

Masterpieces of 19th-Century Russian Literature
Fall 2024 Course Prospectus
(version of March 5, 2024)

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Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:45pm–3:15pm

Course ID and 3-digit number: REES 0410-001

Course Description and Level:

This course takes a broadly chronological approach to several canonical exemplars of Russian literature spanning the “long nineteenth century” (from the birth of sentimentalism in the 1790s to the Russian Revolution of 1905). We will read texts by Pushkin, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and several other active participants in the imperial Russian world of letters as works of verbal art in historical and cultural context. By the end of the semester, you will have a sense of the overarching narrative of nineteenth-century Russian literary history, an understanding of the major themes and problems that preoccupied Russian writers and their readers both at home and abroad, and an ample selection of novels and short stories under your belt. Class discussions and writing assignments will ask you to provide your own interpretations in dialogue with those of others and are designed to help you develop skills in perspective-taking, close reading, and literary analysis.

This course fulfills the Cross-Cultural Analysis requirement and the Sector requirement in Arts & Letters.

All readings, lectures, discussions, and written work are in English. Students who wish to work with texts in Russian are encouraged to do so and invited to consult with the professor in advance of major writing assignments.

Class Structure for Fall 2024:

- This course will be held fully in-person, with twice-weekly required meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays. On some days, the professor will give a short 20-30-minute lecture, but a typical class will center discussion. Students are expected to actively participate in discussions and share their insights and opinions.
- The amount of reading assigned will vary from class to class, ranging from approximately 100 to 150 pages.
- Having finished a novel, students will post a brief written reflection on an online discussion board that responds to our reading. These reflections are an invitation to share their thoughts on the subject in a less formal way throughout the semester.

- On more days than not, the class will start with a quick, unannounced in-class essay designed to stimulate our discussion and/or practice some of the reading and analytical skills that will be of use in completing the major writing assignments.
- There is no midterm or final exam. Instead, students will write three formal papers in this course that increase in length and complexity: a close reading of a short passage (900-1200 words), an analysis of a single theme in an author's work (1500-1800 words), and a research paper (2400-3000 words).

Outline of Assignments and Assessments:

- Participation, 10%
- Reader's diary (responses on a discussion board), 15%
- In-class essays, 25%
- Analytical writing assignments, 50%:
 - Textual analysis (close reading), 10%
 - Thematic analysis, 15%
 - Final paper (research paper), 25%

Required books:

The following texts are available through the Penn Bookstore or on this [Amazon List](#). It is a requirement of this course that you use the specific editions listed here. Translations vary significantly in their quality, character, and sometimes even basic structure. Using a single edition will keep us all on the same page, both literally and figuratively.

- Alexander Pushkin, Eugene Onegin (trans. Stanley Mitchell)
- Mikhail Lermontov, A Hero of Our Time (trans. Vladimir Nabokov)
- Karolina Pavlova, A Double Life (trans. Barbara Heldt)
- Ivan Turgenev, Fathers and Children (trans. Michael Katz)
- Fyodor Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment (trans. Oliver Ready)
- Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina (trans. Rosamund Bartlett)

All additional readings will be available on Canvas.

Preliminary Outline of Topics (subject to change):

- Russian Sentimentalism
- The Golden Age of Russian Poetry
- Saint Petersburg: City and Myth
- Romanticism and Empire
- The "Woman Question": Gender in the Russian Empire
- Nihilism and the Problem of Generations
- Orthodox Christianity and Faith
- Serfdom and Social Class
- Decadence

Preliminary List of Authors (subject to change):

- Nikolai Karamzin
- Alexander Pushkin
- Mikhail Lermontov
- Nikolai Gogol
- Karolina Pavlova
- Sofya Kovalevskaya
- Ivan Turgenev
- Fyodor Dostoevsky
- Leo Tolstoy
- Zinaida Gippius
- Nadezhda Teffi