

RUSSIAN THOUGHT AND CIVILIZATION

• COURSE DESCRIPTION

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the great utopian experiment of modernity – a radical attempt to reorganize society in accordance with rational principles – came to an end. This course explores the entire breadth of Russia’s dramatic history through the prism of the many different efforts to bring about a more perfect arrangement in a culture that spans Europe and Asia and has been continuously preoccupied with the questions of what it may or may not be, what it would like to be, and how it ought to relate to the rest of the world. We begin by examining the key terms that have informed the debates about Russia’s identity throughout the centuries: the notions of faith, authority, and national character. We then look at how Russia’s ideal future was envisioned, and its present and past understood, by politicians, intellectuals, and artists from the early modern period to the twenty-first century. Finally, we consider the effects that sweeping cultural and social changes had on the lives of those who encountered them from the outside and the inside. Here we focus on the responses to the Russian Imperial state, accounts of the Soviet experience, and the role of already familiar utopian motifs in the development of post-Stalinist and post-Soviet ways of imagining self, culture, and society. Our inquiry into the workings of Russian culture draws on a variety of sources and media: documents from the public domain (political propaganda, architectural and theatrical designs, transcripts of trials) as well as the intimate (diaries and letters); works of verbal, visual and performing arts (novels, poems, films, stage productions, icons, paintings); documentary accounts and scholarly analysis.

• COURSE READINGS

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• COURSE PACK CONTENTS

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“Reorganization of Russia by Peter the Great;” “The Problem of Imperial Succession: Peter’s Relations with His Son Alexei;” “Pososhkov on Poverty and Wealth;” “Turgenev’s ‘Definition’ of Nihilism;” “The Catechism of the Revolutionary.”
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Riha, Thomas, ed. *Readings in Russian Civilization*. 2d ed. 3 vols. Vol. 2.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969. 233-7, 252-5, 266-279, 295-302, 390-401.

Radishchev, Alexander Nikolaevich. *A Journey from Petersburg to Moscow* (Extracts).

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Khomyakov, Alexei Stepanovich. "[On the Church];" "To the Serbs. An Epistle from Moscow" (Extract).

Aksakov, Konstantin Sergeevich. "Memorandum to Alexander II On the Internal State of Russia."

Leatherbarrow, William J., and Derek Offord, eds. *A Documentary History of Russian Thought*.

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Pushkin, Alexander. Chapter One.

Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by James E. Falen.

New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. 5-31, 229-231.

Bely, Andrei. "[Moscow Symphony];" Kharms, Daniil. "The Start of a Really Nice Summer's Day: A Symphony."

Kuzmin, Mikhail. "On Beautiful Clarity: Remarks on Prose."

Florensky, Pavel. "[Against Linear Perspective]" ; Vertov, Dziga. "Seeing Like a Camera."

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"From Andrei Zhdanov's Speech;" "From Maxim Gorky's Speech on Soviet Literature."

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New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988. 116-35, 292-5.

Gastev, Aleksei. "We Grow Out of Iron;" "Toward a World Commune: Scenario."

Zhukov, Innokenty. *Voyage of the Red Star Pioneer Troop to Wonderland*.

Doroshin, Mikhail. "Pavlik Morozov;" excerpted from *A Poem about Hate*.

Ostrovsky, Nikolai. *How the Steel Was Tempered*; Ilin, M. *The Story of the Great Plan* .

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Vekhi/Landmarks: a Collection of Articles about the Russian Intelligentsia.

Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994. 17-49.

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Garros, Veronique, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen, eds. *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s*. Translated by Carol A. Flath.

New York: New Press, 1995. 111-27, 164-81, 216-217, 291-307, 330-331.

Brodsky, Joseph. "In A Room and a Half."

Less than One: Selected Essays.

New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986. 447-501.

• **A PREVIEW OF COMING ATTRACTIONS**

This is a *preliminary overview* of course topics and assignments. From time to time during the semester it may become necessary to make adjustments in the syllabus. More detailed, and most recently updated, reading and writing assignments will be posted on the course website; please check the site regularly.

Required **books** are identified by the last name of the author or editor, i.e., “Zenkovsky” refers to *Medieval Russia’s Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*. See the section on required texts, above, for the complete list. All *CP* references, by page number, are to the custom **course pack**. Please prepare the assignment for the date under which it appears, e.g. read Bely, Zenkovsky and Freeze for our second meeting. Please look ahead and note the due dates for the major course projects and exams.

Primary documents – that is, everything other than Freeze’s *History* – will be the focus of our discussion on the day for which they are assigned. Please make a habit of *revisiting previous readings* – to refresh your understanding of the cultural context, to gain new insights into the texts we discussed earlier, and to brainstorm for future projects.

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
Week 1 Day 1		Introduction: Interpreting Russia Through “Western” Eyes

ONE • CIVILIZATION’S VECTORS: IDENTITY / BELIEF / POWER

Week 1 Day 2	Identity: Maps and Genealogies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read CP 1 (Bely, Petersburg); Zenkovsky 43-65 (Primary Chronicle: the beginnings); Freeze 1-12 (Kievan Rus)</i>
Week 2 Day 1	<i>NO CLASS: LABOR DAY</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read Zenkovsky 65-73 (Vladimir Christianizes Russia / Yaroslav)</i>
Week 2 Day 2	Belief / Power: Faith as Worldview <i>Essay One assigned</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Re-read Zenkovsky 65-73; read 85-90 (Hilarion on Law and Grace), 153-60 (“The Descent of the Virgin into Hell”)</i>
Week 3 Day 1	Belief / Identity: Piety and History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read Zenkovsky 101-5 (Boris & Gleb), 262-70, 284-90 (Sergius), 300-10 (Michael, a Fool in Christ); CP 2-9 (Chaadaev, “The First Philosophical Letter”)</i> • <i>Compose Essay One: draft</i>
Week 3 Day 2	Power / Identity: “Us” and “Them”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read Zenkovsky 167-93 (The Lay of Igor’s Campaign); Freeze 13-26 (Mongol Domination / Foundation of Muscovy)</i> • <i>Compose Essay One: draft</i>
Week 4 Day 1	Power / Belief: Violence and Dissent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read Zenkovsky 73-7 (Blinding of Vasilko); 366-76 (Letters of Ivan IV and Kurbsky); 399-411, 441-448 (“The Life of Avvakum”); CP 11-13 (Staden, Oprichnina); Freeze 27-54 (Muscovite Russia);</i> • <i>Compose Essay One: draft</i>
Week 4 Day 2	Faith, Power, Nation: Defining an Ideology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read Zenkovsky 323-32 (“The Tale of the White Cowl”); CP 15-16 (Uvarov, Memorandum to Nicholas I); Freeze 55-86 (From Moscow to Petersburg)</i> • <i>Compose Essay One: draft</i>

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
TWO • DESIGNING AN IDEAL RUSSIA: VISIONS AND MYTHS		
Week 5 Day 1	A Window On Europe: Peter the Great ESSAY ONE DUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read CP 17-35</i> (Peter's Decrees and Letters, Pososhkov, Perry); Gibian 8-21 (Pushkin, "The Bronze Horseman"); Freeze 87-113 (Petrine Era and After) • <i>Compose</i> Essay One: revise and submit
Week 5 Day 2	Enlightenment and the Civic Ideal <i>Essay Two assigned</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read CP 37-57</i> (Catherine II, Radishchev, Karamzin, Decembrists); Freeze 114-142 (Age of Enlightenment)
Week 6 Day 1	Visions of Empire: Russia as Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read CP 59-74</i> (Pushkin, <i>Eugene Onegin</i>, Chapter One); Gibian 4-8 (Pushkin's lyrics), 433-4 (Dostoevsky on Pushkin), 131-198 (Lermontov, lyrics and <i>A Hero of Our Time</i>); Freeze 143-157 (Pre-Reform Russia: Alexander I)
Week 6 Day 2	MIDTERM EXAMINATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Review</i> for the midterm
Week 7 Day 1	Russia after Europe? The Idea of "the People"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Gibian 232-42 (Gogol, "Easter Sunday" / <i>Selected Passages</i>); <i>CP 75-96</i> (Belinsky, Khomyakov, Aksakov, Pobedonostsev); Freeze 157-169 (Pre-Reform Russia: Nicholas I) • <i>Compose</i> Essay Two: draft
Week 7 Day 2	Revolutionary Dreams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read CP 97-103</i> (Turgenev, Bakunin and Nechaev); Dostoevsky 104-22 (Chernyshevsky, from <i>What Is To Be Done?</i>); Freeze 170-99 (Reform & Counter-Reform). • <i>Compose</i> Essay Two: draft
Week 8 Day 1	Aesthetic Utopias: Life as Art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read</i> Gibian 278 (Tyutchev), 631-7 (Solovyov); <i>CP 105-116</i> (Bely, Kuzmin, Bryusov, Zinov'eva-Annibal, Rozanov) • <i>Compose</i> Essay Two: draft
Week 8 Day 2	Aesthetic Utopias: Art as Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Explore</i> Russian Modernism Online: "Nothingness" • <i>Read CP 117-40</i> (Burluk et al., Florensky, Bryusov, Malevich, Kharms, Vertov); Freeze 200-230 (Revolutionary Russia); • <i>Compose</i> Essay Two: finish and revise
Week 9 Day 1	Revolutions: Conquering Space/Time ESSAY TWO DUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read CP 141-143</i> (Gastev, "Toward a World Commune") Freeze 231-62 (Russia in War and Revolution)
Week 9 Day 2	Revolutions: "New Man" in the New City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read CP 143-167</i> (Zhukov, Ilin, Ostrovsky), Freeze 263-290 (NEP and the Revolutionary Experiment)
Week 10 Day 1	Revolutions: Engineering the Soul	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read CP 168-197</i> (Zhdanov and Gorky, <i>The Stalin White Sea – Baltic Canal</i>, Clark), Freeze 290-318 (Building Stalinism)

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
THREE • UTOPIA AS EXPERIENCE		
Week 10 Day 2	Sentimental Journeys <i>Essay Three assigned</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read CP 199-229 (Radishchev, A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow; de Custine, Russia in 1839)</i>
Week 11 Day 1	Empire's Subjects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read Gibian 202-232 (Gogol, "The Overcoat"); 489-531 (Tolstoy: "Master and Man," "Literature and Life")</i> • <i>Compose Essay Three: draft</i>
Week 11 Day 2	Conscientious Objections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read Dostoevsky 3-91 (Notes from Underground), 95-101 (background and sources)</i> • <i>Compose Essay Three: draft</i>
Week 12 Day 1	The Intelligentsia Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read CP 231-247 (Sergei Bulgakov, "Heroism and Asceticism"); as much as possible from Olesha, Envy (in Brown; for next time).</i> • <i>Compose Essay Three: draft</i>
Week 12 Day 2	Escape from the New World	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read Brown 250-378 (Olesha, Envy);</i> • <i>Compose Essay Three: draft</i>
Week 13 Day 1	Life Has Become More Joyous: The Stalinist Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read CP 249-293 (diaries in Intimacy and Terror, poems about Pavlik Morozov and the purges; 1938 show trial; political jokes);</i> • <i>Compose Essay Three: draft</i>
Week 13 Day 2	Writing the Soviet Past	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read Solzhenitsyn, One Day of Ivan Denisovich (all); Freeze 319-346 (The Great Fatherland War and Late Stalinism)</i> • <i>Compose Essay Three: draft</i>
Week 14 Day 1	The Other Sixties ESSAY THREE DUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read Brown 485-506 (Sinyavsky, "Pkhents"), 602-11 (Sokolov, from A School for Fools); Freeze 347-368 (Perils of Reform)</i> • <i>Compose Essay Three: finish and revise</i>
Week 14 Day 2	Ruins of Utopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read CP 295-322 (Brodsky, "In A Room and a Half"); Freeze 368-382 (Perils of Restoration)</i>
Week 15 Day 1	The Day After: "Generation II"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read Pelevin, Homo Zapiens, 1-156; Freeze 383-421 (From Perestroika towards a New Order)</i>
Week 15 Day 2	Back to the Future? In Place of a Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read Pelevin, Homo Zapiens, 156-250; Freeze 422-456 (Meltdown, Rebuilding, Reform)</i>
Week 16	<i>FINAL EXAM</i>	