



McGill

Department of Languages,
Literatures and Cultures
Russian Studies

Russia's Utopia Complex RUSS 381, Fall 2022

Prof. Laura Beraha
T/Th 8:35 – 9:55 am
SH 688 Room 495

Office hours

T 1:30 – 2:30 pm
W 10:00 -- 11:00 am / Eastern Time Zone
Or by appointment (via email)

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Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Tower of Babel* (1563)
Vladimir Tatlin, *Monument to the Third International* (1919-1920)

Office: 688, rue Sherbrooke ouest, bureau 335.

Credits: 3

Prerequisites: A 200-level course in Russian literature or culture, or literature or culture in the European or Asian traditions. This course will be conducted in English.

Calendar description: From Zamiatin's *We* (1921), and Dostoevskii's "Grand Inquisitor" (1880), an examination of the Russian creation of and imprint on the utopian/dystopian genre. From prototypes in Russian romanticism and folklore, to dissident masterpieces of the Stalinist era, to sci-fi as rediscovered in the post-Soviet experience. Literature, film and beyond.

Required texts: Available at LeJames, the McGill University Bookstore, 680 rue Sherbrooke ouest.
<https://lejames.ca/textbooks>.

- Coursepack under this course number and title.
- Alexander Bogdanov, *Red Star: The First Bolshevik Utopia*, trans. Charles Rougle. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984. Also available as an eBook https://www.ebooks.com/en-ca/book/209521725/red-star/alexander-bogdanov/?_c=1
- Tatyana Tolstaya, *The Slynx*, trans. Jamey Gambrell. New York: New York Review of Books, 2003. Also available as an eBook at <https://www.kobo.com/us/en/ebook/the-slynx>
- Vladimir Sorokin, *Day of the Oprichnik*,¹ trans. Jamey Gambrell. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011. Also available as an eBook at https://www.ebooks.com/en-ca/book/654448/day-of-the-oprichnik/vladimir-sorokin/?_c=1
- Kindle editions of *Red Star*, *Slynx* and *Day of the Oprichnik* are also available on Amazon.ca.
- Online texts to be downloaded from the MyCourses site for this course.

¹ Some of you may object to this novel's depictions of sexual and other forms of violent assault. If this is the case, please let me know so that we can together choose an alternative.

Course objectives: Upon completion of this course you should feel confident in your ability to --

- articulate and defend your own evolving response to and interpretation of the core assumptions of utopian fiction in the Russian context and beyond
- appreciate utopian fiction as a literary genre, its range of plot components, variations and themes
- accept (or reject!) genre not as a straightjacket but as a test case and sounding board across generations
- recognise literary utopia as a challenge to the status of literature in general and the truth values of language itself

Attendance, participation and assignments: Regular attendance and timely submission of assignments are essential not only to your success in this course, but to our group dynamic as a whole. After the drop/add period, unexcused absences (without a doctor's note or letter explaining a family emergency, for example), half a grade point will be deducted in the attendance and participation category for every two unexcused absences. Out of courtesy to your fellow students (and to me!) late arrivals will not be tolerated. Extensions on assignments will not be granted unless my written permission is requested well in advance. Your participation will also be evaluated on the basis of your thoughtful and well-prepared contributions to class discussions and workshops.

Instructional method: As you will see from the Target Term Schedule at the end of this course outline, 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, either in the Coursepack or in the relevant MyCourses module for that author or text. (There are also some optional extras, some for the enthusiast, some just for fun.) Each will also feature a required powerpoint setting out the content of a topic or sub-topic. 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 our 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, 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.

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), 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.

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](#).

Reserve List: available at the Reserve Desk in the Humanities and Social Sciences Library under this course number and the instructor's name. Note that these are *supplementary texts*, intended particularly to help you prepare for your team project and final paper.

- Heller, Leonid, and Niqueux, Michel, *Histoire de l'utopie en Russie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995. HX806 H36 1995
- Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. London and New York: Verso, 2005. PS648 J36 2005.
- Morson, G. S. *Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's "Diary of a Writer" and the Traditions of Literary Utopia*. Evanston, ILL: Northwestern UP, 1981. PG3325 A16 D638 1981b
- Stites, Richard. *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989. DK266.4 S75 1989.

Evaluation scheme (see descriptions by category below)

Attendance and participation	10%
Workshops (20 September, 18 October)	10%
Short paper (25 October)	15%
Team project (08 and 10 November) ²	30%
Summary exercise (01 December)	10%
Final paper (take-home exam)	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 also 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.

Workshops / discussion prompts: (2x 150-200 words). For these exercises the class will be divided into two halves. Those with surnames beginning in A-L, and those with surnames beginning in M-Z. Each of you will be asked to contribute *one* discussion prompt to *one* workshop on the relevant forum on the Discussion Board on MyCourses. In the other workshop, you will be required to participate in the discussion of all prompts either in class or by posting in the relevant forum on the Discussion Board. The two halves of the class will switch roles from prompt to discussion from one workshop to the next. Each prompt and workshop will focus on specific passages in or thematic / historical aspects of a required text. Choose your passage or aspect with a view to looking more closely at its assumptions, its impact, its various interpretations, or its paradoxes and internal contradictions. Ask questions such as: how does this passage

² Subject to adjustment depending on class size.

or aspect shape or challenge your understanding of utopia; what if any solutions does it suggest; what if any further problems does it raise; why in your opinion does it deserve our close attention? We will hold an in-class discussion of the results of this exchange on the date indicated on the Target Term Schedule. Guidelines, dates and evaluation criteria will be posted on MyCourses.

Short Paper: (1250-1750 words, due Thursday 06 October, to be submitted online by 11:59 pm via the Assignments folder on MyCourses). A reflection on a major theme or concept developed in the required course readings and class discussions; you may focus your reflection on a single primary text/passage or trace it across a *maximum* of three primary texts discussed in class to date. A primary text is an original work (literary or critical) that can be said to stand on its own; by contrast a secondary text (e.g. Morson) analyses primary works and their after effects. Suggested topics will be posted in advance. You are warmly encouraged to propose a topic of your own choosing, but must get my written approval in advance—my aim here is to ensure that your topic fits the word limits and parameters of our course.

Team project (presentation and written follow-up): (20 minutes / 2500 words). Team sizes, time and word limits to be finalised after the Drop/Add period. Team recruitment procedures, components, deadlines and evaluation criteria for this multi-stage assignment are set out in detail on the relevant topic menu and guidelines. The aim here is to build on our class discussions, comparing our course texts and/or applying our course concepts to other texts in the Russian tradition or outside it (particularly welcome!). You may also look at works in other media (film, film adaptations, graphic novels, and the like.) You are more than welcome to propose a topic of your own choosing, but you must consult with me *in advance* to make sure your topic fits in with the course parameters and the required word count. A written follow-up is due one week after receipt of feedback from me, the instructor.

Summary exercise: (350 words or powerpoint, maximum 10 slides, to be posted to the designated forum on the Discussion Board on ; presenting with a partner is strongly encouraged.) A final look back on the key concepts and themes as demonstrated or challenged by our required texts, in-class or online discussions and team projects. The exercise is intended to serve as a building block for the Final Paper. For detailed instructions see the Summary Exercise – Topics Menu and Guidelines in the General Course Information Folder on our MyCourses site.

Final paper (Take-home exam): (requested for 15 the University exam scheduling office; 7-10 pages Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced, 1750 – 2500 words). Your chance to critically review the term's work – readings, class discussions and, where relevant, presentations and postings by your fellow classmates. Suggested topics, to be posted in advance, will be based on our course's core (primary) texts. No new research is required.

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/).
- Work submitted for this course may be checked with text-matching software within MyCourses.
- 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.”
- As the instructor of this course I endeavour 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 Student Accessibility and Achievement, 514-398-6009.

Here's wishing you an enjoyable and productive term!

*Target Term Schedule*³

Module	Date	Topic / Reading (prepare <i>before class</i>)	Assignments
First meeting	Th 01.09	Course set-up: powerpoint Course content: powerpoint	
1. Introduction	T 06.09	Morson, “Utopia as a Literary Genre” [1] Orwell, “The Principles of Newspeak” [2]	Return questionnaire
2. Legend, allegory	Th 08.09	Powerpoints: Cave and Kitez (in two parts) Legend of Kitez [3] Plato, “Allegory of the Cave” [4]	Sign-up for the team project begins

³ Numbers in square brackets refer to the texts to be found in the Course Pack. Titles without numbers in square brackets refer to required course materials posted in the relevant module on MyCourses. These include reading guides, powerpoint presentations, and texts provided in pdf format. Author's names in **red font** refer to readings to be purchased under separate cover.

	T 13.09 Th 15.09	Powerpoints: Chaianov (in two parts) Chaianov, <i>Peasant Utopia</i> [5]	Students with surnames from A-L must post discussion prompts for Workshop № 1 Fr 16.09
3. Russian 19 th century	T 20.09	Workshop № 1 Chernyshevsky, “Preface” [6]	
	Th 22.09 T 27.09 Th 29.09	Reading Guide: Vera Pavlovna Powerpoints: Vera Pavlovna (in two parts) Chernyshevsky, Life and Works Chernyshevsky, “Vera Pavlovna’s Fourth Dream” [7] Pelevin, “Vera Pavlovna’s Ninth Dream” [8]	
4. Architecture of the New World	T 04.10	Punin, “Monument to the Third International” Gloveli, “Bogdanov as Scientist and Utopian”	
	Th 06.10	Bogdanov , <i>Red Star</i> , Parts I and II	Sign up for the team project ends
	T 11.10	FALL READING BREAK	CLASS CANCELLED
	Th 13.10	follows Monday schedule	CLASS CANCELLED
	F 14.10	Bogdanov , <i>Red Star</i> , Parts III and IV	Students with surnames from M-Z must submit discussion prompts for Workshop № 2 by Saturday 16.10
5. Dystopia	T 18.10	Workshop № 2 Morson, “Anti-Utopia” [9] Zamiatin, <i>We</i> Records 1-10 [10]	
	Th 20.10	Zamiatin, <i>We</i> Records 11-25 [10]	
	T 25.10	Zamiatin, <i>We</i> Records 26-40 [10] Dostoevsky, “Grand Inquisitor” [11]	Short paper due by 11:59 pm via the Assignments folder on MyCourses
6. Meta-Utopia	Th 27.10 T 01.11 Th 03.11	Platonov, <i>Chevengur</i> pp. 1-120 <i>Chevengur</i> pp. 121-241 <i>Chevengur</i> pp. 242-351	Note that <i>Chevengur</i> is available in pdf format in this module on MyCourses
	T 08.11 Th 10.11	TEAM PROJECT PRESENTATIONS	
7. Post-Soviet Returns	T 15.11 Th 17.11 T 22.11	Tolstaya , <i>Slynx</i> pp. xx-115 <i>Slynx</i> pp. 115-217 <i>Slynx</i> pp. 218-299	
	Th 24.11 T 29.11	Sorokin , <i>Oprichnik</i>	Finalise choice for Summary exercise by Thursday 24.11
			Post Summary exercise on the Discussion board by Monday 28.11
	Th 01.12	Summary exercise – in-class discussion	
	M 12.12	Take-home exam requested – pending approval by the University timetable office	