Russian Women Writers (W)

Russian 260/ WGS 260 (fulfills P and D category C)
Spring 2012, Tu-F 2:10- 3:25, HW 411

Sample syllabus

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Prerequisite:  English 120 or the equivalent.

Course description/rationale:

"Russian Women Writers" considers the development of women's writing in Russia in the 19th and 20th centuries and examines the distinctive role played by Russian women writers in Russian literature, a role which was particularly significant in the great period of Russian modernism, when two of Russia's five major poets were women, as were a disproportionate number of the major painters.

Since Russian women writers have worked primarily in short forms (such as lyric poetry and the short story), or have chosen longer non-fictional genres such as the autobiography or the memoir, they are under-represented in the survey courses in Russian literature currently offered in English translation. "Russian Women Writers" will therefore introduce students to writers such as A. Akhmatova, M. Tsvetaeva, A. Kollontai, N. Mandel'shtam, E. Ginsburg, L. Petrushevskia as well as a number of 19th century women writers.

Learning Objectives:

Students will develop their skills in critical and analytic close reading, as well as their capacity to write critical and analytical prose in a literary context. They will also have developed an awareness of the richness of Russian Women’s writing in the 19th and 20th centuries as well as of the historical, social and political conditions that determined the forms and subject matter chosen by these writers and that led to critical neglect of their work until the second half of the 20th century.

Writing requirement:  Essay midterm exam 75 minutes in class and, including a take-home question. The take home essay may be revised after the professor has corrected and commented on it.), Essay final exam (two hours), and a 5-8 page paper on a choice of announced subjects.

Required Reading:

The following works are required reading for all students. Except as otherwise noted, they may be found in the course packs to be purchased at Shakespeare and Co, on Lexington Avenue between 69th and 70th street. Course packs are in the basement. One copy of many of the readings will also be on reserve in the library. In many cases, the selections are excerpts from longer works, and are so indicated. Full bibliographical information on the works from which the extracts are taken is given in the course pack. The readings are given in the (approximate) order in which they will be discussed. Most of them are relatively short. Nevertheless, it is probable that some of these selections will be cut for time as we go along. The course pack should cost approximately $55.  One will be on reserve in the library.

Required Reading. These are short and available in the course pack unless otherwise indicated:

Durova, Nadezhda. ext fm. The Cavalry Maiden. trans. Mary Fleming Zirin (to be distributed the first day and read for the second class.)
Zinovyeva-Annibal, Lydia. ext. from The Tragic Menagerie
Akhmatova, Anna. selected lyric poems.Various translators.
Tsvetaeva, Marina. selected lyric poems. Various translators.
Tsvetaeva, M. "The Devil,"and "Mother and Music". trans J. Marin King
Berberova, Nina. ext fm The Italics are Mine. trans Phillippe Radley
Berberova, Nina. "the Tattered Cloak." trans Marian Schwartz.

probable midterm
Chukovskaia, Lydia. *The Deserted House (Sophia Petrovna)* trans A.B. Werth. (not in the course pack. Several copies on reserve in the library. Will probably be demoted to recommended reading and is a possible paper topic)

Akhmatova, A. *Requiem* various trans.

Mandelstam, N. ext fm. *Hope Against Hope*, trans Max Hayward


Grekov, I. "The Ladies' Hairdresser" trans. Larry Gregg

Baranskaia, N. "A Week Like Any Other"


Tolstaia, T. "On the Golden Porch" and "Okkervil River" trans. A. Bouis

Class Schedule (approximate. Subject to subtraction for reasons of time).

Week 1: General introduction to Russian literature and society; the conditions of women in the pre and post-revolutionary periods. Russian women writers before 1850 (e.g. Princess Dashkova, Nadezhda Durova).

Week 2: exp from Karolina Pavlova, *A Double Life* the first major novel (part of it actually in verse) written by a Russian woman.

Weeks 3 Hippius" The Mad Woman", Zinoviyeva-Annibal


Week 6: Alexandra Kollontaj. Biography and general introduction to the role of feminism and female sexual liberation in the period from the October Revolution of 1917 to the institution of the First Five Year Plan in 1928.

Week 7:A) Slides showing the works of Russian Women avant-garde painters and designers 1910-1928.

Week 8: General introduction to Russian Women Writers in emigration: Nina Berberova, Elsa Triolet, Zinaida Schakovkoy, Zinaida Gippius, etc.


Week 10: Nadezhda Mandel'st'am. Selections from *Hope Against Hope*.

Week 11: Anna Akhmatova, "Requiem"; Lydia Chukovskaia, *Sophia Petrovna* Works by and about women whose families were sent to the Camps.


Week 13:Tatyana Tolstaia and Ludmila Petrushevskaia. One short story apiece. And *The Time Night* women writers in the period of glasnost' and perestroika.

Course Organization and grading policy information

STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO HAVE READ ALL THE REQUIRED BOOKS and be prepared for class discussions.
Grades will be based on two essay exams (the final is worth slightly more than the midterm, since it is longer and covers more material), one shorter paper and one longer one. You may rework the first paper (if it is handed in on time and you wish to do so after you have considered my comments), as well as the final one (if it is submitted at least a week before the end of classes). Answers to essay questions should be coherent and organized. Style and structure will be important factors in the grades you earn on your exams and on your papers.

The first exam will cover the material of the first half of the course and the final exam will cover the material of the second half. This means that you must have completed the reading of the first authors in time for the mid-term exam. There will be a question on the final exam involving comparison of a number of works from both halves of the course, but it will be optional.

The class uses a lecture/question/comment format. Constructive class participation will count in your favor for the course grade.

You are expected to observe appropriate standards of scholarly honesty in both your examinations and your papers. Should you choose to use secondary material on your papers, you must acknowledge your sources properly. Unacknowledged use of other people's ideas is plagiarism and entails serious academic penalties. This also goes for material you may have found on the web. College policy states:

"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."

RECOMMENDED SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS:

**Strongly Recommended:**


Ginzburg, Lydia. "Notes from the Leningrad Blockade." .


Petrushevskaya, Ludmilla. " That Kind of Girl"

**Just Recommended:**

Primary texts:


Chukovskaya, Lydia. *To the Memory of Childhood*. Evanston: Northwestern, 1988


Palei, M. *The Losers Division*. Translated by Jehanne Gheith.

Pavlova, Karolina. *A Double Life*. Translated by Barbara Heldt.


History and Criticism:


Women Painters of the Avant-garde 1910-1930 (catalogue, Gallery Gmurzunska)
Zirin, Mary. Russian Women Writers 1890-1930. Epd.: 1993