

RUSS 294/ENGL 294 SPRING 2004

MWF 2:20-3:20, HUM 226

www.macalester.edu/russian/courses/RUSS294.html

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Course Description

The scandal surrounding Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel about the nymphet Lolita finally made him a hugely successful celebrity, allowing him to retire from teaching at Cornell University and move to Switzerland to devote himself to fiction, translation, criticism, and lepidoptery. This was only one of the many metamorphoses Nabokov underwent while in exile, moving from Russia to the Crimea, Cambridge UK, Berlin, Paris, Cambridge MA, Ithaca, Hollywood, and finally Montreux. Members of the Russian nobility, the Nabokovs lost everything with the 1917 Revolution except for their immense cultural capital, which Nabokov transformed into a tremendously productive career in Russian, French, and English. This course examines both the Russian (in translation) and English novels – his first novel, *Mary* (1926), *The Defense* (1929), *Invitation to a Beheading* (1936), *The Gift* (1938), *Lolita* (1955), and *Pale Fire* (1962) – his memoirs, *Speak, Memory* (1966), and some of the essays and short stories, plus recordings of Nabokov reading his work aloud. We will also watch *Lolita* (1962) by Stanley Kubrick and the recent version (1997) by Adrian Lyne, and *The Luzhin Defense* (2000), by Marleen Gorris. A mercurial defier of national, linguistic, cultural, and theoretical categories, Nabokov remains paradoxically elusive and monumental, a thrilling and exasperating genius.

Required Texts

Mary (1926, English 1970)
The Defense (1929, English 1964)
Invitation to a Beheading (1936, English 1959)
The Gift (1938, 1952, English 1963)
The Enchanter (1939, English 1986)
The Annotated Lolita (1955, Russian 1967, 1976)
Pale Fire (1962, Russian 1983)
Speak, Memory (1951, 1966, Russian 1954)

Recommended on Reserve

Vladimir Alexandrov, *Nabokov's Otherworld*, 1991
 Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years*, 1990
 Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 1991
 Brian Boyd, *Nabokov's Pale Fire*, 1999
 Julian W. Connolly, *Nabokov and His Fiction: New Perspectives*, 1999
 Julian W. Connolly, *Nabokov's Invitation To A Beheading: A Critical Companion*, 1997
 D. Barton Johnson, *Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Nabokov*, 1985
 Stacy Schiff, *Véra (Mrs. Vladimir Nabokov)*, 1999
 Gavriel Shapiro, *Nabokov at Cornell*, 2003
 Maxim D. Shroyer, *The World of Nabokov's Stories*, 1999
 Michael Wood, *The Magician's Doubts: Nabokov and the Risks of Fiction*, 1995

Websites

<http://www.libraries.psu.edu/nabokov/> Site of the Vladimir Nabokov Society, it contains a list and some photos of everywhere Nabokov lived (including motels and street addresses), a chronology of his life, a bibliography of his work, bibliographies of works about his works, some critical articles, a list of films based on his works, and indexes to the journals *The Nabokovian* and *Nabokov Studies*, which is supported by the University of Minnesota.

<http://www.nabokov.tk/> This site is in Russian and English, with complete texts of novels, short stories, plays, translations, memoirs, poetry, essays, interviews, letters, and photographs. You can hear Nabokov read *Lolita* and Russian poems, and submit questions and comments.

<http://www.libraries.psu.edu/nabokov/demossp1.htm> An index to *Strong Opinions* (1973).

NABOKV-L listserv@ucsbvm.bitnet Vladimir Nabokov

Writing Assignments (% of your final grade)

1. Write a short paper (1-2 pages) comparing Nabokov's and Tolstoy's ideas about art. Do you share either of their views? Due in class Monday, Feb . 2 (10%).
 - Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?* 1896, 50-3.
 - Vladimir Nabokov, "L'envoi," *Lectures on Literature* (1950s), 181-2.

2. Film review (2-3 pages), due in class the Monday after we see the film. (10%)
3. Two papers (5-7 pages) on a work and topic of your choice. The paper is due on the Monday after we finish discussing the work. Please submit a one-page abstract of the paper to me on the Friday before you start writing. The first paper is due no later than Monday March 8th, and the second, Monday April 26th. You may rewrite your paper for a better grade. I expect rewritten papers to be substantially revised and am happy to work with students individually on writing. (each 30%)
4. A midterm *à la* Nabokov: a multiple choice, open book, take-home midterm on the details (trivia, some might say) of the novels. Due Monday March 29th. (20%)
There is no final.
5. I will provide a list of study questions for each work. You should be prepared to discuss them. Occasionally I will ask you to write a brief paragraph on a question at the start of class. Feel free to use the questions to shape your paper topics.

Field Trip

The Museum of Russian Art in Bloomington may interest you as a way to learn more about Russian culture. This collection provides a context for Nabokov's ideas about philistinism, bad art, and émigré culture. We will read Nabokov's essay about this phenomenon, which in Russian is called *poshlust*.

Readings

Week 1 *Speak, Memory*

M Jan 26 Introduction: Which Nabokov?

W Jan 28 Foreword, Chapters 1 & 2

F Jan 30 Chapters 3 & 4

Week 2 *Speak, Memory*

M Feb 2 Chapters 5, 6 & 7

W Feb 4 Chapters 8, 9, & 10

F Feb 6 Chapters 11 & 12

Week 3

M Feb 9 Chapters 13, 14, 15 & Index

W Feb 11 *Mary*: Chapters 1-7

F Feb 13 Chapters 8-17

Week 4 *The Defense*; film *The Luzhin Defense* (2000, 112 min.)

M Feb 16 No class

W Feb 18 Chapters 1-5

F Feb 20 Chapters 6-10

Week 5

M Feb 23 Chapters 11-14

W Feb 25 *Invitation to a Beheading*: Chapters 1-4

F Feb 27 Chapters 5-9

Week 6

M Mar 1 Chapters 10-14
 W Mar 3 Chapters 15-20
 F Mar 5 *The Gift*: Chapters 1

Week 7 *The Gift*

M Mar 8 Chapter 2
 • Last day to hand in first paper
 W Mar 10 Chapter 2-3
 F Mar 12 Chapter 3

SPRING BREAK: PLEASE READ *PALE FIRE*Week 8 *The Gift*

M Mar 22 Chapter 4 (212-50)
 W Mar 24 Chapter 4 (251-300)
 F Mar 26 Chapter 5

Week 9 *Lolita*, by Stanley Kubrick (1962, 152 min.)

M Mar 29 *The Enchanter*
 W Mar 31
 F Apr 2 *Lolita*: Foreword, Chapter 1-11

Week 10 *Lolita*, by Adrian Lyne (1997, 137 min.)

M Apr 5 Chapter 12-26
 W Apr 7 Chapter 27-Part 2, Chapter 2
 F Apr 9 No Class

Week 11

M Apr 12 Chapter 3-16
 W Apr 14 Chapter 17-28
 F Apr 16 Chapter 29-36, "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*"

Week 12 Reread *Pale Fire*

M Apr 19 Foreword, Poem
 W Apr 21 Poem, Commentary 73-107
 F Apr 23 Commentary 107-56

Week 13 *Pale Fire*

M Apr 26 Commentary 157-215
 • Last day to hand in second paper
 W Apr 28 Commentary 215-64
 F Apr 30 Commentary 264-301

Week 14

M May 3 Index of the course