

Nabokov: Between Two Cultures (W)
 Complit 320. 53.
 Russ 296

Sample syllabus

Course Description:

Vladimir Nabokov, born in 1899, is generally considered one of the most innovative and influential English language writers of his generation, but he had begun his literary career as the most brilliant young Russian writer produced by the First Russian Emigration. He had, in fact, created a major corpus of prose and poetry before his metamorphosis into an American writer.

While it is not unusual for a writer to be a bilingual, it is rare for a major writer to be bilingual or polyglot as a writer and to create a body of work of more or less equal weight in more than one language as Nabokov has done. Certainly, being bilingual as a writer confronts an artist with painful difficulties: neuro-physiological, and emotional as well as problems of linguistic choice and resistance. All these factors have significant impact on the form and language of the works. Translation and self-translation also pose important problems for the bilingual writer.

Nabokov's works provide an excellent laboratory to address all these questions through the analysis of major works of twentieth century Russian and English prose.

Readings will be mostly of primary texts, with a few selections from books and articles dealing with bilingualism and/or translation, (Grosjean, Steiner) and several texts written by other language-exiles. For Nabokov, the major texts will be: Speak, Memory [the Russian version is Drugie berega], Invitation to a Beheading [Priglasenie na kazn'], The Gift, [Dar], Lolita, Pnin, Pale Fire, and several poems.

Course Objectives:

The student will have learned about the, psychological and linguistic complexities of writing in more than one language in the course of a careful analysis of major literary works by one of the most important writers of the 20th century.

Reading List

Required Nabokov texts, in the order in which they will be read. All poems will be in a course pack at Shakespeare and Co. or will be posted in a file on BB. Novels are ordered in the standard Vintage International edition at Shakespeare and Co., but you can probably find them anywhere.

Speak, Memory! (\$10,88 pb)

Invitation to a Beheading [Priglasenie na kazn'](\$10.08)

The Gift [Dar] (\$10.18 pb)

"The Art of Literature and Common Sense" (in course pack)

"The Blazon" [Gerb} "To Russia [K Rossii]

MIDTERM EXAM

Pnin (\$12.98)

"An Evening of Russian Poetry," "On Translating Eugene Onegin"

Lolita (\$10,20)

Pale Fire (\$14.96)

Other very strongly recommended readings: all these texts are either in the course pack or on blackboard

Hakuta, Kenji, "The Bilingual Mind"

Grosjean, Francois, " Bilingualism in Society"

Beaujour, Elizabeth, "The Mental Geology of Bilingual Writing"

There is a website for this course. It contains full texts and much useful additional information, including Nabokov reading his own poems. Use it. <http://hunter.cuny.edu/classics/russian/nabokov> There is also a major Nabokov website: [zembla](http://zembla.com)

Recommended background reading;

There is a recent bibliography on the Blackboard site for this course. A full bibliography is available on "**Zembla**"

On reserve:

Boyd, Brian. Nabokov: The Russian Years

Boyd, Brian. Nabokov: The American Years

Alexandrov, Vladimir, ed: The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov

Course requirements:

Students are expected to have read all the required texts on time. Grades will be based on a midterm (including a take-home essay), a final exam, and a five-ten page paper. The exams will require essay answers. The midterm will occur after we finish The Gift.

Since this is a “W” course, you will be able to revise the midterm take home essay after I have corrected it (Provided that it is initially submitted on time). Answers to essay questions should be coherent. Style and structure are important factors in the grades you earn for your paper and for your exams. Constructive class participation will also count in your favor.

You are expected to observe appropriate standards of scholarly honesty in both your examinations and your paper. If you have any questions about the differences between "Research" and "Plagiarism", consult the College catalogue statement on the subject, or ask me. Remember that you may use other people's ideas or words, but only if they are properly footnoted and acknowledged. Information you find on the internet must also be properly acknowledged. Footnotes must follow a consistent standard, whether it be MLA, or whatever. If you do not know how to do this, consult your English 120 composition text, or ask the Reading/Writing center for a handout on how to do acknowledgements and citations. All Hunter syllabi must now include the following statement about academic honesty:

“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.”

Schedule of readings:

Week 1 : General introduction to Nabokov, to problems of bilingual writing, Begin selections from Speak, Memory!

Week 2: Speak, Memory!

Week 3 Speak, Memory, and begin Invitation to a Beheading.

Week 4 Invitation to a Beheading

Week 5 The Gift

Week 6 The Gift

Week 7 a) “The Art of Literature and Common Sense”, “The Blazon”, and
“To Russia” problems of language shift
b) mid-term in class essay exam,

Week 8 Introduction to the American Nabokov : “Softest of Tongues”, “On
translating Eugene Onegin” “An Evening of Russian Poetry” Linguistic
analysis of Chapter 1 of Pnin

Week 9 Pnin . Analysis of “Fame” due.

Week 10 Lolita

Week 11 Lolita rewrite of paper on “Fame” due

Week 12 Pale Fire

Week 13 Pale Fire second paper due if student wishes rewrite option.

Week 14 Pale Fire

Week 15 Wrap up. Optional rewrite of paper 2 due.

Final examination.