

**TYCOONS, TYRANTS, AND TORTURED SOULS
IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE
(RUTR 392/ENSP 392)**

MWF 12:00-12:50 Cabell Hall 337

**INSTRUCTOR:
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Office Hours: Mondays 1-3 pm, 109 Cabell Hall

Overview

From Peter the Great to Putin, Russian society has been marked by a strong divide between the haves and the have-nots, the mighty and the miserable, the money-driven and the morally inspired. Soviet Communism, which promised paradise on earth, yielded an earthly hell of corruption and social inequality even worse than the tsarist system it sought to replace. And now, in the brave new world of Russian-style capitalism, Russia has become a culture of extreme success and extreme suffering, of money-hungry mobsters and spiritually-starved moralists. We will trace these themes and historical developments through readings of masterpieces of Russian literature, past and present, as well as several prominent Russian films. Our focus will be on the everyday emotional and psychological experiences of human individuals who search for meaning in a world defined by the principles of power, privilege, and more recently, the free market.

In addition to exploring this theme in Russian literature and culture, the course will also encourage you to think about your personal attitudes towards success, money, morality, and social justice. 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 does it mean to be "successful"? What is the responsibility of the powerful to the less fortunate? And what can the Russian literary depictions of tycoons, tyrants, and tortured souls teach us about our own society and our own lives? What can Russians and Russian writers learn from us? All readings are in English, and non-majors are welcome.

Required books (available at main campus bookstore)

*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).

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****Note:** Make sure to purchase the books at the beginning of the semester, as the bookstore will return unused copies.

Other required readings

*Selections in Course Reader (indicated in syllabus and available at bookstore)

*Selections in Toolkit (indicated in syllabus)

****Important notice about Toolkit**:** Make sure to download and/or print out each Toolkit reading on the day the reading is due (or a day or two before), as the reading will be removed from Toolkit a few days after it is posted. Sorry, this is just how it's done.

Required movies (class screening dates indicated in syllabus, also available on reserve at Clemons)

**Oblomov*

**The Cherry Orchard*

**Repentance*

**Twelve Chairs*

**Tycoon*

Course Requirements

- Class attendance and participation
- 2 short papers (3 pp. each) and other short writing assignments
- Midterm Paper (4-5 pages)
- Final Paper (5-7 pages)
- Other short writing assignments

Description of class attendance and participation requirement

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 of fiction per week during the first half of the semester, and 120-180 pages of fiction per week during the second half), so that you should have time to read and to spend time thinking and preparing your thoughts for class.

Description of Paper Assignments

First Paper: Close Reading of a Short Passage. 3 pages (Due Friday, February 10)

The **first paper** should be a close reading of a short passage (no more than a few pages) in the context of the work as a whole. When analyzing this passage, some issues to consider are: How are the characters artistically presented in the passage? From whose point of view is the passage written? What is the setting in the passage, and how does that affect our experience of the selection? What physical or other clues does the author give the reader about a character's social position, emotional state, and/or relationship with others in this passage? How does this particular passage shed light on the work as a whole? What can we learn about the worldview of the novel and its author by studying this passage?

Second Paper: Character Analysis. 3 pages (Due Friday, March 3)

The **second paper** should be a literary analysis of a character from one of the works we've read. This should be a character that has fascinated you, disturbed you, challenged you, or aroused your sympathies in some way. In your introductory paragraph, you should describe why you think this character is an important subject for reflection and what your argument about him or her will be. What does that character represent in the context of the work as a whole? Is he or she a hero? A villain? What are the character's major emotional and/or psychological dilemmas, and how does he or she resolve them, if at all? Does the author want us to sympathize with the character? Why or why not? In this paper remember that you are analyzing a character from literature, and not a real person, which means that you should pay particular attention to how that character is presented and functions *artistically* in the work. What are the specific literary techniques the author uses to present that character to the reader? You should conclude your paper with some reflection about what light your character analysis can shed on your chosen author's attitudes towards the social and/or philosophical problems of his time. Remember to stay close to the text to support your arguments, and to be coherent and clear in your analysis.

Midterm Paper. 4-5 pages: (Due Wednesday, April 12)

For this paper you may either choose your own topic (in consultation with the instructor) or write on a suggested topic (to be handed in class). This paper should deal with at least **one** works from the Soviet period (either literature or film) and **one** work either from the Soviet period or 19th century.

Final Paper 5-7 pages: (Due, Wednesday, May 10)

Option One: Thematic Essay

This is a paper on a topic of your choice (in consultation with the instructor) or on a topic suggested by the instructor (to be handed out in class). In this paper you should specifically discuss **one** work from the post-Soviet period, **one** work from the Soviet period, and **one** work from the nineteenth-century (either literature or film).

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Option Two: Personal Reflection Essay

To what extent has your study of the literature from the Russian past and present challenged, complicated, deepened, or perhaps reinforced your previous attitudes about the American free market system, your role in that system, and your personal attitudes towards money and capitalism? What specific life lessons have you learned for the first time—or relearned—from the works you have read? Are there any recurring ideas or themes in these works that particularly resonate with you? To what extent are the issues presented in these works applicable to the challenges of contemporary America, or your own life? In this paper you make specific reference to any **three** of the works we've studied this semester, and you should draw on concrete examples from your own life and/or contemporary America.

A word of clarification: This is a bona fide essay, and all the rules of good essay-writing apply. You should have a clear thesis statement, a well-developed argument, coherence and logical flow throughout. But that doesn't mean you should avoid being personal or passionate in your reflections. Quite the contrary: Feel free to express yourself as honestly and passionately as you feel comfortable doing, always remembering that passion and precision are not mutually exclusive. You can be very personal, sincere, and emotional, while still being clear and maintaining a healthy analytical stance towards yourself and your subject. Finding that balance will be one of your challenges in this paper.

*General suggestion for paper writing

Please remember that a good 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.)

Description of Other Short Writing Assignments

From time to time I will assign very short writing assignments. These will not be graded but it's important that you do them and turn them in (unless I specifically say it's optional.)

Grading

- Class attendance and participation—25%
- 2 short papers (3 pp. each) and other short writing assignments—25%
- Midterm Paper (4-5 pages)—25%
- Final Paper (5-7 pages)—25%

SYLLABUS

Friday, March 3	<p><u>Roundtable Discussion:</u> -How did the nineteenth-century Russian classics shape Russians' thinking about money, capitalism, power, and worldly success? -To what extent did the nineteenth-century Russian classics pave the way for the twentieth-century Russian Revolution?</p>	<p>Please be prepared to contribute to roundtable discussion by sharing your ideas about the works we've read, or other knowledge/insights you have.</p> <p><i>Second Course Paper Due (character analysis, 3 pages)</i></p>
Monday, March 6	NO CLASS SPRING BREAK	Make sure to begin reading <i>Envy</i> for next class
Wednesday, March 8	NO CLASS SPRING BREAK	
Friday, March 10	NO CLASS SPRING BREAK	
	<p><u>PART II: THROUGH THE WRONG END OF THE BINOCULARS: THE ARTIST'S RESPONSE TO THE GREAT SOVIET EXPERIMENT</u></p>	
Monday, March 13	<p>Introduction to the Great Soviet Experiment --The Religion of Communism and the New Soviet Man --Can you ever eradicate the human desire for power and recognition? Can Americans relate to this novel?</p>	<p>Yuri Olesha, <i>Envy</i> Part I, Chptrs. 1-10 (<u>in Course Reader</u>) <u>Recommended Background Reading:</u> "The Revolutions of 1917" and "Soviet Russia: An Introduction" in Nicholas Ryazanovsky, <i>A History of Russia</i> (<u>in Course Reader</u>)</p>
Wednesday, March 15		Yuri Olesha, <i>Envy</i> Part I, Chptrs. 11-15 and Part II, Chptrs. 1-5 (<u>in Course Reader</u>)
Friday, March 17		Yuri Olesha, <i>Envy</i> Part II, Chptrs. 6-12 (<u>in Course Reader</u>)
Monday, March 20		Mikhail Zoshchenko, "The Aristocrat" "The Bathhouse" "Poverty" "The Economy Campaign" "The Receipt" "The Actor," "M.P. Sinyagin" (<u>in</u>

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		<u>Toolkit</u>),
Wednesday, March 22		Vladimir Mayakovsky, “Conversations with a Tax Collector About Poetry” “At the Top of My Voice” (In-Class Handouts) Teaching Analysis Poll
Friday, March 24	NO CLASS	
Monday, March 27		Ilf and Petrov, <i>The Twelve Chairs</i> (Part I, Chapters 1-12)
Wednesday, March 29		Ilf and Petrov, <i>The Twelve Chairs</i> (Part I, Chapters 13-14 Part II, Chapters 15-18)
Friday, March 31		Ilf and Petrov, <i>The Twelve Chairs</i> (Part II, Chapters 19-23)
Monday, April 3		Ilf and Petrov, <i>The Twelve Chairs</i> (Part II, Chapters 24-30), Also read final chapter of <i>Twelve Chairs</i> , Part III, Chapter 40 (“The Treasure”); Discuss novel <i>Twelve Chairs</i>
Wednesday, April 5		Valentin Rasputin, “Money for Maria” pp. 5-66 (<u>in Toolkit</u>)
Friday, April 7		Valentin Rasputin, “Money for Maria” pp. 66-132 (<u>in Toolkit</u>)
Monday, April 10		Alexander Solzhenitsyn, “Matryona’s Home” (<u>in Toolkit</u>)
Wednesday, April 12	<u>Roundtable Discussion</u> Soviet Paradise: Fact or Fantasy? How have artists responded to the great Soviet experiment? What are some of the universal lessons we can learn from their response?	Please be prepared to contribute to the roundtable discussion <i>(Midterm Paper Due, 4-5 pages)</i>
	<u>PART III: CAPITALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA</u>	
Thursday, April 13		Movie Screening in Clemons 407, 7 pm: <i>Tycoon</i>
Friday, April 14	--Will Russians develop a healthy free market mentality? --Has the pursuit of the almighty dollar become the new Russian religion? --My personal experiences in the	Daniil Granin, “New Hopes, New Dangers” (<u>In Course Reader</u>) (Optional) James Billington, “The Travails of a Democratic Identity” (<u>in Course Reader</u>)

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	Russian business sphere	<p><u>Recommended Background Reading:</u> Selections from Mark Galeotti, <i>Gorbachev and His Revolution</i> (<u>in Toolkit</u>)</p> <p>Discuss movie <i>Tycoon</i></p>
Monday, April 17		Gary Shteyngart, <i>The Russian Debutante's Handbook</i> , Parts I-II
Wednesday, April 19	NO CLASS	
Friday, April 21		Gary Shteyngart, <i>The Russian Debutante's Handbook</i> , Parts III-IV
Monday, April 23		Gary Shteyngart, <i>The Russian Debutante's Handbook</i> , Parts V-VI
Wednesday, April 26		Gary Shteyngart, <i>The Russian Debutante's Handbook</i> , Parts VII-VIII and Epilogue
Friday, April 28	<p><u>Roundtable Discussion:</u> Will Russians adapt a healthy free market mentality? What would you tell Russians today who are still concerned about the human costs of capitalism in their country?</p>	Please be prepared to contribute to roundtable discussion.
Monday, May 1		Wrap-up and discuss final papers.
Monday, May 8		<i>Final Course Paper Due, 5-7 pages</i>