

RUS 330/REE 325  
Department of Slavic and Eurasian Studies  
Spring 2012

## Literature and Art of Russian Modernism and Avant-Garde



**Instructor Information:** Marina Potoplyak, PhD  
Class Meetings: Mon, Wed, Fri 12:00 – 1:00 PM in PAR 303  
Office: CAL 436C  
Office Hours: Mon, Fri 1:00 – 2:00 PM and by appointment  
E-mail: [marina.potoplyak@gmail.com](mailto:marina.potoplyak@gmail.com)

**Course Description:** Focusing on literary and artistic expressions of Russian modernist and avant-garde aesthetics, this course explores various responses to Russian cultural modernity between 1890s, when Russian Symbolists first published their works, and the Party decree of 1932 that established the Writers' Union and outlawed all other literary organizations. Unfolding against the background of the revolutions and civil war in Russia, diverse manifestations of the spirit of modernity were captured by the aesthetics of Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, Futurists' shocking manifestos, socialist realist works, and avant-garde art movements like Constructivism and Malevich's Suprematism, among others. While reading critically both textual and non-textual works, we will constantly reference the unique socio-political and cultural context of the period locally and globally in order to create a panoramic vision of possibly the richest period in Russian culture.

Because of the complexity and richness of artistic expression and the unique interconnectedness of arts between 1890s and 1920s, we will explore different artistic and literary phenomena both chronologically and according to particular recurrent themes, like the crisis and renewal, the new and the old, revolution and art, and so on. Students are encouraged to choose a topic of their interest early in the semester and explore it in their papers and projects. Please consult your instructor during the

first three weeks of the course if you need help finding a topic.

**Requirements:**

Participation (including regularly updated reading diary/blog) – 10%

Short response paper – 15%

Presentation – 15%

Two exams – 30%

Final research paper or multimedia project – 30%

**Required Works:**

Aleksandr Blok. *The Unknown Lady* (1906) and other poems (course packet\*)

*A Slap in the Face of Public Taste* (1912)

Gray, Camilla. *The Russian Experiment in Art, 1863-1922* (Co-op)

Daniil Kharms. *Short Stories* (course packet)

Mayakovsky, Vladimir. *Bedbug and Selected Poetry* (Co-op)

Igor Stravinsky. *The Rite of Spring* (1913) (Fine Arts Library reserves)

Zamiatin, Evgeny. *We* (1920) (Penguin edition, Co-op)

Mikhail Zoshchenko. *Nervous People and Other Stories* (course packet)

*Tretia Meschanskaya* (1927) (online)

Various manifestos and documents (course packet)

Poems by Velimir Khlebnikov, Osip Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova and others (course packet)

Related articles (course packet)

\*Course packet is available at Jenn's Copies on Guadalupe St.

**Recommended:**

Bowlt, John E. *Moscow & St. Petersburg 1900-1920: Art, Life, & Culture of the Russian Silver Age* (2008) (FA reserves)

Clark, Katerina. *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (1995)

Hutchings, Stephen C. *Russian Modernism: The Transfiguration of the Everyday* (1997) (electronic)

Matich, Olga (ed). *Petersburg/Petersburg: Novel and City, 1900-1921* (2010) (electronic)

*Meyerhold, Theatre and the Russian Avant-Garde* (DVD, 2004) (FA reserves)

Peterson, Ronald E. *A History of Russian Symbolism* (1993) (electronic)

**Class Attendance:** Class attendance is required. You are expected to read all assigned texts **before** the class and to participate actively in the discussion. Only three unexcused absences are allowed; each additional absence will result in a lower final grade (for example, B+ instead of A-). There will be no make-ups for exams and late papers will not be accepted. If you missed a class, it is your responsibility to borrow notes from your classmates and contact your instructor in case something is unclear. According to the *General Information* catalog, “[a] student who is absent from a class or examination for the observance of a religious holy day may complete the work issued within a reasonable time after the absence, if proper notice has been given” (page 71). The deadline for notification of such an absence is fourteen days prior to the class absence or the first class day for religious holy days that fall within the first two weeks of the semester.

**Special Accommodations:** At the beginning of the semester, students with disabilities who need special accommodations should notify the instructor by presenting a letter prepared by the Services for Students with Disabilities Office. To ensure that the most appropriate accommodations can be provided, students should contact the SSD Office at 471-6259 or 471-4641 TTY.

**Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty:** Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. Refer to the Student Judicial Services website for official University policies and procedures on scholastic dishonesty.

**Grade Evaluations:**

**a. One Response Paper (15%):** Response papers should reflect your thinking on assigned reading. Format: 5-6 pages, Times New Roman, 12 pt. You will be evaluated on the depth and quality of your reflections, clarity of style, and cohesive argumentation. After you receive your paper back, you will have about a week to revise and resubmit it, if desired. Detailed instructions will be provided two weeks before the paper is due.

**b. Two In-Class Exams (30% total):** Each exam will test your knowledge of material discussed in class and studied independently at home. Exams will include ID (for both paintings and texts), multiple-choice, and short essay questions.

**c. Presentation (15%):** You will prepare a 20-minute oral presentation on one of the topics offered at the beginning of the semester. You will discuss your presentation with your instructor **no later than one week in advance**. If you are planning to assign readings, provide materials to your instructor for sharing via Blackboard at least two weeks before your presentation. **Graduate students** will prepare to teach or co-teach during one class meeting. Two meetings with your instructor are required (one before the class and one after). PowerPoint presentations and hand-outs will be posted on Blackboard.

**e. Participation (10%):** Your instructor will determine this part of the grade based on your preparedness and participation in class. There are three components of success: regular attendance, advance reading/preparation of assigned materials, and insightful, well-formulated comments and questions during discussions. **Important:** Bring your **text** and **reading diary** to each class! In the diary, you will record your thoughts, questions, and observations while reading the assigned pieces and studying artworks. The diary is tremendously helpful when you are generating ideas for your papers and prepare for exams. Contact your instructor if you have any questions about other successful study strategies.

**f. Final Research Paper or Multimedia Project (30%):** Your one-page paper or project proposal is due on April 16. More instructions to follow.

**Class Schedule\***

DATE	CLASS DISCUSSION	ASSIGNMENT DUE
Wed Jan 18	Introduction: Structure of the Course, Goals and Requirements.	
Fri Jan 20	Terms and Concepts: Modernism, Modernity, Avant-Garde	Childs (first half) (CP)
Mon Jan 23	Russian Literature and Art of the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century: A Brief Overview. Artistic and literary trends of the late 1890s.	Childs (second half) (CP); Gray, Chapter One ARTstor: Vrubel, Serov, Repin

Wed Jan 25	The Silver Age (1890s-1910s): Aleksandr Blok, Andrey Bely, Anna Akhmatova, Lev Gumilev	Excerpts from Bely's <i>Petersburg</i> (CP); Bely's essays on Symbolism. Poetry of Akhmatova, Gumilev, Mandelstam (CP)
Fri Jan 27	Blok: Early Poetry and "Twelve"	Blok's poetry, "Twelve" (CP); "Puppet Show" (Blackboard)
Mon Jan 30	'World of Art': journal, community, and exhibitions. Presentation: _____	Gray, Chapter Two ARTstor: Leon Bakst, Alexander Benois
Wed Feb 1	Diaghilev's <i>Ballets Russes</i> . Presentation	Gray, Chapter Three
Fri Feb 3	<i>Rite of Spring</i> (1913) and its Reception. Presentation	<i>Riot at the Rite</i> (YouTube)
Mon Feb 6	"World Fire in Our Blood": Revolutions, Riots, and Social Unrest in the early 20 <sup>th</sup> Century Presentation	<i>Rite of Spring</i> . One-page response (in diary). Gapon's Petition and other documents (CP)
Wed Feb 8	Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov: Impressionism. Primitivism. Rayonism.	Gray, Chapter Four Goncharova and Larionov on ARTstor
Fri Feb 10	Rayonnism continued: Exhibitions and Collaborations	Gray, Chapter Five (first half)
Mon Feb 13	Suprematism. Kazimir Malevich Presentation _____	Gray, Chapter Five (second half); Malevich on Blackboard Malevich on ARTstor
Wed Feb 15	Breaking with the Tradition. Russian Futurism: Art and Literature. Kruchenykh, Khlebnikov, Burliuks, Mayakovsky	<i>Slap</i> and other manifestos (CP); Khlebnikov's poetry (CP); Mayakovsky's poetry
Fri Feb 17	Russian Futurism continued: Transmental Language and Word as Such	Readings in CP
Mon Feb 20	Futurism and Cubism	Gray, Chapter Six
Wed Feb 22	The Union of Youth and Organic Futurism	Povelikhina's article; Matiushin's statements (CP)
Fri Feb 24	Elena Guro's Art and Prose	Guro's Prose (CP)
Mon Feb 27	Bolshevik Revolution and the Arts Presentation	Gray, Chapter Seven
Wed Feb 29	Mass Celebrations and Street Performances Presentation	"Artists Are Mobilized" (CP)
Fri March 2	Propaganda: Posters and Performances. Presentation _____	Readings TBA
Mon March 5	Visions of the future. Zamyatin's <i>We</i>	<i>We</i>
Wed March 7	Zamyatin's <i>We</i>	<i>We</i>
Fri March 9	Zamyatin's <i>We</i>	<b>Response paper due</b>
Mon March 19	NEP	"The Beginning of NEP" (CP)
Wed March 21	Constructivism: An Overview. Presentation _____	Gray, Chapter Eight
Fri March 23	Constructivism: Art and Industrial Design	Gray, Chapter Eight
Mon March 26	The Avant-Garde Theater.	Readings TBA

	Presentation	
Wed March 28	<i>Meyerhold, Theatre and Avant-Garde</i>	
Fri March 30	City Planning and Architecture. Concepts of New Life and New Person. Presentation	Article on Blackboard; Film handout
Mon April 2	Communal Life and Artistic Hotbeds. Gorky and Lunacharsky	“Three Houses” (CP)
Wed April 4	Absurdism and Satire: Kharms and Zoshchenko	Intro (CP)
Fri April 6	Daniil Kharms	Kharms’ prose (CP)
Mon April 9	Kharms	
Wed April 11	Mikhail Zoshchenko	Zoshchenko’s prose (CP)
Fri April 13	Avant-Garde Cinema. Presentation	Readings on Blackboard
Mon April 16	<i>Third Meschanskaya (Bed and Sofa) (1927)</i>	<b>Paper/Project proposal due (one or two pages)</b>
Wed April 18	<i>Third Meschanskaya (Bed and Sofa) (1927)</i>	
Fri April 20	Mayakovsky’s <i>Bedbug</i>	<i>Bedbug</i>
Mon April 23	<i>Bedbug</i>	Film Review Due
Wed April 25	The End of Russian Avant-Garde? “On Reorganization of Artistic Organizations”	Party Decree (Blackboard); Papernyi article
Fri April 27	Project Presentations	
Mon April 30	Project Presentations	
Wed May 2	Closing Discussion: What Have We Learned?	
Fri May 4	<b>Exam</b>	

\*Reading assignments and course schedule can change. Please check Blackboard for updates!