day of Week</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>In Class</b>	<b>Homework/Reading Due</b>
1	Wednesday	31-Aug	Class Introduction:	
2	Wednesday	7-Sep	Overview of the History of Saint Petersburg	Watch Tourist Video
3	Monday	12-Sep	Peter the Great and the Founding of Saint Petersburg	Dmitry Shvidkovsky--"The Founding of Saint Petersburg and the History of Russian Architecture"
	Wednesday	14-Sep	Pushkin	"The Bronze Horseman"
4	Monday	19-Sep	Pushkin	"The Queen of Spades"
	Wednesday	21-Sep	Gogol	"Nevsky Prospect"
5	Monday	26-Sep	Gogol	"The Overcoat" & "The Nose"
	Wednesday	28-Sep	Gogol	"Diary of a Madman"
6	Monday	3-Oct	Nekrasov, Belinsky, and Herzen—St. Pete as center of ideas and mythos Dal--Petersburg Yardkeeper Nekrasov--The Petersburg	Nekrasov, Belinsky, and Herzen—St. Pete as center of ideas and mythos

			Corners Herzen--Moscow & Petersburg	
	Wednesday	5-Oct	Dostoevsky	“White Nights”
7	Thursday	13-Oct	Dostoevsky	“White Nights” film
8	Monday	17-Oct	Dostoevsky	“Poor Folk”
	Wednesday	19-Oct	Tchaikovsky & the Rise of Music	Watch <i>Pique Dame</i>
9	Monday	24-Oct	Silver Age Poetry	Selections from Akhmatova & Blok
	Wednesday	26-Oct	Avant-Garde Petersburg	Linda Boersma-- <i>0,10: The Last Futurist Exhibition of Painting</i>
	Friday	28-Oct	<b>Midterm Paper Due</b>	
10	Monday	31-Oct	REVOLUTION!	Watch <i>10 Days That Shook the World</i>
	Wednesday	2-Nov	Petersburg and Revolution Zoshchenko	Watch <i>The End of Petersburg</i> Selected Zoshchenko from <i>Sentimental Tales</i>
11	Monday	7-Nov	Russian Emigrés	Selected Nabokov from <i>Other Shores</i>
	Wednesday	9-Nov	The Siege!	Watch <i>900 Days</i>  Akhmatova, <i>Poem without a Hero</i> , Listen to Shostakovich’s 7th Leningrad Symphony
12	Monday	14-Nov	Brodsky and Piter	Selected Brodsky
	Wednesday	16-Nov	The emergence of Rock’n Roll, zastoi - Dovlatov	Watch <i>LETO</i>
			<b>Final Project Proposal Due</b>	
13	Monday	21-Nov	The wild 90s	Watch <i>Brat</i>  *Watch TV series <i>Banditskii</i>

				<i>Peterburg</i>
	Wednesday	23-Nov	Contemporary Piter	Watch <i>The Stroll</i>
14	Monday	28-Nov	Contemporary Piter	Selected <i>St. Petersburg Noir</i>
	Wednesday	30-Nov	NO CLASS!	Work on Final Project
15	Monday	5-Dec	Final Class, wrap-up <b>Final Project Due</b>	Watch <i>Russian Ark</i>