SL4: Russian Literature and Culture from the Golden Age to the Silver Age

Course Adviser:
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Handbook 2023-24
(updated August 2023)
SL.4: Russian Literature and Culture from the Golden Age to the Silver Age

Introduction
Russian literature came of age in the nineteenth century. Within a few decades (1810s to 1860s), authors went from struggling to develop and refine the literary language, to writing some of the greatest novels of all time. Beginning with Pushkin and the Golden Age of Russian poetry, this course traces the evolution of the Russian literary tradition and the rise of the great Russian novel, culminating with its heyday in the 1860s-70s, and then the return to shorter forms at the end of the century. Students will learn how Russian authors engaged with formal/aesthetic problems and also made literature the site for rich debates about all the pressing concerns of their day: social, psychological, political, scientific, and philosophical.

In order to achieve a balance of depth and breadth, the paper is organized around the study of two set texts and four topics. (There are suggested pathways through the texts and topics tailored to Part IB, option A [ex-ab initio] students).

Overview of Texts and Topics for 2023-24

Set Texts:
A1. Aleksandr Pushkin, Evgenii Onegin (1825-32)
A2. Lev Tolstoi, Anna Karenina (1875-78)

Topics:
B1. Lyric Poetry (1800-40)
B2. Exposing the Need for Reform (1850s)
B3. The Novel of Ideas (1860s)
B4. Short Forms (1880-1910)
Teaching

Weekly lectures in Michaelmas and Lent; weekly revision seminars in Easter.
Ten fortnightly supervisions throughout the year.
Students taking the Long Essay option can discuss adjustments to the schedule below that best accommodate their interests.

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<th>Lecture Schedule</th>
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<td><strong>Michaelmas</strong></td>
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Easter

Revision sessions in lecture slots, Weeks 1-3 (2hrs).
2 x revision supervisions.

Assessment

Assessment by Long Essay instead of final examination is available in this paper for students in Part IB (Options A & B).

The examination is structured as follows: **Section A** will consist of a commentary on one of the set texts and essay questions on the other. **Section B** will offer several questions on each of the prescribed topics as well as more open questions that might be answered with reference to a wide range of texts and periods. All questions in Section B will require candidates to write about at least two texts.

All candidates must answer three questions.

**Students for Part IB (Options A & B) answer:**
1 question from Section A
any other 2 questions (which may include 1 further question from Section A)

**Students for Part II answer:**
1 question on one of the set-texts as a coursework essay (a replacement for Section A)
2 questions from Section B on the prescribed topics during the Easter term exam
Preparatory Reading and General Background
Students are urged to buy and read both Set Texts during the summer (or Year Abroad), as well as any optional longer texts they wish to cover (i.e. *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*). The following reading list serves as an introduction to the subject.


Students should read through a scholarly history of 19th-century Russia such as:


Reading Lists

Using the Reading Lists
The lists below specify Primary and Secondary texts. The lists are extensive but not exhaustive: in other words, you should feel neither daunted nor limited by them!

Sections B & C (Prescribed Authors & Topics)
- Remember that you will be making selections from among the primary texts here; they are not all compulsory reading.
- In particular, students are reminded that the novel *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* by Dostoevskii (B3) is optional. Those who wish to read it should plan ahead.
- Students should consult with their supervisor to select primary texts from the suggested options according to their interests and experience in Russian. Students may also choose to read relevant primary texts that are not listed here in consultation with their supervisor.

Secondary Readings
The suggestions for secondary reading represent a collection of resources and menus of possibilities: no one expects you to do all of the reading below! Your supervisor will help you to orientate yourself within the bibliography, and to use your time efficiently, by suggesting those texts which most closely relate to the themes and approaches that interest you.
Section A: Set Texts


- **Former ab initio students** (i.e. those in Part IB, Option A) are only required to read chapters 1, 2, 7 and 8 in Russian; they must read the entire novel in English in order to follow the plot.
- Recommended translation: James E. Falen (keeps the meter and rhyme scheme)
- In addition, although it does not make for ‘smooth reading’, Nabokov’s literal translation, read side by side with the original, is very helpful: it makes for an excellent primer in reading Russian verse, understanding the flexibility of word order etc.
- Students in Part IB, Option B and Part II should read the entire novel in Russian.

Background, Biography, Reference


Commentary


Other Secondary Readings

(i) Introductory/student survey studies:


(ii) Seminal Russian scholarship:


Lotman (see ‘Commentary’ above)


(iii) Seminal/extensive studies in Western scholarship:


*(iv) Articles with useful, specific focus:*


Ketchian, S. I. “‘What’s Hidden in My Name?:’ Names as a Window into Pushkin’s ‘Evgenij Onegin.’” *Russian Literature* 60, no. 2 (August 2006): 159–183.


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A2: L.N. Tolstoi, *Anna Karenina* (1875-78)
• **Former ab initio students** (i.e. those in **Part IB, Option A**) read at least the extracts specified below in Russian (roughly one third of the novel); they read the entire novel in English in order to follow the plot: Part I: 1-4, 7-11, 13, 16-23, 26-34; Part 2: 7-12, 21-29; Part 3: 1-5, 13-16, 22-25, 31-32; Part 4: 1, 3-5, 9-13, 15-23; Part 6: 3, 7-16, 19-20, 31-33; Part 7: 9-16, 23-31; Part 8: 8-19.

• Recommended translations: either Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky OR Marian Schwartz.

• **Students in Part IB, Option B and Part II** read the entire novel in Russian.

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**Background, Biography, Reference**


**Relevant Theoretical Works (not dealing with Anna Karenina explicitly):**


• For wrestling with ‘Realism’: See also entries for Gustafson, Kliger and Kovarsky below.

**Works which promote something approaching a “comprehensive” reading of the novel, through extensive engagement with the text and/or by dint of interpretative approach:**


On the epigraph:


Other Secondary Readings: use the titles to navigate issues that interest you, or consult your supervisor for recommendations.

- A number of articles appear in editions of the *Tolstoy Studies Journal* (abbreviated below: *TSJ*) [in UL: North Front, Fl 5, P576.b.29]


Emerson, Caryl. “Prosaics in *Anna Karenina*: Pro and Con.” *TSJ* VIII: 150-76.


Herman, David. “Allowable Passions in *Anna Karenina*.” *TSJ* VIII: 5-32.


Section B: Topics

B1: Lyric Poetry (Michaelmas)
Selected poems by Zhukovskii, Batiushkov, Pushkin, Lermontov, Rostopchina. The year in brackets indicates the year of composition.
Poems marked * are suggested for the attention of Part IB, Option A students.

V.A. Zhukovskii
Sel'skoe kladbishche (1802)
Vecher (elegiiia) (1806)

K.N. Batiushkov
*Vyzdorovlenie (1817)
Ten’ druga (1814)
Moi genii (1815)

A.S. Pushkin
Probuzhdenie (1816)
*Ia perezhil svoi zhelan’ia’ (1821)
*K *** <Kern> (la pomnii chudnoe mgnoven’e) (1825)
*Pod nebom golubym (1826)
Prorok (1826)
*Ty i vy (1828)
Stikhi, sochinennye noch’iu vo vremia bessonntsyy (1830)
“Pora, moi drug, pora! pokoia serdtse prosit” (1834)
*“ia pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvorny” (1836)

M.Iu. Lermontov
“Net, ia ne Bairon, ia drugoi” (1832)
*Parus (1832)
Smert’ poeta (1837)
*I skuchno i grustno (1840)
Tuchi (1840)
*“Vykhozhu odin ia na dorogu” (1841)

E.P. Rostopchina
Vstrecha (1837)
Chernovaia kniga Pushkina (1838)
*I on poet! (1840)
*Boius’ (1840)
Kak dolzhny pisat’ zhenshchiny (1840)
Ne skuchno, a grustno (1842)

Secondary Readings

On versification

On poetry

**Works on individual poets**

To set the poets quickly into the contexts in which they were writing, it might be helpful in the first instance to refer to encyclopaedias and other references. For example:


**Zhukovskii**


**Batiushkov**


**Pushkin**


**Lermontov**


**Rostopchina**


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**B2. Exposing the Need for Reform (Michaelmas)**

E. Tur

*Antonina* (1851)

A.N. Ostrovskii

*Groza* (1859)

N.D. Khvoshchinskaia, pseudonym: V. Krestovskii (pseudonym)

*Bratets* (1858) OR *Pansionerka* (1861)

Both Khvoshchinskaia stories will be available in the UL, the MMLL Library, and various college libraries in:

They are also available online at <http://az.lib.ru/h/hwoshinskaja_n_d/text_0050.shtml> and <http://az.lib.ru/h/hwoshinskaja_n_d/text_0060.shtml>.

**Secondary Readings**

**General**

**Tur**

**Ostrovskii**
Leach, Robert and Victor Borovsky (eds.) *A History of Russian Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 [chapters on Realism and on Ostrovskii]

**Khvoshchinskaia**


B3: The Novel of Ideas (Lent)

Core Texts:
Turgenev, Ivan. Otsy i deti (1862).
Dostoevskii, Fedor. Zapiski iz podpol’ia (1864) Part IB, Option A students should read Part I in Russian; Part II may be read in English.
Dostoevskii, Fedor. Prestuplenie i nakazanie (1866) – this long novel is optional, but should be read in the vacation/year abroad by those with a particular interest in Dostoevskii.

General Secondary Readings


Readings Relating this Literature to Current Events
“Don’t Blame Dostoevsky” by Mikhail Shishkin
https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/07/russian-literature-books-ukraine-war-dostoyevsky-nabokov/670928/ (This essay offers justification and praise of Russian
literature.)

“How Should Dostoevsky and Tolstoy Be Read During Russia’s War Against Ukraine?” by Ani Kokobobo
https://theconversation.com/how-should-dostoevsky-and-tolstoy-be-read-during-russias-war-against-ukraine-179932 (This essay offers justification and praise of Russian literature.)

“What Classic Russian Literature Can Tell Us about Putin’s War on Ukraine” by Tim Brinkhof
https://bigthink.com/the-past/russia-literature-ukraine-putin/ (Pits a Tolstoyan worldview against a Dostoevskian one.)

“No Guilty People in the World? Reading Russian Literature After the Bucha Massacre” by Oksana Zabuzhko
https://global-factiva.com.proxy.jbs.cam.ac.uk/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=TLITE00020220422ei4m0005n&cat=a&ep=ASE (This essay is very critical of Russian literature.)

“Novels of Empire: Rereading Russian classics in the shadow of the Ukraine war” by Elif Batuman
https://www.proquest.com/docview/2771047241/CCFF53C016F4FF1PQ/12?accountid=9851 (This essay offers Batuman’s personal experience of rethinking the Russian classics in light of the war with a more critical eye.)

**Turgenev**


**Dostoevsky General Secondary Readings**


**Zapiski iz podpol’ia**

**Prestuplenie i nakazanie**

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**B4: Short Forms (Lent)**
Stories marked * are suggested for the attention of Part IB, Option A students.

A.P. Chekhov
*“Smert’ chinovnika” (1883)*
*“Van’ka” (1886)*
P.D. Khvoshchinskaia
“Semeinaia skorb’” (1879)

N.S. Leskov
“Dukh gospozhi Zhanlis” (1881)
“Levsha” (1881)

S. Smirnova
“Ochertiia golovu” (1897)

L.N. Tolstoi
“Khoziain i rabotnik” (1895)
“Posle bala” (1903)
“Al’easha Gorshok” (1905, pub. 1911)

Leskov


Chekhov
Chekhov, A.P. Letters on the Short Story, the Drama, and Other Literary Topics. Selected and edited by Louis S. Friedland. London: Vision, 1965. [This contains Chekhov’s interesting commentaries on his own writing]


**Tolstoi**


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