Russian 255  

Russian Folklore in Translation

Sample Syllabus

The course examines the central issues of folklore and cultural studies, particularly those related to ritual, material culture and oral lore. In addition, students will learn about the folk history of Russ, the construction of the notion of nationhood, the political uses of folklore and will be acquainted with other Slavic mythologies. A range of theoretical and critical texts will inform our discussions, as will film adaptations and audio performances of certain works of folklore.

Learning Objectives

Through readings, lectures, class discussion and written work, the course will introduce students to the most common Slavic myths and traditions. In addition, students will learn about the cultural and political contexts in which these myths and traditions originated. Understanding what folklorists do and how their work is relevant to culture, explaining and applying the major theories of folklore to rituals, material culture and oral lore, and improving cross-cultural communication are the basic goals of the course. Moreover, we will determine how cultural categories and structures are shared or differ between cultures. Furthermore, students will be trained to analyze primary texts closely and analytically; to make connections among texts, authors, and cultural events; and to improve their research and writing skills.

Required Texts:

The books listed below are available from Shakespeare bookstore. All other readings will be emailed, linked or available for download on BB.


A. Afans’ev, *Russian Fairy Tales*, Pantheon
A. Alexander. *Russian Folklore*, Nordland (Xerox)
J. Bailey and T. Ivanova, *An Anthology of Russian Folk Epics*, M. E. Sharpe

Recommended:


**Course Requirements and Grading:**

Your grade will be comprised of the following elements:

- 25% participation and reaction papers
- 25% midterm examination
- 25% final exam
- 25% term paper and oral presentation on the term paper.

This is a writing intensive course. All assignments and examinations will be essay. There will be no short answer or multiple choice examinations. Reviewing and revising your work is an important part of mastering writing skills. You can submit drafts of writing assignments (other than the two essay examinations) for comments before your final submission.

**Academic Integrity**

Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g. plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The college is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

**Office of AccessABILITY**

In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical and/or Learning) consult the Office of AccessABILITY located in Room E1124 to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance please call 212-772-4857/TTY

**Schedule:**

**WEEK 1 & 2:**

Day 1 & 2: Introduction to the course

- Review syllabus, policies, requirements.
- Lecture and discussion: Definitions of folklore
Day 3: The eternal cycle

- Creation of the world; the agricultural calendar
- Lecture and discussion: the origins of folklore

Day 4: The four ages of humans

- Birth and childhood
- Initiation rites and maturity

WEEK 3:

Day 1: The four ages continued

- Marriage and family
- Lecture and discussion: Death and ancestral worship

Day 2:
- Death and ancestral worship continued

WEEK 4:

Day 1: The Fallen Gods

- Ancient Slavic gods and spirits
- Lecture and discussion: places of worship

Day 2:
- Rites and rituals: Polytheism and Christian monotheism
- Lecture and discussion: Dual belief

WEEK 5:

Day 1: The Fairytale Hero

- The fairytale as a repository of pre-Christian beliefs

Day 2:
- Lecture and discussion: the workings of the fairytale; formulaic texts

WEEK 6:

Day 1: The folk history of Rus

- Folk history vs. real history
- Lecture and discussion: national consciousness

Day 2: The political uses of folklore
• The national past in the bylina, the ballad, the historical son, and the soldier’s song

WEEK 7:
Day 1: Social and political strife and folklore
• The brigand’s song
Day 2:
• Songs about serfdom

WEEK 8:
Day 1:
• Prepare for Midterm examination
Day 2
• Midterm examination

WEEKS 9-11: Folklore and religion

WEEK 12-13
The chastushka, or the Russian limerick, the dragon, the witch

WEEK 14:
Day 1: Other Slavic mythologies: Ukrainian, Belorussian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, South Slavic
Day 2
• Oral presentations