

RUSS 0811: Madness and Madmen in Russian Culture

Fall 2008

Tuesdays, Thursdays 9:30-10:45 in G8 Cathedral of Learning

Our greatest blessings come to us by way of madness, provided the madness is given to us
by divine gift (**Plato, *Phaedrus***).

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:30 – 1:30, and by appointment

Credits, Prerequisites, and Format

This course carries three credits and satisfies the CAS requirement in international/foreign culture. It is intended for a general undergraduate audience and has no prerequisites. Previous knowledge of Russian culture is advantageous, but by no means necessary. The course meets twice a week and combines lecture and discussion format. Despite the relatively large size of the class, I am committed to giving each one of you ample opportunity to participate in class discussions.

Course Rationale and Goals

This course explores interpretations and representations of madness in Russian culture from the Middle Ages up until the present. Our primary texts will be verbal and visual: fairy tales, folk narratives, literature, film. Since madness is not an exclusively Russian phenomenon, we will need to place its Russian history within the broader context of European ideas and treatments from Hippocrates to Freud. This is not a medical course, and it will not treat madness as synonymous with “mental illness” or “mental disorder.” We will study different medical approaches to madness, understanding that the concept of “mental illness” is only one among the possible answers to the following question: “What is madness?” As we will witness, many other interpretations are feasible. Our goal is not to decide which one of them is “correct,” but rather to see how representations of madness—including the medical/scientific—express cultural politics, values, and tensions.

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to

- Discuss the general historical development in concepts of madness from the Antiquity to the present day.
- Characterize major cultural personages in the Russian tradition of madness: Ivan the Fool, the *iurodivye* (“fools in Christ”), the *klikushi* (“shriekers”), the “little man,” etc.
- Identify and discuss major literary texts in the Russian tradition of madness.
- Critique modern concepts and treatments of mental illness from a feminist perspective (analyze the ways in which these have been used to marginalize and repress women in a male-dominated society).
- Problematize medical definitions of madness and the corresponding clinical, psychiatric, and psychoanalytic practices.

Required Readings

- Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from the Underground and the Double*. Trans. Jessie Coulson. NY: Penguin, 2003. (“Dostoevsky” in the syllabus)
- Massie, Suzanne. *Land of the Firebird: The Beauty of Old Russia*. Blue Hill, Maine: Heart Tree, 1980. (“Massie”)
- Pelevin, Viktor. *Buddha’s Little Finger*. New York: Penguin Press, 2001. (Pelevin)
- Porter, Roy. *Madness: A Brief History*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. (“Porter”)
- Tolstoy, Leo. *The Kreutzer Sonata and Other Short Stories*. NY: Dover, 1993. (“Tolstoy”)
- Texts on line (see schedule of classes)

Recommended Readings

- Billington, James. *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture*. (any edition)
- Chizhevskij, Dmitrii. *History of Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature*. 2 vols. Trans. Richard Noel Porter. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt UP, 1974.
- Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (any edition).
- MacKenzie, David and Michael W. Curran. *A History of Russia, the Soviet Union and Beyond*. (any edition)
- Radden, Jennifer (ed.) *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.
- Sirotkina, Irina. *Diagnosing Literary Genius: A Cultural History of Psychiatry in Russia, 1880-1930*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2002.

Course Requirements and Grading

You will be required to:

- Complete the assignments scheduled for each class meeting (normally that means reading 30-60 pages and being ready to discuss them in class on the pertinent day). Questions on these reading assignments will be posted on the Pitt Course Web prior to each class.
- Participate actively and intelligently in class discussions
- Take the three scheduled exams
- Take at least four of the unannounced quizzes administered throughout the semester

Your grade will be determined by the following components:

- 3 exams (120 points maximum)
- 4 highest quiz scores (20 points maximum)
- Class participation (20 points maximum)

TOTAL: 160 points maximum

Grading scale

A 93-100	A- 90-92	B+ 86-89	B 83-85	B- 80-82	C+ 76-79
C 73-75	C- 70-72	D+ 66-69	D 63-65	D- 60-62	F 59-0

EXAMS will feature 30 multiple choice questions. The exams are non-cumulative. Please **note the three exam dates and plan ahead**, so as to be present in class on the particular day.

Requests for make-up exams will be accommodated only in extreme circumstances: death in the immediate family, serious illness on the day of the exam, or travel related to university activities. The proper documentation of these should be submitted to me **no later than a week after the exam date**. All exams will be administered during regular class time, in the room where we usually meet. You will have 60 minutes to complete the exam.

NOTE:

Should unforeseeable circumstances, such as a fire alarm, interfere with Examination 1 and/or Examination 2, they will be given **during the next class meeting**.

Should unforeseeable circumstances, such as a fire alarm, interfere with Examination 3, it will be given **during the Final Examination Period at the time designated by the university**.

IN-CLASS QUIZZES will be **unannounced** and should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. There will be as a minimum six quizzes throughout the semester. Their purpose is to check whether and how attentively you have done the reading for the particular day. I will not be announcing the quizzes partly in order to prevent you from hurting yourself by unthinkingly falling behind in the reading. Only the **strongest four quizzes** will count toward your final grade. Since you will be able to drop your weakest quiz grades, **no make-up quizzes will be given**.

Attendance

You are expected to attend all classes. Missing classes **jeopardizes your participation record and puts you in danger of missing quizzes and important information**.

Excused absences, such as illness or death in the immediate family, must be documented no later than a week after the student's return to class. In case of absence, it is your responsibility to obtain **from your classmates** any information passed out during the class you missed. You are, therefore, encouraged to exchange telephone numbers and e-mail addresses with your classmates. If you are experiencing special problems in the course, do not hesitate to make an appointment with me. I will be glad to assist you.

Web Site

This course will appear on the Pitt Course Web.

Academic Integrity

By remaining enrolled in the course, you not only agree to abide by the above stipulations, but also understand that I will follow rigorously the rules spelled out in the *Handbook on*

Integrity regarding cheating, plagiarism, etc. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with these rules and observe them. Any infraction will be penalized accordingly.

Disability Policy

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, please notify both me and Disability Resources and Services by the second week of the term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call 648-7890 (voice or TDD) to schedule an appointment. The office is located in the William Pitt Union, Room 216.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS:

- Tuesday, 08/26: Mutual introductions, Syllabus
- Thursday, 08/28: General introduction to Russian culture
In-class DVD screening
Reading:
Massie 21-60
- Tuesday, 09/02: Supernatural Concepts of Madness
Reading:
Porter 1-33 + Weyer, “Melancholia, Witches, and ... Demons” (online: under Course Documents in the Course Web)
- Thursday, 09/04: Women possessed
Reading:
Ussher, “Witchcraft” (online) + Ivanits, “Russian Sorcery,” “Spoiling and Healing” (online)
- Tuesday, 09/09: Redemptive debility: foolishness and fools in Russian fairy tales, fools in Christ
Reading:
Porter 62-88 + Fairy tales from the Afanas’iev collection (online) + Thompson (online)
- Thursday, 09/11: Rationalization of Madness: From Antiquity to the Enlightenment
Reading:
Porter 34-61, excerpt from Švankmajer, *Lunacy* (2005)
- Tuesday, 09/16: “Insanity” as a tool of oppression
The case of Chaadaev
Soviet dissidents

Reading: Michel Foucault: "The Great Confinement" (online) + excerpt from *No Asylum* (online)

In-class screening: Forman, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975)

- Thursday, 09/18: "Insanity" as a tool of oppression II
In-class screening: Forman, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) (ending)
- Tuesday, 09/23: **EXAM 1**
- Thursday 09/25: The West goes East: Russia's Westernization
Reading:
Massie 89-151
In-class screening: *Peter the Great, The Tyrant Reformer* (2000) (excerpt)
- Tuesday, 09/30: The Little Man and the Big City I
Reading:
Massie 202-18 + Pushkin, "The Bronze Horseman" (online)
+ Pushkin, "The Queen of Spades" (online)
In-class screening: *The Queen of Spades* by Tchaikovsky (excerpt)
- Thursday, 10/02: The little man and the big city I
Reading:
Gogol: "Diary of a Madman" (online)
Gogol: "Nevsky Avenue" (online)
- Tuesday, 10/07: Movie day (screening and discussion)
Scorsese, *Taxi Driver* (1975)
- Thursday, 10/09: The little man and the big city II
Scorsese, *Taxi Driver* (1975) (ending)
Reading:
Dostoevsky: "Notes from Underground" (start reading Part I)
- Thursday, 10/16: The little man and the big city II (continued)
Reading:
Dostoevsky: "Notes from Underground" (finish reading Part I)
Massie: 307-324
- Tuesday, 10/21: The little man and the big city II (continued)
Reading:
Dostoyevsky: "Notes from Underground" (Part II)
- Thursday, 10/23: **EXAM 2**
- Tuesday, 10/28: Pathological jealousy
Reading:

Tolstoy: “The Kreutzer Sonata”

- Thursday, 10/30: Uncertain times, imbalanced souls I
Post-tsarist vs. post-Soviet Russia
Reading:
Pelevin: *Buddha’s Little Finger* (1-58)
- Tuesday, 11/04: Uncertain times, imbalanced souls II
Reading:
Pelevin: *Buddha’s Little Finger* (58-104)
- Thursday, 11/06: Uncertain times, imbalanced souls III
Reading:
Pelevin: *Buddha’s Little Finger* (104-151)
- Tuesday, 11/11: Uncertain times, imbalanced souls IV
Reading:
Pelevin: *Buddha’s Little Finger* (152-196)
- Thursday, 11/13: Uncertain times, imbalanced souls V
Reading:
Pelevin: *Buddha’s Little Finger* (197-239)
- Tuesday, 11/ 18: Uncertain times, imbalanced souls VI
Reading:
Pelevin: *Buddha’s Little Finger* (240-268)
- Thursday, 11/20: Uncertain times, imbalanced souls VII
Reading:
Pelevin: *Buddha’s Little Finger* (269- until the end)
- Tuesday, 11/25: It’s a mad world: Movie day
Andrei Konchalovsky: *The House of Fools* (2003)
- Thursday, 11/27:
Thanksgiving observation – no classes
- Tuesday, 12/02: Is there such a thing as madness?
Andrei Konchalovsky: *The House of Fools* (2003) (ending)
- Thursday, 12/04: **EXAM 3**

No final exam!
Enjoy your winter break!