

RUS 360 (CL 323, CTI 345, REE 325): LEO TOLSTOY'S EARLY WORKS

Instructor: Nadya Clayton (nclayton@mail.utexas.edu)

Office: CAL 7

Office hours: Wednesdays 11:00 am – 1:00 pm

Class meetings: MWF 10:00 – 11:00 am

Place: PAR 203

Course description:

This course offers a survey of Tolstoy's most emblematic early works that paved the way to recognition for the young writer on the Russian literary scene. The works that we will examine serve as perfect landmarks on the path of the young Tolstoy's evolution as a writer and provide an invaluable insight into the birth and formation of his literary genius. It would be impossible to fully understand and appreciate Tolstoy's later literary masterworks without familiarizing oneself with the literary, aesthetic, philosophical and historical influences and ideas that accompanied and shaped Tolstoy's first steps as a professional writer.

Starting with his first published novel *Childhood*, highly acclaimed and recognized immediately after its appearance in 1852, we will look into the persistent autobiographical tendency of Tolstoy's literary creations, his superb power of observation and portrayal of human psychic life and psychological analysis, his captivating descriptive art that resided in the love for minute details and sweeping generalizations. His military sketches will transport us to the Caucasus where a young officer Leo Tolstoy is pondering the nature of human courage and vanity and is struggling in his writing with the romantic stereotypes of war. We will trace the emergence of the two hallmarks of Tolstoy's descriptive style – the so-called *estrangement device* and *interior monologue* or "dialectic of the soul," and will experience all manifestations of human psyche subjected to the horrors of war through the eyes of the best war journalist – Leo Tolstoy.

The course will also explore Tolstoy's evolution as a writer in the context of his relationship to the aesthetic ideas of the 1850's and his deeply personal involvement in the heated debate over the purpose of art that sharply divided the Russian literary scene of that time. Tolstoy's two lesser known works *Notes from Lucerne* and "Albert" will help us to discover the primary source and nature of Tolstoy's aesthetic rhetoric and to experience his deep personal passion for music.

And finally, we will follow Tolstoy into the classroom of his peasant school to answer his seemingly extravagant question: "Should we teach the peasant children to write, or should they teach us?" Through reading some of Tolstoy's stimulating pedagogical essays which become a new form of artistic creation under the pen of the writer, we will see how Tolstoy's original, humane and practical vision of education has anticipated some of the most leading principles of our contemporary educational theory and commends a great deal to a modern educator.

Texts:

Childhood

Boyhood

Youth

The Raid

Sebastopol in December 1854

Sebastopol in May 1855

Sebastopol in August 1855

The Wood-Felling

A Billiard- Marker's Notes

The Snowstorm

Two Hussars

A Landlord's Morning

Notes from Lucerne

Albert

Three Deaths

Family Happiness

Strider: The Story of a Horse

Polikushka

The Yasnaya Polyana school in the months of November and December

Should we teach the peasant children to write, or should they teach us?

Tales for Children:

God Sees the Truth, but Waits

A Prisoner in the Caucasus

The Bear-Hunt

Course requirements/ Grading:

Active and informed participation in discussion	20%
One in-class oral presentation	30%
Two short written textual analyses (3 pages)	20%
Final research paper (10-12 pages)	30%

Format:

Informal lecture and discussion. Emphasis is on the texts themselves, their significance in Tolstoy's creative evolution, Russian culture and human experience.

Explanations:

Good attendance is pivotal to your success in the course, so you are expected to attend regularly and on time. No more than one unexcused absence will be allowed. Excused absences are for illness or family

emergency only. Excessive absences will lower the final course grade by one-half grade. Coming to class late is disruptive. Cell phones and other electronic devices must be turned off in class.

Active and informed participation is especially important in the seminar setting. Be generous with your comments in response to your colleagues' presentations. Always take notes on what you read, and come to class with a brief synopsis of your ideas about the text and the author as they are developing in your mind in order to try them out and hear what others have to say.

Even though the list of texts included in the course may seem long, the reading load is not excessive and does not exceed 120 pages per week – keep in mind that most of the works on the list are shorter fiction.

Each student will be responsible for one 20 minute in-class oral presentation which will address the interpretation of a particular work on the syllabus or a topic related to our readings.

Two short textual analyses of selected passages from two different works on the syllabus provided by the professor should focus on the stylistic and structural elements of the text. Details and exact methodology will be covered in class before the first paper is due.

The final paper may concentrate on any literary or cultural problem which sparked your interest in the course of our readings. The topic should involve several texts which were read in class as well as independently consulted resources outside of class. A choice of topics will be provided, but you can also choose your own topic as long as you consult the professor about it. I will be happy to read and critique a draft, given a week's lead time.

Recommended secondary sources/ reference texts:

Leo Tolstoy. Collected Shorter Fiction. Trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude. 2 vols. New York: Everyman's Library, 2001.

Ekhenbaum, Boris. *The Young Tolstoy.* 1922. Trans. and ed. Gary Kern. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1972.

Maude, Aylmer. *The Life of Tolstoy.* 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Morozov, Vasilii. "Recollections of a Pupil of the Yasnaya Polyana School." In *Reminiscences of Lev Tolstoy by His Contemporaries.* Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1961.

Orwin, Donna. "The Unity of Tolstoy's Early Works." *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 12, 4: 449-63.

Wilson, A. N. *Tolstoy.* New York: W. W. Norton, 1988.

Armstrong, Michael and Alan Pinch. *Tolstoy on education. Tolstoy's Educational Writings 1861-61.* New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982.

Berlin, Isaiah. "Tolstoy and Enlightenment." In *Russian Thinkers.* London: Penguin Books, 1994.

Botkin, V. P. *Literaturnaya kritika. Publicistika. Pis'ma.* Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia. 1984.

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