

Module title: Short Stories and Important People: The Nineteenth Century

Module code: COM5029

Credit value: 15

Level: 5

Pre-requisite modules:

Content Description

This course examines the Russian short story as a genre that articulates the relationship between the self and society. We shall analyse the intrinsic narrative and thematic complexity of works by Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Andreev. Topics to discuss include self-fashioning and fate, grotesque visions of self-loss, the myth of St Petersburg, social and sexual otherness, history and individuality, love and death, time and memory.

Module Aims

1. To give students an understanding of the formal characteristics of the short story as a genre.
2. Students will have acquired an ability to provide cogent and differentiated interpretations of short stories.
3. To give students an understanding of the impact of particular Russian short stories on the political, social and cultural debates of the day, and their relation to the wider context of Russian literary history.
4. To develop a comparative understanding of the distinctiveness of the Russian short story in the wider perspective of literary practice.
5. To encourage the development of essay writing skills.

Learning Outcomes

Academic Content:

A1 Students will have acquired a developed understanding of important themes of Russian literature.

A2 Students will have developed a firm understanding of the basic poetic features of short stories.

A3 Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the role of literature in the development of Russian history and culture.

A4 Students will be able to place texts in their intertextual context.

A5 Students will have acquired an understanding of the main critical approaches to the texts considered in class.

Disciplinary Skills – able to:

B1 Apply specific techniques of interpretation to short fiction.

B2 Develop analytical skills through independent study and group-based research within seminar activities.

B3 Deploy various research techniques.

Attributes:

C1 Develop analytical skills through independent study.

C2 Produce theoretically-informed and evidence-based interpretations of literature.

C3 Develop concise and sustained written English to write well-organised and cogently argued essays.

C4 Develop an ability to explain and argue a set of ideas orally.

C5 Enhance self-organisational and group working skills.

Activity Hours

| Activity Type | Time spent (hours) |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Lecture | 11 |
| Seminar | 11 |
| Guided independent study | 128 |
| Total | 150 |

Indicative Reading List

Week 1

- Introduction to the Genre in Russia and the West
- Babel, "The Quaker"

Week 2

- Selfhood and Challenges to Fate
- Pushkin, "The Queen of Spades"
- Jurij Lotman, 'Theme and Plot: The Theme of Cards and the Card Game in Russian Literature of the Nineteenth Century', PTL, 3 (1978), 455-92.

Week 3

- Absconding Selves
- Gogol, "The Nose"
- Vladimir Nabokov, Nikolai Gogol (London: Penguin, 2011), but other editions are OK.

Week 4

- Dismantling Emptiness
- Gogol, "Nevsky Prospect"
- Josef Brodsky, "Guide to an Renamed City", in *Less than One: Selected Essays* (London: Penguin, 1986). Available online (in Firefox) at <http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/eac/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Brodsky-Guide.pdf>

Week 5

- The Otherness of Peasants and Nature
- Turgenev, "Bezhin Meadow"
- Rachel S. Platonov, "'Pastoral Space' in Nineteenth-Century Russian Prose", *MLR*, 102:4 (2007), 1105-21. Available on JSTOR.

Week 6

- Love Remembered
- Turgenev, First Love

- Judith Oloskey Mills, 'Theme and Symbol in "First Love"', SEEJ, 15:4 (1971), 433-40. Available on JSTOR.

Week 7

- Read Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich

Week 8

- Confronting Death
- The Death of Ivan Ilyich
- Robert Louis Jackson, 'Text and Subtext in the Opening and Closing Lines of The Death of Ivan Ilyich, or, Phonetic Orchestration in the Semantic Development of the Story', TSJ, 9 (1997), 11-24. Available online at http://media.wix.com/ugd/dab097_a25c86762f1e4ec4804f541fbaeb344d.pdf

Week 9

- Submission and Rebellion
- Dostoevsky, "A Gentle Creature"
- Joseph Frank, Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871-1881 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002), chapters 14 and 18.

Week 10

- Breaking Rank
- Chekhov, "Fat and Thin", "The Death of a Government Clerk", "The Civil Service Exam"
- Cathy Popkin, The Pragmatics of Insignificance: Chekhov, Zoshchenko, Gogol (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993), chapter 1.

Week 11

- History and Change
- Chekhov, "The Bishop", "The Betrothed"
- Adrian Hunter, 'Constance Garnett's Chekhov and the Modernist Short Story', Translation and Literature, 12:1 (2003), 69-87. Available on JSTOR.

Week 12

- Alone in an Institution
- Andreev, "Once Upon a Time"
- James Woodward, Leonid Andreyev: A Study (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), chapter 4.