

ROLLINS COLLEGE FALL 2004
Wednesdays 6:45-9:25
Dr. ALEXANDER BOGUSLAWSKI
CSS 167

MLS 506: MASTERPIECES OF RUSSIAN AND EASTERN EUROPEAN LITERATURE

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

An examination of selected examples of Russian and Eastern European twentieth-century novels. The course will emphasize the intrinsic value of the studied works and their position and role in the development of world fiction. The lectures (and the students' research) will provide the necessary basic historical, cultural, and biographical information, while the discussions will concentrate on the style and the content of the works. The novels will be analyzed not only from the point of view of action, plot, characters, themes, and the psychological motivation of the heroes' behavior, but also from the point of view of their technical (stylistic) merit. The students will discuss the ways in which the novels are "made" and what makes them unique for the particular author or exemplary in world literature. In other words, remembering about the importance of "what," "when," and "where," in our analysis of the novels we will also be concerned with the important questions of "why" and "how."

READING LIST:

1. Yevgeny Zamyatin, **WE**.
2. Mikhail Bulgakov, **MASTER AND MARGARITA**.
3. Vladimir Nabokov, **PNIN**.
4. Sasha Sokolov, **A SCHOOL FOR FOOLS (packet)**.
5. Milan Kundera, **THE BOOK OF LAUGHTER AND FORGETTING**.
6. Milan Kundera, **THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING**.
7. Milorad Pavic, **DICTIONARY OF THE KHAZARS**.
8. Olga Tokarczuk, **HOUSE OF DAY, HOUSE OF NIGHT**.

TESTS, EXAMINATIONS, GRADING, and ATTENDANCE POLICIES:

Students are supposed to attend all classes. Only an official excuse from a physician or from the Dean of the Hamilton Holt School will be accepted. Unexcused absences will automatically lower the final grade since they will result in poorer preparation for assignments and exams and prevent the students from participating in class discussions. The final grade will be calculated on the basis of a) class participation--discussion of the novels [30%]; 5 response papers (thoughts and ideas stemming from the reading of each work) presented in a stimulating 2-3 page essay [30 %], and the final take home exam [40%]. The exam will be a comprehensive 10-12 page paper demonstrating the students' ability to draw upon the material from the entire course and to create an analytical or synthetical essay summarizing their reading adventures. It should be carefully written, well organized, and as original as possible.

TENTATIVE SYLLABUS:

August 25: INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE.

Let's talk about Literature. Writers and readers. A brief synopsis of Russian and Eastern European literature.

September 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE ctd.

Assignment for September 8: Read *We*; research Zamyatin (life and works)

September 8: ZAMYATIN.

Life and works. The Revolution. The Serapion Brothers. *We*. Utopias, Aipotus, Dystopias, and Anti-utopias. Happiness and freedom. Jerome K. Jerome, Orwell, Huxley, Bradbury.

Assignment for September 8: Read *M. and M*; research Bulgakov (life and works).

September 15: BULGAKOV.

Life and works. Stalinism. Atheism. Purges. Socialist realism. *Master and Margarita*. Bulgakov's literary testament. Art and oppression. Good and evil in the world. The Soviet society during NEP.

Assignment for September 15: Read *Pnin*; research Nabokov (life and works).

September 22: BULGAKOV ctd. / NABOKOV.

Life and works. Emigration. Creating "artifices." Readers and writers. Vulgarity and banality (poshlost). *Pnin*. Most human of Nabokov's heroes? Signs and symbols. Memory. The fate of (Russian) émigrés. Freud.

September 29: NABOKOV ctd

Assignment for September 22: Read *A S. f. F*; research Sokolov (life and works).

October 6: SOKOLOV.

Life and works. Art vs. politics. Time. Memory. Death. Nature. Love. Post-modernist experimental prose. *A School for Fools*.

The hero (how many?) The author. Prose vs. poetry.

Assignment for October 13: Read *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*; research Kundera (life and works).

October 13: KUNDERA.

Life and works. Czechoslovakia before 1968. Dubcek and the Prague Spring. The August invasion. Art and politics. History. *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Memory. Past and Future. Laughter. Music. The art of the novel.

Assignment for October 20: Read *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

October 20: KUNDERA ctd.

The Unbearable Lightness of Being. Themes. Composition. Problem of kitsch (poshlost?). Love.

Assignment for October 27: Read *Dictionary of the Khazars*; research Pavic and the Khazars.

October 27: PAVIC.

Life and works. Yugoslav literature. *Dictionary of the Khazars*. Who were the Khazars? What is a novel? Prose vs. poetry.

Language.

November 3: PAVIC ctd.

Assignment for November 10: Read *House of Day, House of Night*; research Tokarczuk (life and works).

November 10: TOKARCZUK.

Life and works. Polish literature. Overcoming the plot. The nature of history. *House of Day, House of Night*.

November 17: TOKARCZUK ctd.

November 24: THANKSGIVING.

December 1: Review and summary. Conclusion of the course.

Assignment: Write your final paper.

December 8: TAKE-HOME FINAL PAPERS DUE.

POSSIBLE TAKE-HOME PAPER TOPICS:

Using your readings as a guide, describe the multifaceted (sometimes torturous, sometimes inspiring, and sometimes indifferent) relationship between writers and readers or between books and readers. You may mention such phenomena as readers' imitation of the characters' behavior and morals, readers' imagination, readers' creativity, writers' dependence on the good reader and, at the same time, on the average reader who buys most of the books, writers' and readers' self-discovery through literary works, and as many other aspects of the relationship as you can conceive of. You can analyze the problem historically (trying to discover how much involvement and creativity was expected from the reader in the past and how much may be required today), structurally (what elements are most telling in this complex relationship), or psychologically (why is the relationship important / unimportant).

Every reader approaches the act of reading differently and pays attention to particular things. In your opinion, what is the most productive way of reading? Imagine yourself advocating several approaches: formal (concentrating on the text itself), political (looking for relevant allusions and critical attitudes), historical (looking for historical facts and cultural realia), moral (evaluating moral issues and the characters' way of coping with them), or religious (using religious beliefs and ideas as a measuring device necessary for approval or disapproval of the heroes' actions). Show the advantages and disadvantages of each method and describe your own approach to reading.

Describe how you imagine an "ideal" reader. What would distinguish such an individual from an average reader? What characteristics and what tools are necessary to become a good (great) reader? Using specific examples from readings in this class, determine which elements of a literary work are usually missed by an average reader, and, at the same time, give the great reader inspiration, excitement, thrill of discovery, and desire to read more and more.

(Additional topics may appear as we journey through the works listed above.)