

Russian Literature and Opera RS335C
Fall 1999
T 6-9 pm, RSC

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Course Description

This course encompasses the second half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries in order to trace the complexity of Russian national identity through literature and opera. The study of Russian literature and opera offers one way to understand Russians' cultural response to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as they turn to the past in an effort to recover a sense of Russian national identity.

In Russia, opera developed only in the latter half of the nineteenth century as part of a drive to raise the level of Russian culture in the visual and musical arts to a European standard. A preoccupation with comparing Russian and European culture was already firmly entrenched in Russian culture, beginning with Peter the Great's attempts in the eighteenth century to modernize Russian court life, and continuing in the early nineteenth century in all areas of Russian literature, society, and political life. The reign of Nicholas I (1825-55) interrupted a process of Europeanization that had begun to accelerate after the War of 1812, and which again continued with the period of reforms around 1860 under Alexander II. Now part of a revival and expansion of Russian cultural life, Russian opera reflected the renewed quest by Russians to understand their history and future amidst rapidly changing notions of national identity.

These unusual historical circumstances are reflected in the relationship between the operas we will study and the literary texts on which they are based. Rather than faithfully transform literature into music, composers interpreted earlier literary texts to fit new historical, political, social, and cultural ideas and ideals.

Operas

Boris Godunov (1869)

Eugene Onegin (1878)

Prince Igor (1887)

Queen of Spades (1890)

The Fiery Angel (1927)

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk (1932)

War and Peace (1952)

Modest Musorgsky (1839-81)

Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840-93)

Aleksandr Borodin (1833-87)

Pyotr Tchaikovsky

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-75)

Sergei Prokofiev

Requirements

- One five-page and one seven-page paper. I do not grade the first draft of your first paper, but make extensive comments and work with you on editing techniques, which you apply by revising the paper for a grade. Any paper can be revised for a better grade. (25% each)
- The papers (your choice) are due the Monday of the week following the discussion of the work you have decided to write on.
- Two five-minute oral presentations on your ideas to the class before you write your papers. (5% each)
- Once a week, a writing exercise on the week's reading on-line through email with me and the class (instead of a midterm) (20%)
- Final exam (20%)

Required TextsThe Lay of Igor (before 1187)Aleksandr Pushkin (1799-1837), Boris Godunov (1825, pub. 1831)Aleksandr Pushkin, Complete Prose Fiction (Queen of Spades, 1833)Aleksandr Pushkin, Eugene Onegin (1833)Nikolai Leskov (1831-95), Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk (1865)Lev Tolstoy (1828-1910), War And Peace (1869)Valery Bryusov (1873-1924), Fiery Angel (1910)WeekThe Nineteenth Century1 *Opera and Russian National Self-Consciousness*Modest Musorgsky, Boris Godunov (1869)2 Aleksandr Pushkin, Boris Godunov (1825, pub. 1831)3 *The Imperial Style*Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Eugene Onegin (1878)4 Aleksandr Pushkin, Eugene Onegin (1833)5 *Orientalism and Nationalism*Aleksandr Borodin, Prince Igor (1887)The Lay of Igor (before 1187)6 *The Russian Song*Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Queen of Spades (1890)Aleksandr Pushkin, Queen of Spades (1833)The Twentieth Century7 *Sex, Decadence, and the Politics of Soviet National Identity*Sergei Prokofiev, The Fiery Angel (1927)Valery Bryusov, Fiery Angel (1910)8 Dmitry Shostakovich, Katerina Izmailova (1932)Nikolai Leskov, Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk (1865)9 *The Great Russian Novel, War, and the Politics of Russian National Identity in the Soviet Union*Sergei Prokofiev, War and Peace (1952)Lev Tolstoy, War And Peace (1869), Books 1

10 Books 2-3

11 Books 4-6

12 Books 7-9

13 Books 10

14 Books 11-13

15 Books 14-15, 2 epilogues