

**THE MEANING OF MONEY  
IN THE RUSSIAN MIND, PAST AND PRESENT  
(RUSS 392)**

**MWF 14:00-14:50**

**INSTRUCTOR: ANDREW D. KAUFMAN**

**Office Hours: Wednesdays 10-12 am in Slavic Department**

**Overview**

What do Russians really think about money, business, and capitalism? What images and myths about money exist in the Russian imagination? What have Russian writers taught their countrymen to think about the role of money in human affairs? How can the representation of money in literature from the Russian past shed light on the current challenges and opportunities facing Russians today as they attempt to develop a free market economy? These are some of the questions this course will explore through close readings of works of Russian literature, dating back to early 19<sup>th</sup> century. This course should be of interest to those students interested in Russian literature and culture, as well as to those interested in how the study of literature can shed light on the “real-world” concerns of business, economics, and the pursuit of money in our lives. As an ongoing part of the course, we will compare and contrast the American and Russian attitudes towards money, capitalism, and the pursuit of worldly success, and we will speculate on the historical and cultural sources of these similarities and differences.

This is not a course in social, economic, or cultural theory. This is, above all, a literature course, and almost all of the readings will be works of fiction. Our focus will be on the emotional and psychological experiences of human individuals, who search for meaning in a modern world defined, in part, by monetary value and exchange. In addition to exploring the theme of money in Russian literature and culture, the course will also encourage you to think about some of the questions each of us faces in our everyday lives: Is money the root of evil, or is it the solution to many of life’s problems? What role does and should the pursuit of money play in our lives? What constitutes “value” in human life? What makes for human happiness? What does it mean to be “successful” in life? What is the responsibility of the wealthy to the less fortunate? What is the meaning of “work” in a free and an unfree society? To what extent is it possible to escape the monetary realities of the modern world altogether? Is it desirable to do so?

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### Required Readings and Movies

#### *Course Reader*

Fyodor Dostoevsky. *Poor Folk* (Ardis, 1982).

Ilf and Petrov. *Twelve Chairs* (Vintage Books).

Alexander Pushkin. *The Queen of Spades and Other Stories* (Dover Publications, 1994).

Gary Shteyngart. *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* (Riverhead Books, 2002)

Movies (on reserve at Clemons): *Oblomov*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and *The Twelve Chairs*.

### Optional Readings

#### Some selections in *Course Reader*

Anikin, Andrei V. "Money and the Russian Classics," *Diogenes*, Paris, France vol. 162, no. 41.

Gregory, Paul R.. *Before Command: An Economic History of Russia from Emancipation to the First Five-Year Plan* (Princeton University Press, 1994) (On Reserve)

Holmgren, Beth. *Rewriting Capitalism: Literature and the Market in Late Tsarist Russia and the Kingdom of Poland* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998) (On Reserve)

Perlman, Louis. *Russian Literature and the Businessman* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937).

Rieber, Alfred J.. *Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Imperial Russia* (University of North Carolina Press, 1982) (On Reserve)

Stipes, Emily. *The Businessman in American Literature* (University of Georgia Press, 1982) (On Reserve)

(For Russian readers): Gorbachev, Georgii Efimovich. *Kapitalizm i russkaia literatura*, izd. 2 (*Moskovskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo*, 1928).

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### Course Requirements

- (1) **Attendance at all classes**, fully prepared to discuss the given work for the day.
- (2) **Active participation in discussions.** As you will see, this course is intended to challenge you to think deeply about issues that are as relevant to our lives in America today as they have been in Russia for over two centuries. I encourage everybody to speak up, to take intellectual risks, to challenge me and each other, and to engage the material in a highly proactive way.

There will not be an exorbitant amount of reading (between 60 and 100 pages a week during the first half of the semester, and 100-150 pages a week during the second half), so that you will have time to read more closely and to spend time thinking and preparing your thoughts for class.

- (3) **Other short (writing) assignments.** From time to time, there will be short creative assignments, usually due the next day of class. These are simply exercises to stimulate your thinking and creativity. While important to complete, they are not will not be graded in the same way as the 4-5 page papers (see below).
- (4) **Weekly email discussions. Every week (by 11:30 pm!! on Thursday night)** you are asked to email me a short one paragraph commentary on the reading selection due on Friday. This may be a brief analysis of a passage you think important, an attempt to make connections between that day's reading and the larger issues of the course, or a personal reflection on that day's reading (so long as you relate it to the larger issues of the course). The important thing is to be clear and to make your remarks relevant to Friday's reading. I will be sharing some of these emails during Friday's class as a springboard for class discussion. Make sure not to save your reading for the last minute, so that you will have time to think about your email. These emails won't be graded, but they are a course requirement, and they will count towards your "class participation" grade. On the weeks when papers are due you are not expected to do the email assignments, but you are welcome to do them for extra credit.
- (5) **Three 4-5 page papers** throughout the course of the semester. (**Due by class on March 4, April 8, and May 6**) If you can get them done earlier you are encouraged to do so. **One** of the three papers may be a rewrite of one of the previous papers. The topic of these papers may relate to any of the issues we have been discussing in class, or any other topic that interests you related to the course. Maybe you want to focus on one character or on the relationship between two characters. Maybe there is a passage you think especially

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important for an interpretation of the work. The important thing is to stay close to the text to support your arguments, and to be coherent and clear in your analysis. The topic should be narrow enough to treat within a short paper. You are encouraged to focus on one work for each paper, but if you are feeling courageous, you may make connections among multiple works, as long as these connections are clear and related to a specific topic (eg., the representation of worldly success in Tolstoy and Ostrovsky).

Please remember that a good 4-5 page paper usually starts off as a mediocre 10-page paper that gets honed and rewritten several times over. Don't save anything until the last minute! Try to give yourself a good week of planning, writing, rewriting, and polishing for each paper. This way you will be much happier with your results. (And so will I.)

- (6) **A Final Exam**, consisting of a few short essays and basic identifications based on the readings and discussions from the semester.

### Grading

Three 4-5 page papers and other short writing assignments—55%

Final Exam—25%

Class participation—20%

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SYLLABUS

DATE	DISCUSSION TOPICS	ASSIGNMENTS
	<b>The Stories Russians Tell About Money I: The Nineteenth-Century Classics</b>	
Wednesday, Jan. 19	--Introduction to Course --Money and you --Attitudes towards money are rooted in cultural biases --In Russia books shaped peoples' attitudes	
Friday, Jan. 21	--The Stories People (and Cultures) Tell About Money --What is your story? --Tolstoy's torment over his own wealth, social conscience --The aristocracy and the peasants in nineteenth-century Russia	Read: Leo Tolstoy, <i>The Wisdom of Children</i> : "Wealth Leo Tolstoy, <i>The Wisdom of Children</i> : "On Compensation" and "On Art" (in-class handout)
Monday, Jan. 24	--Share Student Stories: What can we learn about the cultural/philosophical worldview of each student based on the stories they told? What can we learn about Russian cultural biases based on Russian writers' stories? --The Big Picture: American Protestantism versus Russian Christian Orthodoxy	Leo Tolstoy, "Master and Man" (In Course Reader) Student stories due
Wednesday, Jan. 26	What does it mean to live a successful life?	Leo Tolstoy, "The Death of Ivan Ilych" (In Course Reader)
Friday, Jan. 28	What role can writing play in responding to social injustice?	Fyodor Dostoevsky, <i>Poor Folk</i> (pp. 3-45)
Monday, Jan. 31		Fyodor Dostoevsky, <i>Poor Folk</i> (pp. 46-90)

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Wednesday, Feb. 2	Optional Assignment: Write Varvara's response to Makar's last "letter"	Fyodor Dostoevsky, <i>Poor Folk</i> (pp.91-129)
Friday, Feb. 4	How does comedy become both emotional release and social self-reflection?	Alexander Ostrovsky, <i>Poverty is No Crime</i> , Acts I,II (In Course Reader) <combine>
Monday, Feb. 7		Alexander Ostrovsky, <i>Poverty is No Crime</i> , Act III (In Course Reader)
Wednesday, Feb. 9	Who or what is really in control of our (financial) fate?	Alexander Pushkin, "The Queen of Spades," in Alexander Pushkin, <i>The Queen of Spades and Other Stories</i>
Friday, Feb. 11	What does it feel like to live in a world in which people are treated like objects and objects like people?	Nikolai Gogol, "The Overcoat," (on Reserve and in-class handout)
Monday, Feb. 14	Are artistic genius and commercial success fundamentally opposed to one another?	Nikolai Gogol, "The Portrait" (on Reserve and in-class handout)
Wednesday, Feb. 16	When does great wealth become a great burden?	Anton Chekhov, "A Woman's Kingdom" (in Course Reader)
Thursday, Feb. 17		Movie Screening at Clemons: <i>Oblomov</i>
Friday, Feb. 18	What is Oblomovitis? Does it exist in America?	Discuss movie <i>Oblomov</i> Optional Reading: "What is Oblomovitis?" (In Course Reader)
Monday, Feb. 21	A major Russian writer critiques America: To what extent are his observations correct? To what extent are they incorrect? What can we learn from him? What can he learn from us?	Maxim Gorky, <i>The City of the Yellow Devil</i> , "In America" (pp. 6-41) (On Reserve and In-class handout) <combine>
Wednesday, Feb. 23		Maxim Gorky, <i>The City of the Yellow Devil</i> , "My Interviews" (pp. 45-84) (on Reserve and in-class handout)
Friday, Feb. 25		Maxim Gorky, <i>The City of the Yellow Devil</i> , "Articles" Interviews" (pp. 85-122) (on Reserve and In-class handout)
Sunday, Feb. 27		Movie Screening at Clemons:

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		Chekhov's <i>The Cherry Orchard</i>
Monday, Feb. 28	Doers versus and dreamers: Whom does Chekhov prefer? Whom do you prefer?	Discuss movie, <i>The Cherry Orchard</i>
Wednesday, March 2	When is dreaming of a bright future delusional? When is it beneficial? When is it essential? --Handout questions to be discussed during Roundtable	Discuss <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> (con't) Anton Chekhov, "Dreams," "Vanka," "Misery" (in Course Reader)
Friday, March 4	Roundtable Discussion: What is the meaning of money in the mind of the nineteenth century Russian writers? How did the classics shape Russians' thinking about money, capitalism, entrepreneurship, worldly success, etc.? To what extent did the nineteenth-century Russian classics pave the way for the twentieth-century Russian Revolution?	Think about Roundtable Discussion questions. Please be prepared to contribute by sharing your ideas about the works we've read, or other knowledge/insights you have.  <b>--First of three course papers due</b>
Monday, March 7	NO CLASS SPRING BREAK	Make sure to begin reading <i>Envy</i> for next class
Wednesday, March 9	NO CLASS SPRING BREAK	
Friday, March 11	NO CLASS SPRING BREAK	
	<b>The Stories Russians Tell About Money II: The Twentieth Century Soviet Experiment</b>	
Monday, March 14	Introduction to the Soviet Experiment --The Religion of Communism and the New Soviet Man --The attempt to re-engineer human beings according the principles of Communism --What role does the human desire for power and recognition play in a regimented society? Can Americans relate to this novel?	Yuri Olesha, <i>Envy</i> Part I, Chptrs. 1-10 (in Course Reader) <u>Recommended Background Reading:</u> "The Revolutions of 1917" and "Soviet Russia: An Introduction" in Nicholas Ryazanovsky, <i>A History of Russia</i> (in Course Reader) <combine>
Wednesday, March 16		Yuri Olesha, <i>Envy</i> Part I,

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		Chptrs. 11-15 and Part II, Chptrs. 1-5 (in Course Reader)
Friday, March 18		Yuri Olesha, <i>Envy</i> Part II, Chptrs. 6-12 (in Course Reader)
Monday, March 21	Money and Scandal: The Great Soviet Con Artist	Ilf and Petrov, <i>The Twelve Chairs</i> (Part I, Chapters 1-6)
Wednesday, March 23		Ilf and Petrov, <i>The Twelve Chairs</i> (Part I, Chapters 7-11)
Friday, March 25		Ilf and Petrov, <i>The Twelve Chairs</i> (Part I, Chapters 12-14 and Part II, Chapters 15- 16)<one week only>Add: Money for Marie (2 classes), Matryona's Home (1 class)
Monday, March 28		Ilf and Petrov, <i>The Twelve Chairs</i> (Part II, Chapters 17-21)
Wednesday, March 30		Ilf and Petrov, <i>The Twelve Chairs</i> (Part II, Chapters 22- 26)
Friday, April 1		Ilf and Petrov, <i>The Twelve Chairs</i> (Part II, Chapters 27-30 and Part III, Chptr. 31)
Monday, April 4		Ilf and Petrov, <i>The Twelve Chairs</i> (Part III, Chapters 32- 36)
Wednesday, April 6		Ilf and Petrov, <i>The Twelve Chairs</i> (Part III, Chapters 37- 40)
Thursday, April 7		Movie Screening at Clemons: Mel Brooks' <i>The Twelve Chairs</i>
Friday, April 8		Discuss movie and novel, <i>The Twelve Chairs</i>  <b>--Second of three course papers due</b>
	<b>The Stories Russians Tell About Money III: The Search for Meaning (and Money) Today</b>	
Monday, April 11	--What will it take for Russians to develop a free market mentality?	Daniil Granin, "New Hopes, New Dangers" (In-class handout); Natalia Fonareva,



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	<p>--Has the pursuit of the almighty dollar become the new Russian religion?</p> <p>--My personal experiences in the Russian business sphere</p>	<p>“Protecting Fair Competition in the New Russia: Revolution in Thinking, Not Just Economics” (In-class handout); Aleksandr Auzan, “Transforming Russian Political Mores: The Keys to Economic Evolution” (in Course Reader); <u>Optional</u>: James Billington, “The Travails of a Democratic Identity” (in Course Reader);</p>
Wednesday, April 13		Gary Shteyngart, <i>The Russian Debutante’s Handbook</i> , Part I (pp. 1-46)
Friday, April 15		<i>The Russian Debutante’s Handbook</i> , Part II (pp. 49-107)
Monday, April 18		<i>The Russian Debutante’s Handbook</i> , Part III (pp. 109-180)
Wednesday, April 20		<i>The Russian Debutante’s Handbook</i> , Part IV (pp. 181-253)
Friday, April 22		<i>The Russian Debutante’s Handbook</i> , Part V (pp. 255-310)
Monday, April 25		<i>The Russian Debutante’s Handbook</i> , Part VI (pp. 311-362)
Wednesday, April 27		<i>The Russian Debutante’s Handbook</i> , Part VII (pp. 363-430)
Friday, April 29		<i>The Russian Debutante’s Handbook</i> , Part VIII and Epilogue (pp. 431-476) <u>Optional</u> : Eliot Borenstein, “Public Offerings: MMM and the Marketing of Melodrama” (In Course Reader)
Monday, May 2	<p>Roundtable Discussion: What is the meaning of money in the twentieth century Russian mind? Are there any parallels with the nineteenth-century classics? How can literature from the Russian past shed light on current</p>	<p>Think about Roundtable Discussion questions. Please be prepared to contribute by sharing your ideas about the works we’ve read, or other knowledge/insights you have.</p>

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	challenges and opportunities facing Russians as they attempt to develop a free market mentality and democratic society? --Hand out Exam Questions	
Friday, May 6		<i>--Third of three course papers due</i>
	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>	