SL11: Topics in Nineteenth-Century Slavonic Literature and Culture: Tolstoy

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Preliminary Handbook 2023-24
(created March 2023, to be expanded)
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Introduction
This paper gives students the opportunity to delve deeply into the life and writings of one of Russia’s greatest and most prolific writers, Lev Tolstoy (1828-1910). He not only changed the shape of Russian and world literature, but also impacted political and social movements across the globe. The bulk of the paper will focus on his masterpiece, *Voina i mir* (1865-69), which in its scope and ambitions challenged all the reigning ideas of its time about how history is recorded, how novels are written, and about the individual’s place in the world. Tolstoy’s life was vast; he grew up in a serf-owning gentry family shortly after the Decemberist Revolt and died just years before the Bolshevik Revolution. During that time, he thought and wrote about all the burning questions of his day, so while this paper has a single-author focus, it also gives us the chance to consider most aspects of nineteenth-century Russian literature and culture.

A full year devoted to Tolstoy will enable students to trace the evolution of his thought and writing from his early war stories and experiments in narration, through *Voina i mir*, to the late novellas and non-fiction where he boldly proclaimed his new worldview arrived at after spiritual conversion. It will also offer the space to consider Tolstoy’s legacy through different lenses, from a feminist approach to his writing on women, to a postcolonial examination of his writings about the Caucasus, to an ecocritical examination of his views on nature. For Tolstoy, all the big questions of life—how must I live? what must I do? what is the purpose of science and art? what is religion? how should society be structured?—were open and pressing. Engaging with Tolstoy on his own terms means wrestling with these burning questions anew.

### Overview of Texts and Topics for 2023-24

**Set Text:**
*Voina i mir* (1865-69)

**Topics:**
1. Early writings (pre-1860)
2. Late writings (1880-1910)
Teaching
Weekly lectures in Michaelmas and Lent, except Michaelmas week 5, which will be run as a seminar; weekly revision seminars in Easter. Nine supervisions throughout the year held fortnightly (except Michaelmas week 5/6).

Lecture Schedule

**Michaelmas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Lecture</th>
<th>Supervision</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Intro and Biography</td>
<td>Early war writings</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Early war writings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Narrating the self</td>
<td>Narrating the self</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Diaries and Letters</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>SEMINAR:</strong> preparation for <em>Voina i mir</em> – Tolstoy on his aims</td>
<td>Participation in seminar in place of a supervision</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><em>Voina i mir</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><em>Voina i mir</em></td>
<td><em>Voina i mir</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><em>Voina i mir</em></td>
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**Lent**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Lecture</th>
<th>Supervision</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Voina i mir</em></td>
<td><em>Voina i mir</em></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td><em>Voina i mir</em></td>
<td><em>Voina i mir</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Voina i mir</em></td>
<td><em>Voina i mir</em></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Tolstoy’s spiritual crisis: <em>Ispoved’</em> and <em>Zapiski sumasshedshchevo</em></td>
<td>Post-conversion Tolstoy</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Sex and Art: <em>Kreutzerova Sonata</em> and <em>Chto takoe iskusstvo?</em></td>
<td>Post-conversion Tolstoy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Death: <em>Smert’ Ivana Il’icha</em> and <em>Khoziain i rabotnik</em></td>
<td>Post-conversion Tolstoy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Faith: <em>Otets Sergii</em> and late religious writings</td>
<td>Post-conversion Tolstoy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Returning to war: <em>Hadji Murad</em></td>
<td>Post-conversion Tolstoy</td>
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Assessment
The exam consists of four sections: A, B, C, and D. Section A is comprised of commentary passages and essay prompts about the set text, *Voina i mir*. Section B is comprised of essay prompts about Topic 1, Tolstoy’s pre-1860 writings. Section C is comprised of essay prompts about Topic 2, Tolstoy’s post-1879 writings. Section D is comprised of essay prompts that can be responded to using *Voina i mir* in combination with any other works by Tolstoy.

All students answer three questions.

**Students for Part IB (Options A & B) answer:**

- either 1 or 2 questions from Section A (if 2, one must be a commentary and one an essay question)
- 1 question from section B and/or one question from section C
If you choose to answer only one question in Section A, you may answer 1 question from section D in place of a question from B or C

**Students for Part II** answer:
1 question from Section A and
1 question each from any combination of B, C, or D

Candidates for this paper may not draw substantially on material from their dissertations or material which they have used or intend to use in another scheduled paper. Candidates may not draw substantially on the same material in more than one question on the same paper.
Preparatory Reading and General Background
Students are urged to buy and read the Set Text, *Voina i mir*, over the summer or during the year abroad. The following reading list serves as an introduction to the subject.


Reading Lists

Topics 1 and 2
Remember that you will be making selections from among the primary texts here; they are not all compulsory reading. Suggestions will be made in lectures about different routes through the material.

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. There are also MANY excellent books and articles not listed, so you are encouraged to do your own sleuthing.

The list of secondary readings will be expanded in the final version of the handbook.

Standard edition of Tolstoy’s works

Biographies

**Historical Background**


**Introductory Tolstoy Readings**

General Tolstoy Readings

Set Text

Война и мир (1865-69)
There are numerous editions of this book (of course). You are encouraged to buy a Russian copy so that you can more easily take notes, mark passages, and keep track of where you are in the whole.

For English translations, I recommend either Pevear and Volokhonsky or the Oxford World’s Classics Maude translation edited by Mandelker.

Part IB Students must read the whole text in English and should focus on the following chapters in Russian: T.B.D.

Part II students are encouraged to read the entire novel in Russian, but should focus on the chapters listed for Part IB and also: T.B.D.

Secondary Sources


**Topic 1: Pre-1860 writings**

**Primary Readings**

Севастополь в декабре месяце (1855)
Севастополь в мае (1855)
Набег (1853)
Рубка леса (1855)
*История вчерашнего дня (1851)
Детство (1852)
Три смерти (1859)
Selections from Tolstoy’s Diaries and Letters (T.B.D.)

*Everyone is strongly encouraged to read the short, unfinished «История вчерашнего дня» as a foundational text we will refer back to in thinking about how Tolstoy writes.

**Secondary Sources**


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**Topic 2: Post-1880 writings**

**Primary Readings**

Исповедь (1882)  
Записки сумасшедшего (1883)  
Крейцерова соната (1889)  
Послесловие к «Крейцеровой сонате»  
Что такое искусство? (1898)  
Смерть Ивана Ильича (1889)  
Хозяин и работник (1895)  
Отец Сергий (1898)  
Царство божие внутри вас (1894)

**Secondary Sources**


