

Princeton University
Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures
SLA 221: Soviet Literature, 1917-1965

Spring 2007-2008	Instructor: Petre Petrov
Lectures: Mon, Wed 1:30 – 2:20PM	Office: 231 East Pyne Hall
Precepts: TBA	Tel: 609-258-1605 (with voicemail)
	Email: ppetrov@princeton.edu
	Office hours: Mon 11:00 - 12:00AM, Wed 3:00 - 4:00PM

Credits, Prerequisites, and Format

The course fulfills the University LA (“Literature and the Arts”) distribution requirement. It has no special prerequisites for enrollment, apart from intellectual curiosity and commitment to shaping and sharing your thoughts. Prior familiarity with Russian culture and a knowledge of Russian are a plus, but by no means a must. The class meets three times a week in a format featuring two lectures and one precept. I do not take this to mean that twice a week it will be me speaking and you—just listening and “absorbing knowledge.” On the contrary: I expect discussion to be an integral aspect of both lectures and precepts. Active and intelligent participation in the ongoing dialogue about Soviet literature will be essential for a successful completion of the course.

Course Rationale and Goals

The course aims at acquainting you with major achievements in Russian *belles lettres* in the period 1917-1965, while also tracing principal cultural tendencies and developments during this period. These two goals are not necessarily complimentary. For most of Soviet cultural history, the best works written in Russian occupied not the center of literary life, but its periphery or underground. Conversely, the officially endorsed and acclaimed literature of the period (the literary canon of socialist realism) is, for the most part, an artistically inferior production. The reading list for the course represents a compromise in the face of this dilemma. It includes “masters” marginalized or repressed by the Soviet regime (Zamyatin, Babel, Olesha, Bulgakov, Solzhenitsyn), as well as representatives of the socialist-realist orthodoxy (Mayakovsky, Serafimovich, Gladkov). Surveying this literary field means reopening not just the books of the period, but also the questions raised during this time, questions concerning the place and function of literature and art: about their very mode of being, their “use” and “value,” about their relation to the individual and to society, to ethics and aesthetics, to the productive process, to class identity and ideology, to politics.

Required Readings

0. Fitzpatrick, Sheila. Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *The Russian Revolution*. Oxford UP, 2001.
1. Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Signet, 1998.
2. Mayakovsky, Vladimir. *The Bedbug and Selected Poetry*. Indiana UP, 1975.
3. Zamyatin, Evgenii. *We*. Penguin, 1993.
4. Babel, Isaac. *Red Cavalry and Other Stories*. Penguin, 2006.
5. Olesha, Iurii. *Emvy*. NYRB Classics, 2004.
6. Serafimovich, Aleksandr. *The Iron Flood*. UP of the Pacific, 2001.
7. Gladkov, Fedor. *Cement*. Northwestern UP, 1994.
8. Bulgakov, Mikhail. *The Master and Margarita*. Vintage, 1996.

9. Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2005.
10. Texts in electronic format available through Blackboard Course Materials.

Recommended Readings

SOVIET LITERATURE & CULTURE:

- Brown, Edward. *Russian Literature Since the Revolution*. Harvard UP, 2002.
- Clark, Katerina. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. Indian UP, 2000.
- Groys, Boris. *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*. Princeton UP, 1991.
- James, C. Vaughan. *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory*. St. Martin's Press, 1975.
- Maguire, Robert A. *Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature in the 1920s*. Cornell UP, 1987.

SOVIET HISTORY:

- Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *The Russian Revolution*. Oxford UP, 2001.
- Hosking, Geoffrey. *The First Socialist Society*. Harvard UP, 1985.
- Thompson, John. *A Vision Unfulfilled*. Houghton Mifflin, 1996.

GENERAL REFERENCE:

- *Handbook of Russian Literature*. Ed. Viktor Terras. Yale UP, 1990.
- *Reference Guide to Russian Literature*. Ed. Neil Cornwell. Routledge, 1998.

Course Requirements and Grading

You will be required to

- Complete the assigned reading (normally, around 200 pages per week)
- Participate actively and intelligently in class discussions
- Facilitate seminar discussions during the precept meetings
- Complete the midterm examination
- Submit 5 response papers, approx. 500 words each
- Write a final course paper of approx. 2,500 words

Your grade will be determined from the following components:

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| • final paper | 30 points |
| • 5 response papers (5 pts each) | 25 points |
| • midterm exam | 20 points |
| • class participation | 15 points |
| • seminar facilitation | 10 points |

TOTAL:	100 points (max.)
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Grading scale

100-98 =A+	90-88=B+	80-78=C+	70-68=D+	
97-94=A	87-84=B	77-74=C	67-64=D	60 and below =F
93-91=A-	83-81=B-	73-71=C-	63-61=D-	

Description of Assignments

TERM PAPER: Approximately **2,500 words** in length, the paper should be based on a work (or works) of Russian literature from the period covered in the course, although not necessarily from our list of readings. The choice of text(s) and the formulation of the topic are up to you. My requirements are that this be a well-thought-out and researched piece of writing, evidencing a clear and engaging thesis, cleanly written, solidly structured, and persuasively argued. The paper should reference at least 5 critical sources (articles or monographs; general information sites like Wikipedia do not count as critical sources). A **ONE-PAGE PAPER PROPOSAL**, explaining your approach and summarizing your anticipated argument, is due in Week 10. This is to be followed by an **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY** of 5 critical sources you have consulted thus far (due in Week 12). In all aspects of formatting and citation the paper should follow the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. For a useful summary of the MLA styling guidelines, visit: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>

MIDTERM EXAMINATION: The exam will be administered during regular class time on **Wednesday, March 26**. Covering the material from the first six weeks of the semester, it will consist of short identifications, paragraph-length responses, and a short essay. A worksheet for the exam will be distributed a week in advance.

RESPONSE PAPERS: You will be asked to submit five of these in the course of the semester. Each should be around 500 words and address the main reading for the particular week. This is the format I would like you to follow: choose two non-contiguous passages that, to your mind, capture the “gist” of the text you had been reading or simply an aspect that fascinates you. Proceed to analyze the chosen passages in the context of the work’s overall structure, meaning, or stylistics; explain why you find the passages noteworthy and what significant aspect of the text they reflect. The response papers, typed in Microsoft Word, are **due by noon on Tuesday**; they should be submitted via email to ppetrov@Princeton.edu. Each paper will earn the maximum number of points (4), as long as it is submitted on time, adheres to the prescribed length and format, and displays no alarming idiosyncrasies.

CLASS PARTICIPATION: An optimal participation record in the course amounts to the following: you come to class always on time; always show clear evidence of having read the assigned texts; you regularly pose questions that evidence critical thinking and intellectual curiosity; you contribute to each class discussion, and most of what you have to say enriches the understanding of the issue or text at hand; you speak not just to me, but to your classmates as well, engaging them in a dialogue on the issues that interest you; you are an attentive listener of others, able to endorse their valuable contributions and respectfully argue views you find unconvincing; sensitivity to class organization, time constraints, and the need of others to also say something means that you do not monopolize the conversation nor indulge in long-winded, rambling soliloquies.

SEMINAR FACILITATION: Each of you will be asked to lead the discussion during one or more of the precept meetings. The discussion will focus, in each case, on a literary work assigned for that week. The facilitator’s goal would be to set up and chaperone a productive dialogue about the work, leading toward a deeper and more nuanced understanding of it. This can be done through a series of questions addressed to the class, through choosing particular passages in the text and offering them for group analysis, etc. In several—but not all—instances, the facilitator will be helped in his/her task by the response papers submitted in advance by the rest of the class

Attendance

You are expected to attend all classes. Missing classes jeopardizes your participation record and puts you in danger of missing important information. **More than three** unexcused absences will adversely affect your final grade. **More than five** will result in automatic failure of the course, regardless of prior standing. Excused absences, such as illness or death in the immediate family, must be documented no later than a week after your return to class.

In case of absence, it is your responsibility to obtain **from your classmates** any information passed out during the class you missed. You are, therefore, encouraged to exchange telephone numbers and e-mail addresses with your classmates.

If you are experiencing special problems in the course, do not hesitate to make an appointment with me.

Blackboard

By enrolling in SLA 221, you automatically gain access to the Blackboard site for the course. Please, familiarize yourself with its main areas. If you need assistance with the program, call the Blackboard help line at 609-258-0737 or email blackboard@princeton.edu.

Academic Integrity

By remaining enrolled in the course, you agree to abide by all the fundamental regulations concerning academic integrity. These are spelled out in the Princeton Booklet on Integrity (<http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pub/integrity/index.html>). I strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with it.

Disability Policy

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, please notify both me and the Office of Disability Services located in 327 First Campus Center. You can reach the Office by phone at 609-258-8840 or by e-mail at ods@princeton.edu.

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

WEEK 1 (FEBRUARY 4-6)

- Introduction. Course outline.
- Revolution and the early Soviet period: historical background.
- Asia and Europe, East and West. Scythianism. Apocalypticism.
 - [Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*]
 - Aleksandr Blok: “Twelve,” “Scythians” (BB)
 - Andrei Belyi, from *Petersburg* (BB)

WEEK 2 (FEBRUARY 11-13)

- Marxism and Leninism
- The Soviet state and the proletariat
 - Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*
 - Vladimir I. Lenin, *State and the Revolution*, Chapters 1 & 5 (BB)

WEEK 3 (FEBRUARY 18-20)

- The left avant-garde. Futurism, LEF, life-building, constructivism
- Artistic manifestoes of the left avant-garde
- The overthrow of old culture
 - Manifestoes (BB)
 - Vladimir Mayakovsky, “The Cloud in Trousers,” “At the Top of My Voice,” *Bedbug*

WEEK 4 (FEBRUARY 25-27)

Response paper 1

- Cult of the Machine. Fordism, Taylorism, Americanism.
- Utopian and anti-utopian thinking
 - Evgeny Zamyatin, “On Literature, Revolution, Entropy...” (BB)
 - Evgeny Zamyatin, *We*

WEEK 5 (MARCH 3-5)

Response paper 2

- Proletarian culture and literature
- Proletkult, RAPP and the Party
 - Leon Trotsky, “What is Proletarian Culture and is It Possible?” (BB)
 - Alesksandr Serafimovich, *The Iron Flood*

WEEK 6 (MARCH 10-12)

Response paper 3

- The intelligentsia and the revolution. “Fellow travelers.”
- Old mentalities and new heroes.

- Iurii Olesha, *Emy*

-----Spring recess (March 15-23)-----

WEEK 7 (MARCH 24-26)

- Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry*

Midterm examination: Wed, March 26

WEEK 8 (MARCH 31-APRIL 2)

- Early Stalinism: historical background
- The cultural revolution, 1928-1932, and the regimentation of literature
- First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers and the proclamation of socialist realism
 - James, C. Vaughan, *Soviet Socialist Realism*, Chapter 4 (BB)
 - [Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, Chapter I (BB)]
 - Fedor Gladkov, *Cement*, Part I

WEEK 9 (APRIL 7-9)

Response paper 4

- Socialist realism: poetics, heroes, formulas
 - Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, Chapter II (BB)
 - Fedor Gladkov, *Cement*, Part II

WEEK 10 (APRIL 14-16)

Paper proposal

- Late Stalinism: historical background
- Tightening of cultural controls after WWII. Zhdanovism.
- Soviet censorship and literature “for the drawer”
 - Mikhail Bulgakov, *Master and Margarita*. Part I

WEEK 11 (APRIL 21-23)

Response paper 5

- The Thaw period: historical background
- Krushchev’s secret speech and the process of de-Stalinization
- Liberalization of cultural policies and its impact on literature
 - Mikhail Bulgakov, *Master and Margarita*. Part II

WEEK 12 (APRIL 28-30)

Revised proposal and annotated bibliography

- The Soviet literary scene during the Thaw
 - Vladimir Pomerantsev, “On Sincerity...” (BB)
 - Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*

