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THE GREAT COURSES®

Literature & English Language

Classics of Russian Literature

Taught by: Professor Irwin Weil,
Northwestern University

Part 1

Course Guidebook

THE TEACHING COMPANY®

Irwin Weil, Ph.D.

Professor of Russian and Russian Literature, Northwestern University

Irwin Weil is professor of Russian and Russian Literature at Northwestern University, where he has been teaching since 1966. Previously, he taught at Harvard and Brandeis Universities. He was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio, in a family that speaks only Midwestern American English; his father was formerly the owner of the Cincinnati Reds baseball team. At the age of 19, as a student at the University of Chicago, the young Weil encountered the powerful talent of Dostoevsky and decided to learn how to read that literary powerhouse in his native language. When Soviet diplomats laughed at the young American's desire to enter the USSR in Stalinist days, he settled for learning, reading, and speaking Russian in the United States. Twelve years later, when Kennedy and Khrushchev agreed to open the gates slightly, he made a beeline for Moscow, only to hear from natives that he spoke Russian "too well, like a character from Tolstoy"—shades of his reading!

Dr. Weil has been going to the USSR (later Russia) for more than 45 years—lecturing at Russian universities and academies, talking up a storm with colleagues and friends by the hundreds, if not by the thousands. He knows the Russian language and its culture as well as any person born in the United States.

Dr. Weil's students come to him in groups that number more than 500 every year. He has received dozens of teaching awards from universities and national associations. He is a laureate of the International Pushkin Medal for Outstanding Service to Russian Language and Literature and the possessor of an honorary doctorate from the prestigious St. Petersburg Nevsky Institute for the Humanities. He now speaks six or seven European languages, and he reads biblical Hebrew.

Dr. Weil's written work covers the field of Russian literature and culture, with special attention to the classics of 19th-century Russian literature and the Soviet period. He has done a great deal of work on the relations between Russian literature and music, and neither he nor his students are strangers to musical notes.

To this very day, students and colleagues continue to ask him: "So, what are *your* Russians up to now?"

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Classics of Russian Literature

Scope:

Throughout the entire world, Russian culture—and most especially its 19th-century literature—has acquired an enormous reputation. Like the heydays of other cultures—the Golden Age of Athens, the biblical period of the Hebrews, the Renaissance of the Italians, the Elizabethan period in England—the century of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Pushkin, and other great Russian writers seems, to many readers, like a great moral and spiritual compass, pointing the way toward deeper and wider understanding of what some call "the Russian soul," but many others would call the soul of every human being.

How did this culture come about, within the context of a huge continental country, perched on the cusp between European and Asiatic civilizations, taking part in all of them yet not becoming completely subject to or involved in any of them? What were the origins of this culture? How did it grow and exert its influence, first on its neighbors, then on countries and civilizations far from its borders? What influences did it feel from without, and how did it adapt and shape these influences for Russian ends? What were its inner sources of strength and understanding that allowed it to touch—and sometimes to clash with—these other cultures and still come out with something distinctively Russian? What wider implications does this process have for the entire human race?

Such are the questions and musings of the mind and the heart that these lectures will attempt to arouse and entertain. No final solutions can possibly be claimed, but some amusement and, perhaps, instruction and enlightenment may well be encountered.

Some consideration will be given to the very first predecessors of the contemporary Russians and their so-called "era of Rus'," which occurred in the Eastern European territory around the ancient city of Kiev. The origin and rise of these predecessors, together with their discovery of Eastern Orthodox Christianity—their attempt to coalesce and their fatal clash with the eastern Tatar invaders, from the 9th to the 13th centuries A.D.—produced two impressive literary languages and documents well worthy of serious study.

Subsequent history contributed to a literature that reflected human life and its nature and spirit. That history included the formation of a huge empire, starting around the city of Moscow in the 14th century and expanding under the rule of a government located in the more recent city of St. Petersburg from the early 18th century. Two cataclysmic 20th-century revolutions, which led first to the formation of the USSR in the early 1920s, then to the reestablishment of Russia as a federation in 1991, also greatly influenced the shape of literature.

After a consideration of the early formation of Russia and some of its basic documents, which provide important direction for the centuries ahead, we shall move to the 19th and 20th centuries.

We shall look at Pushkin, touted as the poetic "Sun of Russian Literature" and the "Mozart of the 19th century." Then we will examine the art of Gogol', with its remarkable combination of humor and the grotesque. The two prose giants of Russia will follow: Dostoevsky, with his dialectic between the depths of human pathology and the heights of religious inspiration, and Tolstoy, with his enormous universe of creatures, both animal and human, no two of whom are alike. Between these two giants came a very fine writer, Turgenev, who found himself, as a Russian liberal of the 1860s, caught between the radicals and the conservatives, the Westernizers and the Slavophile admirers of old Russian culture, not to mention the fierce emotions of his fellow writers. We will then turn to two immediate shapers of the 20th century: Chekhov, who has become the god of the American and British theater, and Gorky, who stood on the edge of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and survived to become the icon of Soviet ideology in literature.

From the time of the USSR, we will examine Maiakovsky, who saw the Russian Revolution as the greatest and most humane achievement of human history; Sholokhov, whose prize-winning novel saw the revolution as a tragedy that destroyed the Cossack world that he loved so well; Zoshchenko, who saw the revolution as food for parody and satire; Pasternak, one of the greatest poets of the 20th century, who also wrote a Nobel prize-winning novel; Solzhenitsyn, who first exposed the reality of the Soviet forced labor camps and continued to speak prophetically until he reached what he considered enlightened new nationalism.

We will conclude with the situation in post-Soviet Russia. In what ways can it become the worthy inheritor of such a powerful and all-embracing literary culture?

Notes on the Course

Russian Names:

Traditionally, when a Russian met another Russian, each would almost always address the other by his or her first name plus the patronymic, formed by using the first name of the person's father with the suffix *-ich* or *-vich* for a man, and *-ovna* or *-evna* for a woman. Examples: Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (Theodore, the son of Michael), Anna Arkad'evna Karenina (Anna, the daughter of Arkadii).

The use of the first name and the patronymic was a way of showing respect, in the same way that we say "Mr. Jones" or "Ms. Smith." Presently in Russia, this custom is in the process of dying out, although students still almost universally address their teachers in this way. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the practice was ubiquitous.

Transliteration:

The Russian language uses the Cyrillic alphabet, somewhat altered after the 1917 revolution. In the sections quoted directly from literary texts, I have used the Library of Congress system of transliteration. Although it is not totally internally consistent, it is—among all those currently in use—the closest to an English speaker's sense of spelling and pronunciation. There are other systems that are more consistent internally, but they seem stiff and pretentious to the non-specialist.

In the use of proper names, I have used the spellings most familiar to English speakers.

In the bibliography, I have used the spelling employed by individual authors, many of whom deviate from the Library of Congress standard. In every case, I have tried to follow what seemed to me the dictates of common sense.

Lecture One

Origins of Russian Literature

Scope: Russian literature had its national and spiritual origins in the territory around the ancient city of Kiev, which was the sometimes grudgingly accepted center of a number of settlements and city-states, a loose confederation called "Kievan Rus'." From the 10th century A.D., its literature was deeply involved with both religion and politics. When Vladimir, prince of Kiev, in A.D. 988–989, sought a dynastic alliance by marrying the sister of the Byzantine emperor, he returned not only with a literate (and presumably beautiful) wife but also with many documents of the Eastern Orthodox Church. These documents, some of which we will examine, had been translated by a genius, St. Cyril, into the 9th-century language spoken by all Slavic peoples. This church literature bore a deeply religious feeling derived from the New Testament and rendered exquisitely by Cyril's translations. The connections between Russian literature and politics and ideology started almost 1,000 years before the advent of the Soviet Union and its Marxist ideology.

Outline

I. We start some 1,000 years ago with events in the city of Kiev, where Eastern Slavs were converting to Christianity.

- **A.** After a brief look at literature between the 12th and 19th centuries, we jump forward to the 19th century—the Golden Age of Russian Literature, which began with Pushkin, the "Sun of Russian Literature," who put together the sound of the modern Russian language.
- **B.** Slightly later than Pushkin was Gogol', who knew something about the grotesqueness of life.
- **C.** Then we see how Dostoevsky delved into the human personality, taking us from hell to heaven in a few short steps. There is hardly a writer who has not been influenced by Dostoevsky.
- **D.** Tolstoy created a huge universe of memorable individuals and even animals.
- **E.** Turgenev, who tried to find a way between conservative and radical thinking, was a marvelously sensitive writer.
- **F.** Chekhov, a kind of god of the theater, especially to Americans, also wrote short stories that show an extraordinary sensitivity.
- **G.** Gorky stands on the cusp between tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. In his stories, we see him trying to work through a situation in which, in many ways, a dream-come-true becomes a nightmare.

- **H.** Opposite to Gorky is the poet Maiakovsky, who stood for socialist values.
- **I.** Nobel Prize-winner Sholokhov saw the Russian Revolution as a tragedy and painted a marvelous picture of what it was like to live through the revolution from the viewpoint of the oppressed Cossacks.
- **J.** Zoshchenko saw the revolution as fodder for satire and got away with it for something like 25 years.
- **K.** Pasternak reacted poetically to a collectivist society with the deep feelings and convictions of an individualist. His worship of individualism comes out in his novel *Dr. Zhivago*.
- **L.** We will end the course with Solzhenitsyn, who lived through and described the horrors of the Stalinist forced labor camps; his voice became a fearless clarion of deep conviction.
- **M.** In general, these writers represent a multiplicity of voices dealing with problems of world history that are both agonizing and eternal, such as God, faith, love, politics, and the human psyche, examined from every possible angle.

II. To see where this literary legacy began, we have to go back some 1,000 years to a city called Kiev in the Rus'—a collection of city-states. At that time, Kiev was ruled by a Prince Vladimir, who thought through many possible solutions to his political problems, finally settling on the idea of a dynastic alliance.

- **A.** He proposed marriage to the sister of the Byzantine emperor, who dwelt in Constantinople (presently Istanbul). The emperor was not averse to such a proposal, and his sister eventually agreed. (We learn this information from the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, written from the 8th–9th centuries to the 11th–12th centuries.)
- **B.** The emperor requested that Vladimir convert to Christianity. Like most people in Byzantium, the emperor and his family were Christians. He promised to give Vladimir documents that would help his conversion.

III. The Byzantines, whose language was Greek, had a policy of translating holy documents into the language of the native people whom they wanted to conquer and convert.

- **A.** The Byzantine emperor, in 863, asked Cyril and Methodius, two talented brothers and scholars at the University of Constantinople, to translate the religious documents into the Slavic language.
- **B.** Cyril and Methodius, who even had to devise an alphabet for the Slavic language (named Cyrillic after Cyril), were extraordinarily talented linguists and writers; the resulting documents were at a very high level of literary power and taste.

IV. In 988–989, Prince Vladimir agreed to the conversion and returned home with his new bride and the church documents given to him by the Byzantine emperor.

  A. For many centuries after Vladimir, there continued a *dvoeverie*, the Russian term for two faiths struggling for domination in the people's imagination.

  B. The Christian Church had a powerful tool in the documents so skillfully translated by Cyril and Methodius. All of the ancient literary power of the biblical tradition, translated at a very high level of taste and influence, was early absorbed into the subsequent Russian literary imagination.

  C. At the same time, the old pre-Christian traditions were also very powerful influences on subsequent generations.

  D. It was the eventual combination of these two powerful literary lineages that created what we now know as Russian literature.

V. Kievan times gave birth to several themes that run through Russian literature.

  A. It is no accident that Russian literature, through many centuries, has connected with politics. Long before the Marxists insisted on such a connection, Vladimir attempted to defend Kiev through an alliance with Byzantium and Christianity, which caught the imagination of writers.

  B. Another leitmotif of Russian literature that can be seen in the religious documents of Kievan times is the struggle for faith in the face of evil.

  C. The pre-Christian gods of nature also play their part throughout Russian literature. As we see from Kievan times, there is an enormous Russian sensitivity to the forces and beauties of nature.

Suggested Reading:

Samuel Hazard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, eds., *The Russian Primary Chronicle*.

Nicolas Riasanovsky, *History of Russia*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How would Christianity adapt itself for reception by a people accustomed to worship gods who personify forces of nature: the Sun, the Moon, the swiftness of animals?
2. Why would the forced connection of religion and politics become so natural for so many eras of Russian history?

Lecture Two

The Church and the Folk in Old Kiev

Scope: When Prince Vladimir's agents and allies tried to spread the new Christian beliefs and ceremonies among the people—mostly illiterate, but by no means stupid peasants, there arose a genuine and stubborn conflict: the old pre-Christian legends and gods versus the new ideas of salvation and grace through Jesus Christ and his powerful preaching. The result, which lasted for centuries, was called *dvoeverie* (two faiths, side by side). The new faith was literarily represented by St. Cyril's magnificent translations. The old faith persisted in oral folklore of an equally powerful expression. By the 13th century, the political situation changed substantially, with the invasion of Eastern peoples—the Tatars—under their famous leader Genghis Khan, whose military strategy and technology were very advanced for their time. One of Russia's most precious literary productions, an epic poem called "The Tale of Prince Igor," deals with Kiev's initial defeat at the hands of the Polovetsians, precursors of the Tatars.

Outline

I. According to the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, the East Slavs of the 10th century were considering a new religion. They turned to Christianity after examining Judaism and Islam.

  A. When Prince Vladimir sent his emissaries to Constantinople, they described their impression of the cathedral of St. Sophia in these words: "We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth."

  B. In St. Vladimir's conversion to Eastern Orthodoxy and the subsequent Christianization of the East Slavic world, we find the work of a saint active and effective in the everyday political world.

II. A very different kind of sainthood is described in the lives of Boris and Gleb, prime examples of the concept of the *kenotic* saint. The word comes from Greek, referring to the fact that Jesus humbled himself by taking on the form of man, literally by "the emptying out of his godliness."

  A. Boris and Gleb were younger brothers of Sviatopolk, the son of Prince Vladimir. Sviatopolk got the bright idea "of adopting the advice of Cain" and plotted to kill his two younger brothers and consolidate his power as the sole prince of Kiev.

  B. Boris soon got the news of his impending death and quoted the 38th biblical psalm: "Thy arrows have pierced me and I am ready for wounds." In short, he agreed to be killed, rather than raise his hand against his brother. Gleb reacted in a similar way: "It were better for me to die with my brother than to live on in this world."

C. The brothers' decision to accept death rather than fight evil with violence became an important part of the definition of Russian sainthood.

D. The kenotic saint, at home in heaven, became the direct opposite of the active saint at home in this world. The two contrasting ideas formed an ongoing debate often heard in Russian literature.

III. The East Slavic world, however, was by no means exclusively inhabited by saints. Demons and devils were deeply feared by the East Slavic people and quite dear to the hearts of their writers. A good example was Brother Isaac, who had many encounters with the demons.

A. After distributing all his wealth to the poor and to monasteries, Isaac took on the ascetic way of life.

B. The devils tricked him by pretending to be Christ and his angels. Once they had him in their demonic power, they tormented him and forced him into wild dancing; they also beat him mercilessly.

C. When he was rescued and restored by some fellow monks, he adopted an even greater degree of ascetic behavior. Many took him for a madman who did foolish things.

D. The theme of the holy fool, the fool in Christ, became a popular one in Russian literature. The ability to recognize and struggle with the demonic, a quality that appeared inside and outside human beings, became a mainstay of Russian spiritual literature.

IV. The folk literature of the Kievan period also produced many interesting and powerful works. Probably the most famous was the epic poem "The Lay of the Host of Prince Igor."

A. Composed in the late 12th or early 13th century, the poem deals with the disastrous military campaign undertaken in 1185 by Prince Igor from Putivl, one of the city-states in Kievan Rus'.

1. Igor was determined to defeat the Polovetsians, an Eastern tribe of people who were later assimilated into the famous Tatar conquest and destruction of Kievan Rus' in the 13th and 14th centuries.
2. Igor was, however, defeated and taken captive.

B. Perhaps the most attractive—and certainly the longest surviving figure in the poem—is Yaroslavna, the lovely wife of Prince Igor. Her lament for her husband, languishing in Polovician captivity, is one of the enduring outcries in Russian literature.

C. Her faithfulness and her spiritual beauty capture the reader and show the power of the natural world around her. As a strong feminine figure, she lives many centuries into the future of Russian literature.

D. Borodin's opera *Prince Igor* is a moving 19th-century musical adaptation of the poem.

V. The poem depicts a terrible time in Kievan history, when the Tatars ruled the territory ruthlessly.

A. Kiev went into decline, and a new city emerged on the River Moskva—Moscow.

B. By the 1500s, Ivan the Terrible, reigning from Moscow (r. 1533–1584), became the first tsar of Russia. Ivan defeated the Tatars and made Moscow the center of power in the territory.

C. He did not produce a successor, and after his death, Russia went through a time of bloody political turmoil.

D. In the 18th and 19th centuries, however, that history would produce the Golden Age of Russian Literature.

Suggested Reading:

Robert Mann, trans., *The Song of Prince Igor.*

Serge A. Zenkovsky, ed., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales.*

Questions to Consider:

1. What is the relationship between the kenotic saints, who are closer to heaven than to Earth, and the active saints, who strive mightily to bring spirituality into the everyday tempestuous life on Earth?
2. In the folk imagination, what is the relationship between human beings and the natural world around them? Does oral literature see humans as powerless in relation to nature?

Lecture Three

Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin, 1799–1837

Scope: We now take a great chronological leap from the 13th century to the last year of the 18th. In the midst of the splendiferous and powerful Russian Empire, with its ancient capital of Moscow and new capital of St. Petersburg, we see the career of a new genius, descended from an African brought to Russia by Peter the Great. This bright young fellow is brought up in a family whose members adore French literature. They read it to the boy on every possible occasion, and his extraordinary memory fixes it in place. They then enroll him in a remarkable school, the Lycée (again, a French name) with the brightest young aristocrats of Russia, under highly talented teachers. Neither his mischief nor his flair for writing deserted him after he left the Lycée, and he soon found himself banished from St. Petersburg and forced to spend time in the colorful area of Bessarabia, in the southwestern part of the Russian Empire.

Outline

I. St. Petersburg, founded in 1703 by Peter the Great, became, by the end of the 18th century, the center of an expanding empire and a glittering jewel of Russian and European culture. Its emperors and empresses encouraged the arts with huge capital investments, and many Russian aristocrats did the same. St. Petersburg became a city of great mansions and glorious residences.

II. In 1799, Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin was born into an aristocratic family.

- **A.** Pushkin's father and paternal uncle were descendants of ancient Russian aristocracy.
- **B.** Very heavily under the influence of 18th-century French language and culture, they spent long hours reading French poetry (Russian was the language of the serfs), often in the presence of young Aleksandr.
- **C.** Pushkin's nurse, a serf woman by the name of Arina Rodionovna, spoke to him in the Russian language used by non-aristocrats at that time. She had a vast store of folk poetry that she would recite to him for long stretches.
- **D.** His mother was a descendant of a Moor from Africa whom Peter the Great had brought to his court, then educated to become an officer in the Russian Army.
- **E.** All of the above elements became lively parts of Pushkin's future life and poetry.

III. In the very early 19th century, Tsar Aleksandr I established a new school with a French name, the Lycée. The idea was to produce an educated bureaucracy to help run the country.

- **A.** Among its first group of highly talented youths from Moscow came Aleksandr Pushkin.
- **B.** When Pushkin arrived at the Lycée, the staff, who numbered among the finest teachers in aristocratic Russia, did not take long to realize that they had a genius on their hands—as well as one of the most mischievous and sometimes ungovernable brats in Russia.
- **C.** Pushkin's schoolmates, many of them future famous leaders in Russia, found in him a loyal and staunch friend, although one with a passionate and unpredictable temper.
- **D.** Neither did it take long for Pushkin's brilliant poetry to be recognized, in the Lycée and beyond. In his poetry, Pushkin combines church Slavic with the Russian language and French words.

IV. When this talented but rebellious and mischievous youth came out of school into the supercharged aristocratic life of early-19th-century St. Petersburg, he showed neither interest nor promise as a "top-drawer" bureaucrat.

- **A.** During his absences from work, he spent a great deal of time at the gambling tables, balls, theaters, and, most especially, the ballet. He found the combination of music and movement, together with the presence of shapely women's legs, irresistible.
- **B.** His rebellious temper, however, did not desert him. At a theatrical performance, he circulated the portrait of a famous French assassin of a high-ranking aristocrat. The caption, in Pushkin's handwriting, read: "A lesson to tsars!"
- **C.** When this episode inevitably came to the attention of the St. Petersburg chief of police, Pushkin did not remain long in the Russian capital. He was exiled to the southwest, to the town of Kishinev in Bessarabia, near present-day Romania.
- **D.** Pushkin amazed the local Kishinev residents with his eccentric costumes and his heavy, metal walking stick, which he used to keep his pistol-shooting hand strong and supple. This strengthened hand was necessary for the duels that he so often fought, often in response to insults purely imagined by the poet.
- **E.** He was also eager to continue the life of admiring and enjoying women. Not only did he produce some wonderful lyrics of love, but he was actively engaged in a life that would produce a famous "Don Juan list" of women whose favors he had enjoyed.

V. On a trip to the Caucasus mountains, Pushkin wrote the famous poem in which he describes the waves of the Black Sea coming up to the feet of a beautiful woman. Eventually, he ended up in the port city of Odessa, which had rich links to other cultures. His activities in Odessa were important for the future of his poetry.

Suggested Reading:

T. J. Binyon, *Pushkin—A Biography*.

Questions to Consider:

1. When a bright and linguistically talented youngster is brought up between two powerful cultures and languages, such as French and Russian, in what ways are they likely to bend his consciousness and creativity in the future?
2. Why does genius, which so often depends heavily on tradition and culture, often turn to rebellion against that very tradition and culture?

Lecture Four

Exile, Rustic Seclusion, and Onegin

Scope: In Odessa, a thriving port city on the Black Sea, Pushkin managed to irritate the local governor, who soon sent him packing back to his parents' country estates in the north of Russia. During this time, he began a long work that would become Russia's greatest poem. He called it a "novel in verse": *Eugene Onegin*. Inspired partly by Byron's *Don Juan*, it dealt with many different literary themes and became an endless source of inspiration for writers and composers who came after Pushkin. Its central plot involves the title character, who is a strange combination of sensitivity, intelligence, and perversity. He recognizes the unusually high human value of the central female figure, Tatiana Larina, but rejects the love she offers when she is a young woman in the country. Later, when he sees her as a grande dame in St. Petersburg, it is his turn to experience rejection. The poem also deals with dueling and the death of the poet, perhaps a foreboding of the author's fate.

Outline

I. In 1823 in Odessa, Pushkin wrote a quatrain that made devilish fun of the provincial governor, whose wife the poet had seduced.

- **A.** The poem gained immediate notoriety, and the governor, who did not deserve this treatment, became the laughingstock of Russia. He had Pushkin exiled further north to the estate of his father.
- **B.** After Pushkin discovered that his father had been co-opted to spy on him, he moved again, this time to his mother's estate, where he spent perhaps the most creative time of his life.
- **C.** By the time Pushkin reached his mother's estate, he was working on the most famous long poem in the Russian language—*Eugene Onegin.*
- **D.** In a letter, Pushkin denied that Byron's *Don Juan* had anything in common with his poem. Yet when reading the poem, one immediately senses that Pushkin is dealing ironically with the title character, as Byron had in *Don Juan.*

II. The title character, Eugene Onegin, has sense and intelligence enough to recognize the unusual strength and soul of the central female character, Tatiana Larina. Yet when she has the audacity to write him a magnificent letter confessing her love, he rebuffs her with self-righteous preaching.

- **A.** In the last verse of the poem, however, the former country girl has now become a grande dame in St. Petersburg, the wife of a well-regarded general.

B. Suddenly, Onegin feels the pangs of passion and regret. It is now his turn to write an expression of love, which evokes no reply from Tatiana.

C. In desperation, he makes his way to her room, where she confronts him with his past self-righteous behavior. It is now her turn to preach to him, which she does with an expression of love:

> Ia vas liubliu (k chemu lukavit'?),
> No ia drugomu otdana;
> I budu vek emu verna.
>
> I love you (Why should I bend the truth?) But I have been given to another, and I shall be forever faithful to him.

D. Pushkin leaves Eugene in despair, embarrassed by the sudden arrival of Tatiana's husband.

III. There are three male characters in *Eugene Onegin*—Onegin, Lensky, and the city of St. Petersburg—and three female characters—Tatiana, Ol'ga (beloved of Lensky), and the muse who inspired Pushkin's poem.

A. The second major male character, a poet named Lensky, is a friend of Eugene, in spite of the fact that the title character "could not distinguish an iamb from a troche, no matter how hard we tried to teach him."

B. Lensky is a fascinating figure. His genuine feeling and passion as a poet and lover of Tatiana's sister (Ol'ga) are warmly presented in Pushkin's poetry.

1. One of the most moving descriptions—Lensky's love for Ol'ga—is a real demonstration of how difficult it is to render Pushkin in translation:

> On pel liubov', liubvi poslushnyi,
> I pesn' ego byla iasna,
> Kak mysli devy prostodushnoi,
> Kak son mladentsa, kak luna….

2. In Russian, this verse conveys a whole universe of rhythm and feeling. In English, it falls almost flat:

> He sang of love, obedient to love, and his song was
> clear, like the thoughts of an open-hearted maiden,
> like an infant's dream, like the moon….

C. But Pushkin also conveys Lensky's naivete and lack of worldly understanding. Onegin originally welcomes this innocence, and he feels loath to disturb it.

D. Later, at a provincial ball in the country home of Tatiana's family, Onegin decides to punish Lensky for dragging him to this banal evening, and he proceeds to dance and flirt with Ol'ga, the sister whom Lensky deeply loves.

E. Lensky cannot hide his mortification and anger; he bursts forth with bitter insults to his erstwhile friend.

F. Almost immediately, Onegin realizes, with some guilt, that he has gone too far in wounding the young poet. But it is too late: According to the rules of early-19th-century Russian society, a duel is inevitable.

G. Among the most beautiful passages in the poem are Lensky's lines as he awaits Onegin's arrival to fight the duel.

H. The duel takes place, and Onegin is horrified when he realizes that he has shot and killed his friend, the innocent young poet.

I. Pushkin wrote *Onegin* over many years, not finishing the poem until the latter part of the 1820s.

IV. While living on his mother's estate, Pushkin had affairs with women on a neighboring estate. One beautiful visitor inspired a poem. Pushkin had a marvelous realization of the greatness of femininity, but there was also another side to his poetic treatment of women, as we shall see.

Suggested Reading and Listening:

Aleksandr Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, translation by James E. Falen.

Aleksandr Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin—A Novel in Verse*, translation and commentary by Vladimir Nabokov.

Petr I. Tchaikovsky, *Eugene Onegin*, an opera based on the poem.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways did Onegin's inability to accept and find love—in contrast with Lensky's direct passion and poetic sensitivity—reflect a division in Pushkin himself? Did the Onegin side of him kill his Lensky side?
2. In what ways did the sentimentality of Tchaikovsky's famous opera change the effect of Pushkin's highly ironic poem? Did the composer render the artistry with a power equal to that of the poet?

Lecture Five

December's Uprising and Two Poets Meet

Scope: In 1825, a group of aristocrats attempted an uprising on a St. Petersburg square. Naively, given that they had no widespread support, they thought they could overthrow the tsarist regime and replace it with a republic. Among these would-be revolutionaries were many friends of Pushkin. After an interview with the new tsar, the poet managed to extricate himself from these associations. He then discovered the work of another great poet—William Shakespeare, whose works Pushkin read in French translation. He was particularly impressed by the plays written about the guilt-ridden Henry IV, and he decided to respond in Russian. The result was his tragedy *Boris Godunov*, concerning events surrounding Russia's early-17th-century "Time of Troubles." The tragedy involves a Russian tsar who made his way to the throne by means of a murder and suffered the pangs of conscience. Naturally, the play had considerable political resonance on the Russian scene, which had just witnessed an attempted regime change. The resonance of the play was made even more powerful two generations later, when one of the greatest Russian composers, Modest Mussorgsky, converted the tragedy into one of the world's greatest operas, *Boris Godunov*.

Outline

I. While Pushkin was living on his mother's estate, he received an unexpected visit from a woman he had known in St. Petersburg—Anna Pavlovna Kern, who inspired what may be the most remarkable lyric in the Russian language: "I remember that magnificent moment, when you appeared before me…like the genius of pure beauty."

II. Meanwhile, in St. Petersburg, under the influence of the American and French Revolutions, a few aristocratic would-be revolutionaries banded together. One of their members, Pestel, envisioned the creation of a republic in Russia.

- **A.** Pushkin knew members of Pestel's group, who were fellow students at the Lycée, but failed in his attempt to join them.
- **B.** In December 1825, during an interregnum between Tsar Aleksandr I and his brother, who followed him as Nikolai I, Pestel and his followers attempted a naively conceived demonstration in a public square. They were arrested by armed troops and sent to the Siberian salt mines.
- **C.** When it was discovered that Pushkin had known some of the so-called "Decembrists," he was ordered to Moscow to appear before Tsar Nikolai.
  1. According to later reports, Nikolai asked the poet what side he would have joined if he had been in St. Petersburg during the uprising.
  2. Pushkin replied that he would have been together with his Decembrist friends.
  3. The tsar praised him for his bravery and honesty and asked him if he would change his ideas.
  4. He said he would try, and the tsar promised to serve as Pushkin's personal censor in the future.
- **D.** Later, Pushkin wrote a poem in honor of the tsar with a veiled plea to pardon his Decembrist friends. Pushkin carried the memory of the Decembrist Uprising with him for the rest of his days, and the incident became an extremely important focal point in Russian history for the revolutionary times ahead.

III. While he was reading and working on his mother's estate, Pushkin encountered the works of Shakespeare in French translation. He was amazed by the force of the poetry and the drama. He composed a parody on Shakespeare's poem "The Rape of Lucrece" and translated Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure.*

- **A.** He then discovered Shakespeare's plays about Henry IV and was deeply impressed by the depiction of the guilt-ridden Henry after he ordered the murder of Richard II, a legitimate monarch.
- **B.** Furthermore, Karamzin's famous *History of Russia* had just come out with the volume devoted to Russia's "Time of Troubles" in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. At that time, it was believed that Boris Godunov murdered the son of Ivan the Terrible in order to ascend to the Muscovite throne.
- **C.** Inspired by Shakespeare's plays about Henry IV, Pushkin wove these events into the poetic drama *Boris Godunov.*

IV. Pushkin's play came at a difficult time for Nikolai I. After the Decembrist Uprising, it was not easy for the tsar to accept a play about a king's son being murdered.

- **A.** The play opens with Boris making a show of reluctance before accepting the crown.
- **B.** When he retreats into a monastery, his agents force a crowd, which hardly understands what it is saying, to demand that he accept the crown.
- **C.** Boris gives in and makes sweeping public gestures before his coronation, inviting the public to attend a banquet where all will be welcome, no matter what their social status.

D. There immediately follows a scene in a monastery in which the monk Pimen talks about keeping a record of history, which will clearly record the sin of Boris in murdering Tsar Ivan's son.

E. Pimen is overheard by the young monk Grigorii, who decides to pass himself off as the resurrected boy.

F. In the meantime, Boris is tortured by his guilty conscience. He cannot sleep. This scene reminds us of a similar one in Shakespeare, when Henry IV unsuccessfully seeks sleep.

1. Henry then says the famous couplet:

   > …then, happy low lie down,
   > Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.

2. Pushkin, with a very similar couplet, shows Boris beset by a hallucination of the "bloody boy" whom he murdered:

   > Na prizrak sei podui…ne okazhu ia strakha…
   > Akh, tiazhela ty, shapka Monomakha.
   >
   > Blow on the vision, then there will be no fear…
   > Oh, how heavy you are, cap of Monomakh.

   The cap of Monomakh was worn by the Russian monarch at his coronation.

G. Another scene in this play is also reminiscent of Shakespeare but in a different way.

1. Tsar Boris is walking out of a cathedral. A well-known character from Russian folklore, a *iurodivyi* (a "fool in Christ"), has just been teased by a group of boys, who have made off with his *kopeck* (a small coin).
2. When the fool sees the tsar, he cries out that Boris should slit the boys' throats, as he had done to the son of Tsar Ivan.
3. The members of the tsar's suite want to arrest the fool.
4. Boris stops them and asks the fool to pray for him.
5. The fool replies that the Mother of God will not allow him to pray for a sinning tsar.
6. It would be hard to exaggerate the electric effect of this scene on a Russian audience, in Pushkin's day or in our own time.

H. Here we have an unexpected conjunction with Shakespeare's *Henry IV*. Just as Falstaff, one of Shakespeare's most intelligent characters, reduces the pretensions to glory of battles that claim the lives of thousands, the *iurodivyi* breaks through the royal pretensions of the guilty Boris.

1. Compare the famous reduction of honor:

   > Honor pricks me on. Yea, but how if honor prick me off when I come on? How then? Can honor set to a leg? …Therefore I'll none of it. Honor is a mere scutcheon; and so ends my catechism.

2. In his own way, the *iurodivyi* matches Falstaff's rational commentary.
3. The difference between the guilty monarchs rests on the fact that Henry IV exhibits a great deal of hypocrisy; the guilty grief of Boris is real.
4. He could never say, as Henry did to Exton (the man whom Henry had ordered to murder Richard II):

   > They love not poison that do poison need,
   > Nor do I thee: though I did wish him dead,
   > I hate the murderer, love him murdered.

5. This man is not one who will experience Boris's hallucinations of bloody murder victims returning to life.

I. This play brings together politics, murder, and love—and all those things that make up a human's fate—in a great creation of Russian literature.

Suggested Reading and Listening:

Modest Mussorgsky, *Boris Godunov*, an opera based on the play.

Aleksandr Pushkin, *Boris Godunov*.

Aleksandr Pushkin, *The Poems, Prose, and Plays of Alexander Pushkin*, edited by Avrahm Yarmolinsky.

William Shakespeare, *Richard II*; *Henry IV, Part One*; *Henry IV, Part Two*; *Henry V*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Can a monarch or a tsar who claims to rule by divine right tolerate a theater that explores the issue of guilty monarchs who have sinned their ways to the throne? Is the monarchy stronger or weaker for tolerating such a theater?
2. Falstaff, a highly intelligent and active knight, questions, albeit comically, the very basic notions of honor and service to his monarch. The Russian fool in Christ, seen as a weak-minded madman, raises similar questions. Which of them does it more effectively?

Lecture Six

A Poet Contrasts Talent versus Mediocrity

Scope: Pushkin was well aware, perhaps even immodestly so, of his extraordinary gifts; he often contrasted and compared them with the talents of other artists. In his earlier writings, he turned to Mozart: a genius, like Pushkin, who was often able spontaneously, without extensive labors or revisions, to pour out his talent in written notes, producing marvelous melodies and rhythms. Antonio Salieri, by contrast, labored within all the rules of harmony. The result was a clash of temperaments, which led, as legend had it, to Salieri's murder of Mozart, "for the good of music" no less! Pushkin's short drama *Mozart and Salieri* echoes that legend, as does Peter Shaffer's play and film *Amadeus*. Later in his career, Pushkin looked with admiration at the great Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz. The result was a brilliant novella, *Egyptian Nights*, in which a character, in many ways like Pushkin himself, was the lesser talent, looking on as the gifted foreign improviser worked his magic on the glitterati of St. Petersburg.

Outline

I. Given the extensive historical witness in *Boris Godunov*, it was hard to escape the possibility of strongly politicized reactions.

- **A.** Nikolai I, who had promised to serve as Pushkin's personal censor, penned the following royal lines: "I consider it likely that Mr. Pushkin's goal would be achieved if he would change his comedy, with the necessary corrections, into a historical novel written in the style of Walter Scott."
- **B.** The drama was finally published in 1831. The final line has become a proverb in the Russian language.
    - **1.** When the pretender takes the throne, his followers urge the crowd to shout out their support with the cry: "Long live Tsar Dmitrii Ivanovich!"
    - **2.** The play then ends with the statement: "*Narod bezmolvstvuet.*" The verb describing the people's reaction is "to be silent," as if that were an active verb.
- **C.** The taking of action by non-action and the expressing of opinion by non-expression became strong Russian characteristics. It was Pushkin who first defined them clearly.
- **D.** In later Soviet times, the nature of protective silence, when violent circumstances seemed to demand speaking out, often cast a leaden weight over Russian society.

II. By the end of the 1820s, Pushkin's fame was securely established among the Russian reading public. At the same time, his love affairs and his reputation among the ladies were equally well known.

- **A.** He was reputed to have an uncanny understanding of women and to have the ability to attract their interest and, often, their passion by the force of his wit and his talent.
- **B.** At the age of 30, Pushkin realized he could not lead such a life indefinitely. The time had come for him to settle into marriage. In seeking a wife, he settled on Natalia Goncharova.
- **C.** His initial joy was somewhat marred by the fact that Nikolai I appointed him to the rank of *Kammerjunker* ("Gentleman of the Bedchamber"), a rank more appropriate to men much younger than Pushkin.
- **D.** It was clear that the tsar made the appointment so that the poet would bring his beautiful wife to the court balls.
- **E.** Pushkin grew to resent the attention and control exerted by the tsar.
    - **1.** At the same time, the poet desperately needed royal help with finances and with permission to use governmental archives to get information necessary for his poetic work.
    - **2.** Similarly, Pushkin also deeply needed and deeply resented the fleshpots of aristocratic St. Petersburg society.

III. While finding himself in ever deeper financial problems and correspondingly deeper dependence on royal favor, Pushkin wrote a series of four short poetic dramas in the early 1830s. One of them, *Mozart and Salieri*, dealt directly with the problem of mediocrity and its relation to genius.

- **A.** At the end of the 18th century, there was a widespread rumor that Salieri, a popular composer contemporary with Mozart, had murdered the great Austrian genius.
    - **1.** Pushkin opens his drama with Salieri's monologue: He recalls what efforts and self-sacrifice it cost him to master the art of musical creation.
    - **2.** He muses about murdering Mozart, not out of jealousy, but out of love for music. Future musicians cannot learn from Mozart, who takes his melodies directly from God. They can learn only from the craftsman, Salieri.
- **B.** Later, Mozart enters in a jovial mood: He has found a blind fiddler who is "murdering" an aria from *Don Giovanni.*
    - **1.** Mozart finds this wondrously amusing.
    - **2.** Salieri is furious that his friend and colleague can take his genius so lightly.

C. When Mozart comes to dine with Salieri in a restaurant, the subject of Mozart's famous "Requiem" comes up.

  1. Salieri tries to divert Mozart with a glass of wine that he has secretly poisoned.
  2. Mozart asks: "Is it true that Beaumarchais once poisoned a person?" He then dismisses the idea with lines that have become proverbial in Russian:

> ...On zhe genii,
> Kak ty da ia. A genii i zlodeistvo—
> Dve veshchi nesovmestnye.
>
> ...He was a genius,
> Like you and me. Genius and evil-doing
> Are two things that cannot exist together.

D. Mozart drinks the wine and dies. Salieri is left to his final monologue: "Can he possibly be right? And I am not a genius?"

  1. He desperately tries to defend himself, knowing full well the truth of Mozart's (and Pushkin's) verdict.
  2. Mediocrity can never become genius, no matter what powerful means it has at its disposal.

IV. If Pushkin considered his genius to be at the level of Mozart, his sensitivity to the genius and creativity of others was like that of Salieri.

A. Back in 1826, he met the great Polish poet Mickiewicz. Although the Russian and the Pole were to have their political disagreements, Pushkin had enormous admiration for his friend's poetic talent.

B. Above all, Pushkin adored Mickiewicz's almost uncanny ability to improvise magnificent poetry in two languages, Polish and French. Out of this admiration, in 1835, came the story *Egyptian Nights*.

  1. The story opens in the nicely appointed aristocratic study of the St. Petersburg aristocrat Charsky, who goes to great lengths to conceal the fact that he is a poet.
  2. He is quite angry to have one of his creative moments rudely interrupted by the intrusion of a beggarly looking Italian visitor.
  3. The chap is almost unceremoniously tossed out, until Charsky learns that the visitor is an Italian poetic improviser, who answers Charsky's challenge with a poem marvelously constructed on the spot.
  4. Charsky agrees to set up a St. Petersburg evening of poetic improvisation, whose admission fees will go to the Italian poet, clearly modeled on Mickiewicz.
  5. On the evening of the performance, the theme is finally decided; it turns out to be "Cleopatra and Her Lovers."
  6. Charsky, who supplied the theme, says he had in mind the episode when Cleopatra offered a night of sexual love to any man at her feast who, on the following morning, would agree to give up his life to the executioner's axe. Three such men stepped forward.
  7. In the words of Cleopatra:

> Klianus', o mater' naslazhdenii,
> Tebe neslykhanno sluzhu,
> Na lozhe strastnoi iskushenii
> Prostoi naemnitsei vskhozhu...
>
> I swear, o Mother god of all pleasures,
> It's you I serve, without demur—
> I enter as a simple hireling into
> The bed of passionate temptations...
>
> No tol'ko utrennei porfiro
> Avrora vechnaia blesnet,
> Klianus'—pod smertnoiu sekiroi
> Glava schastlivtsev otpadet.
>
> But as soon as morning purple
> Of the eternal dawn shall shine,
> I swear, the heads of the happy ones shall fall
> Under the executioner's axe.

Suggested Reading:

Aleksandr Pushkin, *Egyptian Nights*.

Aleksandr Pushkin, *Mozart and Salieri*.

Aleksandr Pushkin, *The Complete Prose Fiction*, translation and commentary by Paul Debreczeny.

Aleksandr Pushkin, *The Poems, Prose, and Plays of Alexander Pushkin*, edited by Avrahm Yarmolinsky.

Peter Shaffer, *Amadeus*, a play and a film.

Questions to Consider:

1. Is there any truth to Salieri's claim that future generations cannot learn creativity from Mozart because his inspiration came so naturally and quickly; can those future generations learn only from hard-working mediocrity, as Pushkin, perhaps somewhat unjustly, portrays in Salieri?
2. In his story *Egyptian Nights*, Pushkin implies a contrast between the repressed and conventional high society of St. Petersburg and the open and impulsive passion of his poetic version of Cleopatra's Egypt. Is there a necessary contrast between well-organized high society and the open expression of passion?

Lecture Seven

St. Petersburg Glorified and Death Embraced

Scope: Pushkin was well aware that Russian greatness and power were built on the suffering and labor of tens of millions of serfs and lower-class, urban serving people. In his narrative poem *The Bronze Horseman*, he contrasts the most famous invocation to the beauty of St. Petersburg—known as well by Russians as we know Hamlet's "To be or not to be"—with the misery of those who live and perish under the yoke of Russia's imperial establishment. Later, not long before his death, he erects his own monument, "not touchable by human hands," to be admired by countless future Russian generations. In 1837, Pushkin, who felt he had to live in Russian high society, perished from a blow brought about by the Byzantine turnings of that same society. A French officer serving in the Russian army, Georges d'Anthès, virtually stalked Pushkin's beautiful wife, Natalia. Pushkin's enraged reactions, and a nasty anonymous letter, led to a duel that ended with a bullet in the poet's abdomen and a hideously painful death—a death that Russia mourns to this very day.

Outline

I. In St. Petersburg, a statue depicts Peter the Great on the back of a magnificently rearing horse. It represents the epitome of Peter's power and Russia's glory. Inspired by this statue, in 1833, three years before his death, Pushkin composed one of the most powerful short narrative poems in the Russian language—*The Bronze Horseman.*

A. In the introduction to the poem, Pushkin tells his version of Peter's founding of the city that will bear his name. It is a glorious, powerful tale, and it contains two quatrains known by most Russians and loved throughout the land:

> Liubliu tebia, Petra tvoren'e,
> Liubliu tvoi strogii, stroinyi vid,
> Nevy derzhavnoe techenie,
> Beregovoi ee granit,…
>
> I love you, o creation of Peter,
> I love your stern, harmonious view,
> The current of the mighty Neva [River],
> The granite along its riverbank…

B. In part 1, after the high-flown rhetorical introduction to Peter's and Russia's imperial glory, we see a very different, contrasting side of the country.

1. Under a leaden November sky walks our young hero, whose name is Eugene. Pushkin lightly recalls another Eugene, with whose name his pen "was on friendly terms." But this Eugene, unlike the former one, is a poor copyist.
2. He walks in a poor section of the city, bemoaning his poverty and lowly station, contrasting so starkly with that of more highly placed "lazy people."
3. The weather becomes increasingly threatening, and he dreams about the one person who brings him joy in life, his girlfriend, Parasha. The rising waters of the Neva River are threatening thousands of poor people and their homes.
4. At the end of a graphic description of the flood, caused in part by the low and swampy place where Peter erected his city, Eugene is seen sitting on a marble lion, his hat blasted by the wind and rain, his heels feeling the rising water.

C. In part 2, Eugene manages to find the spot where Parasha's house had stood.

1. Clearly she is lost. Peter's city has been built on a swamp at a great price paid by the poor.
2. The poor man, in desperate delirium, rushes to the statue of the man whose imperial will had created this city.
3. Clenching his fist, he cries "*Uzho tebe!*" (This translates something like, "You should suffer what's coming to you!") Such defiance is unheard of toward the tsar.
4. Eugene runs in madness; his deranged mind hears the clop, clop, clop of the bronze horse chasing the poor man wherever he flees.

D. The poem is a magnificently balanced contrast between the imperial glory and the miserable poverty of tsarist Russia.

1. Pushkin's sympathies are clearly divided between the two sides. Seldom has poetry captured more clearly and eloquently the great divide of Russia.
2. That Nikolai I saw this clearly is shown by his refusal to allow the poem's publication during Pushkin's lifetime.

E. In writing his glorification of St. Petersburg, using the famous statue of Peter, Pushkin was also engaging in polemics with his Polish poetic counterpart, Mickiewicz.

1. The Polish poet had written about the statue as a symbol of tsarist imperialism: Peter's outstretched arm was seeking to grasp its neighboring countries, such as Poland.
2. Pushkin found this interpretation false: The sculptor had intended for the arm to be extended in blessing.

F. The beauty of poetry united the two poets; the disharmony of politics and nationalism divided them.

II. In his final years, Pushkin could not help but pay the price for his earlier years of debauchery and widespread seduction of women.

  A. Open flirtation was a constant quality of St. Petersburg's aristocratic society. Particularly ardent in pursuit of Pushkin's wife was a young French officer serving in the Russian army. His name was Georges d'Anthès.

    1. In 1835, the young French officer was smitten by Natalia's beauty and soon made his passion obvious to the public. Pushkin got wind of the situation and became furious.

    2. The situation was made even more complex, because d'Anthès had been legally adopted by the Dutch ambassador to St. Petersburg, Baron Jacob van Heeckeren.

  B. Pushkin wrote a nasty letter to van Heeckeren, to which the only possible reply was to demand a duel—exactly what Pushkin wanted.

  C. Zhukovsky, a poet and friend of Pushkin, tried hard to avert a duel that could cost Russia its greatest poet.

    1. He managed to maneuver the situation so that d'Anthès proposed marriage to Ekaterina Goncharova, Natalia's sister.

    2. In this way, Zhukovsky thought he had saved the situation.

  D. In 1836, Pushkin received an anonymous letter that contained vile attempts at humor. The butt of the intended jokes was Pushkin, who was pictured as the historiographer of a Society of Cuckolds.

    1. It seemed to Pushkin that the letter was written on stationery available to the foreign diplomatic corps, and he assumed it was from van Heeckeren.

    2. The poet therefore sent a challenge to the baron, which would force a duel with d'Anthès.

  E. At the duel, d'Anthès's shot hit Pushkin's stomach. He died after lingering painfully for several days.

  F. The tsar was so frightened at the prospect of large demonstrations that he ordered Pushkin's body swiftly removed from St. Petersburg.

    1. He is buried in a monastery near the ancient city of Pskov, near his mother's estate.

    2. To this day, the grave is surrounded by flowers, brought fresh every day.

  G. Russia still mourns the early loss of its greatest and most eloquent poet. The most powerful memorial is a poem Pushkin himself wrote in 1836; the epigraph is from Horace—"Exegi Monumentum." It finishes with the lines:

> To the orders of God or muse be obedient.
> Don't be afraid of insult, don't demand the laurel wreath.
> Slander and praise receive with equal indifference
> And don't argue with a fool.

Suggested Reading:

John Bayley, *Pushkin: A Comparative Commentary.*

Ilya Kutik, *Writing as Exorcism—The Personal Codes of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol.*

Aleksandr Pushkin, *The Bronze Horseman* in *Pushkin Threefold*, poems translated by Walter Arndt.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does the grandeur of a powerful empire and aristocratic culture go together with a population kept in illiteracy and serfdom? Is it possible to make a historical judgment on such matters?
2. How did Pushkin's rashness and evident self-destructive tendencies fit in with his genius and creativity? Can one evaluate a genius in normal human ways?

Lecture Eight

Nikolai Vasil'evich Gogol', 1809–1852

Scope: Partly contemporary with Pushkin came the first great master of Russian prose, a man with a long, prominent nose that he immortalized in literature. Born in Ukraine, brought up with the rich folklore and devilish tales of that rich western region of the tsar's empire, Gogol' came to the capital in 1828, the year of Tolstoy's birth. After a short, spectacularly unsuccessful career as a teacher, in 1836, he wrote a play, *The Inspector General*, whose performances attracted enormous attention among Russian spectators and readers, not least of all from Tsar Nikolai I. The play's off-center sense of humor, combined with its bitingly mordant presentation of Russian corruption and civic disorder, made an impression that has lasted for 180 years with undiminished strength. Five years after writing the play, Gogol' wrote one of the greatest masterpieces of the European novella form—*The Overcoat*. This portrayal of the travails experienced by a low-ranking St. Petersburg copyist and bureaucrat, a sort of human typewriter, has captured the sympathies and imagination of countless generations.

Outline

I. Concerning Pushkin, I have described work that is remarkable for its direct clarity and simplicity, worthy of a great genius. In this lecture, I turn to an artist who, despite his deep admiration for Pushkin, is in many ways the opposite.

   A. Gogol' loved to let his fantasy unfold in complicated ways, glorying in extensive and intricate imagery and metaphors.

   B. Furthermore, he was a master of grotesque humor, developing absurd situations, in which noses mysteriously disappear from people's faces and artists see visions the opposite of what they seek to create. His world is often manipulated by a devil as strong and perverse as any fiend found in medieval religious literature.

II. Gogol' was born in the city of Poltava, in the Ukraine. In the 19th century, it was a province of the Russian Empire, a territory with its own language and folk traditions, dominated by Russian language and culture. Many of the author's early stories reflect this origin in a colorful way.

   A. After some literary successes and a blatant academic failure as a lecturer—"The University and I spat at each other and parted"—in 1836, Gogol' wrote one of his masterpieces, a play called *The Inspector General*. Its first performance was an enormous and popular *coup de theatre*.

   B. Gogol's use of Russian slang is evident even at the beginning, in an epigraph from a slang Russian proverb:

      Na zerkalo necha peniat'
      Koli rozha kriva.

      An attempted translation:

      Don't gripe at the mirror
      If it's your kisser that's crooked.

   C. The writing has about it the capacity to create wonderful jolts to the imagination, such as the judge who keeps geese in his courtroom and the teacher who broke chairs when he talked about Alexander the Great. The text opens before our eyes the wondrous and multifaceted, fantastic world of the writer's imagination.

   D. The central character, a fairly brainless braggart and poseur, bears the name of Khlestakov, which evokes the sound of the whip.

   E. His presence in a provincial town causes a terrible upset, because the townsfolk mistake him for an inspector general, traveling incognito from St. Petersburg to examine the administration of the provincial town, which is corrupt.

   F. The various local officials offer him substantial amounts of money, which he gladly accepts. They think they are bribing the inspector general and covering up the crookedness of the town.

   G. In the midst of all this confusion, Khlestakov manages to make declarations of love to both the wife and daughter of the town's mayor. The fantasies with which he woos them are marvelous exaggerations of the good life in St. Petersburg.

   H. He mentions talking with "brother Pushkin…he's a real character, that one." He also talks about a marvelous "soup in a pot brought straight from Paris on a ship;… its aroma beats by far anything you can find in nature." Gogol' gives full reign to his fantasy through Khlestakov's lies.

   I. After the town's administrators send him off in the fastest available vehicle, a carriage pulled by three spirited horses (a *troika*), they find out, again by the device of reading other people's mail, that Khlestakov is a fraud who has been making fun of them.

   J. As they start to upbraid one another, more and more loudly, a gendarme appears and announces the arrival of the real inspector general.

   K. As Gogol' puts it, they suddenly all become "calcified" into grotesque positions.

1. The local postmaster is twisted into a motionless question mark. Others stand with their limbs contorted in various forms.
2. They stand there, as if frozen in place, for a minute and a half until the final curtain slowly falls.

III. There has been tremendous critical controversy over this play, perhaps indicating a rich kind of ambiguity in its text.

A. The conservative critics castigated Gogol' for besmirching the good name of Russia with his exposure of widespread local corruption. They did not so much deny its existence as complain that Gogol' dared to write about it openly.

B. The radicals and reformers sang Gogol's praises for exposing Russian social flaws, which they had been attacking for many years.

C. Tsar Nikolai I himself, who so constricted the presentation of Pushkin's works, was surprisingly tolerant in this case.

1. It is claimed that after the first performance he said: "Everyone got what was coming to him, and I got it worst of all."
2. He then gave royal permission for future performances. Such is the caprice of monarchs! The Russians call it "the logic of Pharaoh."

D. Gogol' himself denied that he had any intent to satirize tsarist Russia. He claimed the final appearance of the true inspector general represented the Christian conscience of mankind or the biblical day of final judgment.

E. To deny the presence of political satire in the play is the same as denying the presence of the magnificent nose on Gogol's face. But to confine the play's meaning only to politics is a reduction of Gogol's magnificent art.

IV. Between 1835 and 1841, Gogol' wrote a series of brilliant novellas. Two of them have strongly captured the modern imagination.

A. The first one, from 1835, is entitled *The Nose*. It plunges the reader immediately into a world both comic and grotesque: A drunken Russian barber sits down to breakfast and finds a human nose in his bread.

B. The second chapter begins when a certain Kovaliov, who has the civil service rank of collegiate assessor, wakes up and feels his face, seeking his favorite spot, his newly pimpled nose. Instead, he feels a perfectly flat place—no wound and no nose!

C. In a panic, Kovaliov rushes around St. Petersburg to rectify the situation, only to meet his own nose dressed up in the gold embroidered uniform of a state councillor, a higher rank than that possessed by Kovaliov himself.

D. All entreaties for the nose to get back in its place are in vain. Finally, in a cathedral, the nose even refuses to talk with the face to which it rightfully belongs.

E. All through the story, Gogol' plays with the idea of the part—that is the nose—taking precedence over the whole—that is, Kovaliov.

1. The story makes the assertion that in human life, the part can be even larger—and more important—than the whole.
2. In the fantastic world that he creates, Gogol' wants to reverse geometry.

F. Then, Kovaliov awakes one morning to find his nose back on his face.

G. Gogol' ends with speculation about the supernatural quality of the events in the story. "But," he says, "where does one not find such events which don't fit together? …Such things, however rare, do actually happen."

V. The later novella, published in 1842, is the most famous masterpiece of the novella form. Its Russian title is *Shinel'*, often translated as *The Overcoat*.

A. A *shinel'* is a heavy outer garment with an extra layer of cloth over the shoulders, coming down to the level of the elbows.

B. The protagonist of the story has a name that sounds as ridiculous in Russian as it does in English: Akakii Akakievich Bashmachkin.

C. Akakii Akakievich, like Pushkin's Eugene in *The Bronze Horseman*, is a poor man who occupies a humble rank in the Russian civil service and serves as the butt of countless mean jokes in the government office where he works as a simple copy clerk.

D. He bears his fellow worker's jeers with humble submission, only once arousing their conscience by his simple but agonized words: "Leave me alone. Why are you insulting me?" At this point, the story seems to be an argument for the brotherhood of humanity.

E. His dilapidated overcoat is no match for the Russian winter, and Petrovich, the demonic tailor, refuses to repair the old one. When his boss gives him a bonus, he can buy a new one. But it is stolen right off his back.

F. He decides to seek help from local officials. Unfortunately, when he approaches an important person and tries to be heard, he hears only the blustering: "Do you realize with whom you are speaking?"

G. In despair, Akakii returns home and soon dies of an acute fever. There is a kind of poetic justice in the story. The important person who received Akakii with bluster soon has his own coat stolen off his back by a ghostly figure remarkably similar to Akakii Akakievich.

Suggested Reading:

Nikolai Gogol', *The Inspector General.*

Nikolai Gogol', *The Nose, The Overcoat, Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*, translated and with an introduction by Ronald Wilks.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol.*

Questions to Consider:

1. Gogol' insisted that the end of his play *The Inspector General* was a representation of God's final judgment, whereas many of the spectators saw it as earthly reprisal, well deserved by petty crooks and scoundrels. Does the impact of the play change if you choose one interpretation or the other?
2. In both *The Nose* and *The Overcoat*, Gogol' uses the grotesque for various effects, from humor to horror. How does he manipulate the situation and the circumstances to make the reader laugh in some cases and shiver in others? Do the two moods ever mix together?

Lecture Nine

Russian Grotesque—Overcoats to Dead Souls

Scope: Gogol' was a tremendously restless person. Right after his success as a playwright, he set off for Western Europe, where his memories of rural Russia, filtered through his half-crazy imagination, produced an unforgettable series of grotesque and comic characters under the deceptive title of *Dead Souls*. Despite its morbid-sounding title, the novel gives a fascinating picture of a Russian *plut* ("rogue"), Chichikov. The very sibilant repetition in the name tells a great deal. In his rickety yet mighty *troika*, Chichikov slithers his way through the Russian provincial gentry, with a wondrously crooked plan, more than worthy of any world-class shyster. Later, Gogol' tried to bring his rogue to virtue, with a lack of success that was clearly predictable: Paradise was not for this inveterate denizen of hell. Gogol' did manage to irritate mightily his erstwhile friends and readers. A short time after receiving a missive from the great critic Belinsky, a letter that would have torn the hide off a hog, Gogol' died with leeches hanging from his magnificent nose.

Outline

I. *The Overcoat* was very popular in Gogol's time and inspired many arguments about its interpretation.

  A. The immediate argument claimed that Gogol' was protesting against the terrible poverty in Russia at that time. A plea for the poor seems implicit in Akakii's words to his fellow workers, who were tormenting him: "Why are you insulting me? …I am your brother."

  B. The story also seems to be about spiritual vengeance. The devil seems to be in the character of Petrovich, the tailor, who smoothes the folds of Akakii's new coat, as if he were making something supernatural out of it.

  C. Many modern critics have suggested that the story is nothing more than Gogol' taking pleasure in making his rich sense of fantasy come to life.

  D. It can be argued that the story is a rich mixture of all these elements.

II. In 1836, Gogol' left Russia for Western Europe. He spent most of the next 11 years in Italy. During this time, he wrote the novel *Dead Souls*, which he called a "poem." It does indeed have a tremendously strong poetic element.

  A. In Gogol's Russia, the word *soul* had two meanings: the religious notion of the human spirit and a serf owned by a Russian country landlord. To have a "hundred souls" meant to have a hundred serfs.

B. In the novel, *dead souls* referred to serfs who had died, but whose names were kept on the government tax rolls until the next census revision. While these names were on the rolls, the landlord had to pay taxes on them.

C. When a swindler named Chichikov came to a small Russian town, he undertook to buy dead souls, thus relieving their owners of their tax obligation. When he had accumulated a sufficient number, he offered them to the government as collateral for a large loan, without mention of their physical absence from this world.

D. In the novel, Gogol' also brought to its most powerful effectiveness his habit of creating fantastic characters, like phantoms out of a wizard's vat, who flash before the reader's eyes, then simply disappear, without playing a further role in the story. But such is their vitality that one never forgets them.

E. When Chichikov is bargaining to establish a price for a dead soul, the owner, Sobakevich ("son of a dog") waxes eloquent about his qualities:

> "Milushkin, the bricklayer, could set up a stove in anyone's house. Maksim Teliatnikov, the shoemaker, no sooner sticks in his awl, and you have a pair of boots that's a pair of real boots!—and not one drop of liquor in his mouth! And Yeremei Sorokopliokhin! That guy can compete with the best of them in Moscow!..."
>
> "But pardon me," interrupted Chichikov … "why bother listing all of this, they're not of any use now, these people are all dead! The dead body's only good to prop up a fence!"

III. In dealing with his dead souls, Gogol' also creates a series of characters who have come to be unforgettable figures in the Russian literary tradition, as well as in Russian everyday life.

A. Chichikov himself has all the charm of a loquacious rogue. When he speaks, it seems like honey drips right out of his mouth. When the local worthies first meet him, they react with compliments:

> The Governor: "He's a well-intentioned man."
>
> The Prosecutor: "He's a practical man."
>
> The Colonel of the Gendarmes: "He's a learned man."

Chichikov responds to the delights of the town by jumping up joyfully and kicking himself in the backside.

B. The first landlord to whose house he travels is Manilov, who turns out to be the opposite of virtually every other human being.

1. Gogol' gives one of his most detailed lists of people's interests: dogs, music, food, social position, cultivation of aristocratic company, gambling with cards, slapping around those who are socially inferior.

2. Manilov has none of these inclinations. The absence of these, or any, qualities in Manilov tells us something about the quality of nothingness, which Gogol' sees in him.

C. Many other memorable characters are introduced as Chichikov travels around the town, but, in the end, Chichikov's plans unravel entirely and he is forced to flee in that reliably swift vehicle, the Russian *troika.* In one of Russian literature's most famous passages that *troika's* trajectory is evoked:

> Ah, you steeds, you magnificent steeds! Are there windstorms caught in your manes?... You have heard the song from on high and you are straining your bronze chests, with your hoofs barely scraping the ground, you have become one stretched outline flying through the air; you dash along, inspired by God. Oh Rus', whither art thou hurtling? Give us an answer! It gives no answer.... It flies past everything on this earth, while other peoples and states, looking askance, step aside and let it pass through.

D. This image of the noble, elevated, medieval version of Rus' flying by other nations and states, which totally give way, became a classical representation of Russia's greatness.

E. What that interpretation overlooks is the fact that, inside the hurtling *troika* pulled by its magnificent steeds sits the fleeing chiseler and deceiver, Chichikov.

IV. Gogol' decided to compose a second part of *Dead Souls* that would present a reformed and morally improved Chichikov. As one can easily imagine, the attempt proved fruitless. The material that had been so lively in the first part turned deadly dull and lifeless in the hands of the would-be moralist.

A. To compensate for his literary troubles, Gogol' began to compose letters of moral advice to his friends. The burden of his arguments was to support the social status quo against all those who attacked the evils of serfdom.

B. He urged such activities as burning a 10-ruble note before the eyes of the serfs to show that the master did not care for money, only for the moral welfare of his serfs.

C. From this, you can, perhaps, see why increasing numbers of Russian readers decided that Gogol' was becoming insane or something worse: He was a cowardly turncoat from some of his best earlier writing.

D. The climax of this general reaction came in the form of a letter, written in Germany, where there was less censorship than in tsarist Russia. The epistle came from the critic Vissarion Belinsky, who became a powerful protagonist of Russian radicals. He wanted to overturn the tsarist system.

E. His letter reads in part as follows:

> Proponent of the knout, apostle of ignorance, upholder of obscurity and darkness, panegyrist of Tatar morals, what are you doing? …That you base such teaching on the Orthodox Church, that I can understand; it has always been the supporter of the knout and the handmaid of despotism. But why have you mixed Christ in here? What have you found in common between him and any church, much less the Orthodox Church?

F. The letter tore Gogol' to shreds, and he died soon after of malnutrition, while leeches hung off his magnificent nose.

Suggested Reading:

Nikolai Gogol', *Dead Souls* (a novel called a "poem"), with commentary at the end of the Norton edition.

Francis B. Randall, *Vissarion Belinsky*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Nabokov claims that *Dead Souls* is a description of Gogol's inner world, not a description of the actual Russian countryside. What aspects of the human imagination are covered by the grotesque landlords he constructs on his pages?
2. Does a writer who lives under a repressive political regime have a clear moral duty to use his talent as a weapon against that regime, as Belinsky insists? Was he justified in his attack on Gogol'?

Lecture Ten

Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, 1821–1881

Scope: There is probably no writer since the Renaissance who has made a deeper impression on contemporary imagination and creativity than Dostoevsky, with the possible exception of his great contemporary, Tolstoy. (Let it only be said that it was Dostoevsky who forced the creator of this lecture series, at the age of 19, to learn the magnificent Russian language.) Dostoevsky was the son of a military Russian doctor in Moscow. He grew up in the city, and he did not partake of the great rural culture of Russia. Educated as an engineer but desperately in love with French and Russian literature, he wrote an epistolary novel, *Poor Folk*, in 1844, which he submitted to a prestigious journal. Its famous editor, Nekrasov, gave it to Belinsky (shades of Gogol'), who only grudgingly agreed to read the work of some nerdy engineer. Belinsky became totally engrossed in its artistry, swallowed the work whole, went to Dostoevsky's apartment at 4:00 in the morning, embraced him, and declared the young man the future genius of Russia. Dostoevsky later wrote: "That was one of the rare moments in my life when I was truly happy." The novel itself concerned not only the difficult life of Russian poor people but also many of the themes that Dostoevsky later elaborated.

Outline

I. Unlike most of the other great Russian writers of the 19th century, Dostoevsky was born in the city (Moscow) rather than in the countryside, and he had no hereditary estate or manor house on which to look back.

- **A.** The young Fedor Mikhailovich received his education in an engineering institute. In 1839, while he was still in his engineering training, he received the news that his father had been murdered.
- **B.** After he left the engineering institute, he translated Balzac's novel *Eugénie Grandet.* At the age of 23, he submitted the manuscript of his own novel to Nekrasov, a famous editor and poet of that time.
- **C.** Nekrasov, in turn, gave the manuscript to the famous critic Vissarion Belinsky. Like Nekrasov, Belinsky was enormously popular among the liberals of the 1840s.
- **D.** Belinsky was initially reluctant to read the words of an unknown engineering student, but to his amazement, he found that he could not put the manuscript down!
- **E.** At 4:00 in the morning, he burst into Dostoevsky's apartment; kissed the young man three times, in Russian style; and proclaimed him a

genius, the new hope of Russian literature! "Guard your gift well," he advised the astounded and impressed young man.

F. Belinsky's praise went to Dostoevsky's head, and his newfound arrogance lost him friends.

II. The novel that so impressed Belinsky was *Poor Folk*, whose epistolary form is interrupted by a short diary entry supposedly written by a young girl.

A. The correspondence takes place between two people who live in rooms under one roof in a poor section of St. Petersburg. The young girl is named Dobrosiolova ("kind village"). Her correspondent is an older man named Devushkin (*devushka* means "young woman").

1. The novel itself would probably not be remembered today if it did not bear Dostoevsky's name. There are many places where it creaks along, exposing the inexperience of a young writer.
2. Yet there are also many places in the book that exhibit the talent of a powerful observer and writer; glimpses of the future Dostoevsky reveal themselves.

B. The correspondence deals with the desperate position of the young Varvara Dobrosiolova, who can barely sustain herself materially.

C. Varvara meets a young man named Pokrovsky, who decides to become her tutor. Varavara believes Pokrovsky looks down on her and decides to prove she is his intellectual equal.

1. She steals into his room to take a book. To her horror, the books are so closely packed on the shelf that her plucking one book causes the whole library to collapse. And just at that moment, Pokrovsky enters the room to witness the falling carnage.
2. He upbraids her as a teacher would and tells her that she should be ashamed, being such a big girl, to indulge in such tricks. Her blush shows her chagrin; it also makes him look twice and realize that she is indeed a big girl, with all the attractions belonging thereto.
3. This reaction immediately communicates itself to her. She understands that he understands, and he immediately understands that she understands that he understands.
4. Back and forth the understanding goes, with the lightning speed of sensitive people. Dostoevsky had learned his lesson well from Balzac, whose novel *Père Goriot* he had read.

D. Pokrovsky later dies of consumption, and his drunken father is forced to follow behind his son's coffin.

1. In this case, the old man almost crazily insists on carrying with him many volumes of Pushkin, which he had given to his son on his birthday.
2. As the funeral procession moves faster, the father starts to drop the books, stops to pick them up, then runs after the coffin.
3. What starts out to be a very sad scene suddenly embarrasses us as readers: We realize that it is turning comic, a terrible thing on so clearly sad an occasion. We try to resist the laughter, but it is not easy.
4. The young Dostoevsky is delicately and masterfully treading that thin line between the grotesque and the comic.

E. We begin to realize, in the course of the novel, that poverty is not only a material condition.

1. It is also a metaphysical statement about people and the profound ways in which we see the human soul when the body is stripped bare of material accouterments.
2. When we get to know a person without material possessions, we get to know that person's soul.

F. Another theme in this novel is that of the *infernal'nitsa* ("infernal woman").

1. Varvara is a proud and powerful personality. She realizes that she cannot continue to depend on Devushkin, who has tried to help her at great cost to himself.
2. Consequently, she decides to accept the marriage proposal of Bykov, an older lecher.
3. Bykov expects a submissive young wife.
4. What he does not realize now, but will soon come to realize, is the enormous strength and willpower of Varvara. The old fellow will get much more than he bargains for.

G. Devushkin, of course, is devastated by her decision.

1. For Devushkin (and Dostoevsky), salvation lies in a woman.
2. We can contrast this with Gogol' and his character Akakii. What an overcoat is for Gogol', a woman is for Dostoevsky.

H. Another character in the story, who is worse off than Devushkin, wins a lawsuit, then dies! The relationship among life, poverty, and death at the end of poverty is something Dostoevsky will play with throughout his life.

I. When Devushkin's boss calls him into his office, he is so moved by Devushkin's poverty that he shakes his hand and gives him money. Thus, Devushkin turns his boss into a real human being.

Suggested Reading:

Fedor Dostoevsky, *Poor Folk*.

Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Classical Russian literature usually takes place in the Russian countryside. In what way does Dostoevsky's decidedly and deliberately urban world shape his novel and its characters' approach to life?
2. How does Varvara Dobrosiolova, in *Poor Folk,* demonstrate the power of people in a weak position? How does this affect the young Dostoevsky's description of women?

Lecture Eleven

Near Mortality, Prison, and an Underground

Scope: Shortly after Dostoevsky's auspicious beginnings, Belinsky hurt the young man deeply by sharply rejecting *The Double*. The author then drifted into a mildly revolutionary circle of moderate liberals. In 1848, early in the morning, he was awakened by the tsar's police and placed under arrest. In December of 1849, he was led, together with his fellow liberals, out into the bitter St. Petersburg cold, under sentence of execution by firing squad. At the very last second, the soldiers lowered their rifles, and the condemned men heard a prearranged tsarist stay of execution. The young writer served four years in chains, working in a Siberian prison camp. This experience received much literary treatment in his subsequent work. After marrying a widow in Siberia, he returned to European Russia in 1859. The marriage was an uneasy one, and his first wife died. In 1864, with her corpse, according to Russian custom, still on the table, he wrote one of his most disturbing, moving, and penetrating works: a novella, *Notes from the Underground.* If you read it and then sleep normally for the next week, you have not read it properly. The Underground Man, a compendium of everything deep within ourselves that we try to hide but know all too well, makes an impassioned and embittered cry for human freedom but without human joy and love.

Outline

I. Encouraged and emboldened by Belinsky's public praise, Dostoevsky decided to cut a high-profile figure among the high-powered literary circles of St. Petersburg. His social graces were by no means the most polished, and his inherent shyness and almost morbid sensitivity made him extremely vulnerable to the inevitable jealous barbs that came his way.

   A. In the 1840s, Dostoevsky published *The Double*, in some ways a precursor of the kind of psychology we are interested in nowadays. The story concerns a man who believes he sees his own double. Eventually, he becomes insane. With *The Double*, we see Dostoevsky becoming obsessed with the inner contradictions of the human spirit.

   B. The story called forth Belinsky's apprehension and strongly negative criticism, which struck Dostoevsky painfully. Naturally, his jealous contemporaries used Belinsky's critical words in a very clever way to wound their talented rival.

   C. To avoid their company, which he now found obnoxious, Dostoevsky gained entry into another political and social group, led by Petrashevsky, a man of moderately liberal views that bordered on the French ideas of Saint Simon and Fourier, mild precursors to socialism.

D. Possibly, there was another, darker side to Dostoevsky's involvement with the *Petrashevtsy* (Petrashevsky's followers): A sub-group had organized to murder one of the members of the group. Those who participated in the murder could never go to the police and denounce any of their co-assassins. This arrangement was later to become the core of a fearsome novel by Dostoevsky, *Besy*, variously translated as *The Possessed*, or *Devils*.

E. The affair did not end well. In April of 1849, Dostoevsky and his friends were arrested.

   1. On December 22nd of that year, they were led out to a St. Petersburg square so that the government could carry out the sentence: execution by firing squad.

   2. When the first rank was already tied to the stakes, the soldiers raised their rifles, and a prearranged courier galloped in with news from the tsar (our old friend, Nikolai I).

   3. The execution would not take place; the prisoners would spend four years in Siberia, in chains, and then four years in the army.

F. Shortly thereafter, Dostoevsky wrote to his brother: "*Zhizn' – dar, zhizn' schast'e, kazhdaia minuta mogla byt' vekom schast'ia. Si jeaunesse savait!*" ("Life is a gift, life is happiness, every minute of life could be a century of happiness. If youth only knew!") It is hardly accidental that many of his future novels would describe the last hours of a person about to die.

G. On the way to Siberia, some of the prisoners were given rest and help by a widow of one of the Decembrist rebels. She gave Dostoevsky a gift he kept until the day of his death: a copy of the New Testament. Later, he wrote her a very revealing letter, which has become famous as an expression of his religious feelings:

> I am a child of this century, of disbelief and doubt.... But God sometimes sends me minutes, when I am entirely calm. ... I have set forth a symbol of faith for myself ... to believe there is nothing more beautiful, profound, sympathetic, intelligent, courageous, brave, and complete than Christ.... Furthermore, if someone were to prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, then I would rather stay with Christ than with the truth.

H. Dostoevsky returned to central Russia after 10 years of exile, most of them spent in one of Siberia's coldest places. By 1859, he was a very different person and writer. He was also a man married to a widow with a child from a previous husband. On their wedding night, she had witnessed one of Dostoevsky's frightening attacks of epilepsy.

I. Back in Moscow, the marriage did not proceed too well, even leading to a partial separation. Dostoevsky's first wife died in April of 1864, and her body, according to Russian custom, lay on the table while he wrote one of his most famous, powerful, and gloomy works, *Notes from the Underground*.

II. The title of the work tells us a great deal. The first word—*zapiski*—implies something jotted down in a hurry, without much second thought, an unedited outpouring of feeling. The words that follow—*iz podpol'ia*—literally mean "from the cellar."

   A. The fictional writer of these jottings lives in the cellar. He is musing about the nature of freedom, in a philosophical sense: To what extent are we really free from all outside conditions and influences when we wish to exercise our own will?

   B. Typically for Dostoevsky, the author himself contradicts his own protagonist in the introduction, when he states: "Such people…not only can but must exist in our society, taking into account the circumstances under which our society has developed."

      1. In this note, signed with his own name, the author states that the Underground Man has been produced by those very outside circumstances whose power he heroically and passionately tries to deny, all in the name of freedom of the human will!

      2. Clearly, Dostoevsky exults in the paradox.

III. The novel begins with the most unlikely phrases to attract and hold the attention of the reader, including inversions of normal order: "*Ia chelovek bol'noi...ia zloi chelovek. Neprivlekatel'nyi ia chelovek.*" (*very* literally: "I man sick, I spiteful man. Unattractive I man.")

   A. With a satanic kind of glee, the Underground Man flaunts his nasty unattractiveness in our faces. He offers an excuse, claiming that his liver hurts, then immediately denies it, claiming the ineffectiveness of any medical cure, which to be sure, he is taking.

   B. In 11 closely reasoned, short chapters, stated in the most febrile way possible, the Underground Man takes us through his refutation of the 19th-century notion of progress, human improvement, and the possibility of a decent human society.

IV. An interlocutor springs up in the text, out of the Underground Man's feverish imagination.

   A. The interlocutor appeals to the rational notion of self-interest. Nobody, he claims, acts against his own self-interest, and a decent society can educate humans to a proper undertstanding of true self-interest, which will correspond to the interests of a genuinely good society.

   B. One can hear the echoes of 19th-century utilitarianism and later socialism in the Underground Man's polemics.

V. The Underground Man is ready to act against his own self-interest. Under no circumstances will he allow himself to be a piano key under God's hands or under socialist hands.

   A. His interlocutor exclaims that the chap would even find pleasure in the pain of a toothache!

   B. The reply is that there is indeed pleasure in the groans of a man with a toothache, which can bother the peace of his neighbor.

   C. Dostoevsky's hero is ready to throw himself out the "window of paradise," rather than be forced to admit that two times two always equals four.

   D. He lives in pain and total isolation in a "cellar" of his own making. He makes an argument for freedom, but we also see that perverse devil who lives inside every one of us: We can act out of spite to show we are not controlled by anything outside ourselves.

VI. The narration now turns from dramatized argumentation to a series of reminiscences that give us some idea of why the Underground Man's self-constructed world is so bleak.

   A. This section starts with an epigraph taken from a popular poem by Nekrasov, the editor who had accepted and published Dostoevsky's first novel.

      1. In the poem, Nekrasov makes a rather self-satisfied statement about his rescue of a fallen woman: From a life of vice and despair, she comes into the poet's house as a respectable woman.

      2. It is clear that the estranged and analytical eye of Dostoevsky's narrator looks upon this outcome with derision.

   B. The memories start out with a great deal of self-contempt. The Underground Man wants to establish his existence in the presence of an officer, who—always looking neither to the right nor to the left—walks right past our hero and forces him to give way.

   C. The Underground Man decides to hold his ground. After mortgaging his salary for months ahead, he gets a cheap fur, which will make him look respectable enough to bump into the officer rather than to have to give way to him.

      1. The officer pays him no attention and walks right on. Our protagonist's existence will not be established by clothes or by relations with officers.

      2. He even imagines the officer 14 years later: "*Chto on teper', moi golubchik? Kogo davit?*" ("What's he doing now, my dear little pigeon dove? Whom is he crowding out of the way?")

      3. The use of the marvelous Russian *golubchik* ("pigeon dove," or "darling") shows the Underground Man's ambivalence: He wants the relationship, yet he can't stand it.

   D. This discomfort is intensified powerfully when the narrator meets old schoolmates and invites himself to their party. They don't want him there.

      1. The night turns into a perfect reproduction of the nightmare of a cocktail party where no one really wants to talk to you.

      2. The narrator becomes drunk on champagne, dreadfully insults the honoree, and ends up pacing the room silently for two hours, while the others engage in conversation.

   E. When they rush off to a house of ill repute, he insists on chasing them.

      1. There, he meets a strong young woman—a prostitute. He begins to preach at her.

      2. Eventually, he makes her miserable; then, in a moment of remorse, he gives her his address and invites her to come for a visit.

   F. When she shows up, right after he has a terrible, soul-shaking row with his servant, she sees he is much poorer than the impression he had given.

      1. He begins to pour out his grief to her. For the first time, the Underground Man is trying to make human contact.

      2. But he shoves a 5-ruble note into her hand, which she rejects before rushing out.

   G. The slamming of the door as she leaves indicates the hell into which he has put himself. As Dostoevsky will say repeatedly, hell is the place where a person is unable to love.

   H. The Underground Man has shown that he cannot experience the freedom he wants together with the feeling of love. For him, the two states are mutually exclusive.

VII. Dostoevsky will try to deal with the problem of the coexistence of freedom and love in his future works.

Suggested Reading:

Fedor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, *Three Short Novels of Dostoevsky*, translated by Constance Garnett and revised by Avrahm Yarmolinsky.

Robert L. Jackson, *The Art of Dostoevsky*.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature*; a dissenting, critical view of Dostoevsky.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why is the Underground Man so disturbed by the idea of people acting rationally in their own interests? Is there really pleasure to be gained from a toothache?

2. What in the character of the Underground Man prevents him from responding to the love offered by Liza, the young woman who accepts the invitation to come to his apartment? What prevents him from seeing the possibility of freedom and human love existing side by side?

Lecture Twelve

Second Wife and a Great Crime Novel Begins

Scope: In the 1860s, Dostoevsky got himself out of a dangerous snare with his publisher, thanks to the help of a young woman stenographer, Anna Grigor'evna Snitkina, who took not only his dictation but also his proposal for marriage. Subsequently, she played no small role in the production of the world's greatest novels. Dostoevsky was long fascinated by human foibles, especially the very Russian habit of alcoholism. He decided to deal with this problem in a novel called *P'ianen'kie* (*The Dear Little Drunkards*), but his main character, a certain Marmeladov (notice the jelly in the man's name) met a young, troubled student named Raskol'nikov (literally, "from among the schismatics"). The resulting murderous and inflamingly introspective journey became the world-famous *Crime and Punishment*. In the beginning, we see a St. Petersburg quite far from Pushkin's glorious creation of Peter. We see a crowded tenement, whose banisters are covered with sticky eggshells, and canals that stink when their levels go down in an unusually hot summer.

Outline

I. For a variety of personal and business reasons, Dostoevsky found himself in a bad financial and emotional situation in the 1860s. To pay his debts, he signed an agreement with a publisher.

  A. The conditions of the agreement stipulated that in two years, the writer would submit the manuscript of a new novel of a specified length. In return, the publisher would pay off Dostoevsky's debts and give him enough money to live on for the two years.

  B. If he failed to fulfill this agreement, the publisher would get the rights to everything Dostoevsky had written up to that time, plus everything that he wrote in the future. Almost two years passed, and Dostoevsky had not even started on the new novel. Finally, a month before his deadline, Dostoevsky found a way to get himself out of the mess.

II. At that time, a new institution established itself in Russia: the School of Stenography. Friends convinced a skeptical Dostoevsky to try dictation.

  A. The best student of the institute, a young woman by the name of Anna Grigor'evna Snitkina, came to his apartment.

  B. After finding himself tongue-tied for over a day, Dostoevsky located his voice and, in slightly less than a month, dictated the text of the novella *The Gambler*, on a theme not entirely unknown to Dostoevsky, to put it mildly.

C. The finished manuscript was delivered in the nick of time. The publisher managed to be out of town on that day, but the author took the manuscript to a police notary, and thus he had legal proof of delivery within the agreed deadline.

D. Shortly thereafter, Dostoevsky and his friends followed Russian custom and arranged a banquet for all concerned, including the young stenographer.

E. When she arrived, the writer requested her help with another problem: He was constructing a story where a somewhat older man had fallen in love with a young woman. His was a difficult character—temperamental, moody, not an easy person to be with—he had even spent time in a Siberian prison. But he sincerely loved the young woman; would his proposal of marriage sound convincing in the story?

F. Anna Grigor'evna replied, "I accept your proposal." Their marriage lasted for almost 15 years, until his death in 1881.

  1. She had the stamina and courage to put up with his very difficult, sometimes almost violent, character.

  2. She played an important role in making it possible for him to write several masterpieces, most especially including *The Brothers Karamazov*, which he gallantly, and rightfully, dedicated to her.

G. Anna survived him up to the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, when she died from overeating after a period of starvation, a sad end for a woman who had played a vital role in the survival of Dostoevsky's papers and the publication of his works.

III. In 1865, Dostoevsky was determined to write a novel on the theme of alcoholism, to be called *P'ianen'kie* (*The Dear Little Drunkards*, later entitled *Crime and Punishment*).

A. In an early scene, the young student Raskol'nikov has managed to drag himself out of his tiny room in a poor part of the city. He is obsessed with the idea of killing someone as a form of philanthropy. He believes he is a kind of Napoleon—someone who is not subject to society's rules.

B. In a bar, he meets Marmeladov, who pours out a terrible tale of what has happened to his family. He has drunk away all their money and forced his own daughter (Sonya) into prostitution.

C. When Raskol'nikov accompanies the drunken Marmeladov to his apartment, we see the desperate situation of Katerina Ivanovna, his consumptive wife, and their children living in terrible poverty.

D. Raskol'nikov beats a hasty retreat. But before he leaves, he instinctively empties his own pockets to leave his last kopeks for the use of the family.

E. This same man, who is making himself ready to commit an awful murder, is also capable of sacrificing his last kopeks to support a poor family whose members he barely knows.

F. Clearly, the human being is a very divided creature, capable of extreme actions, both in a morally positive and negative sense.

G. Equally clearly, this family, particularly the daughter, Sonya, is a force that draws out the humanly decent and moral side of Raskol'nikov.

IV. When he gets back to his room, Raskol'nikov is confronted not only with a police summons, for nonpayment of rent, but also with a letter. It turns out to be from his mother, Pul'kheriia, whose name comes from the Latin word for beautiful.

A. The letter tells Raskol'nikov about the suffering of his sister, Dunya, who turns out to be the strongest person in the novel. It seems that she obtained a household service position in the family of a certain Svidrigailov.

  1. No sooner did she appear in his household than Svidrigailov began to press her for a sexual relationship, which she indignantly refused.

  2. Through a misunderstanding, Mrs. Svidrigailov thought the young woman was a seducer and sent her away in public disgrace.

B. Despite her suffering from town gossip, Dunya is soon cleared of suspicion after Svidrigailov's confession of the facts.

C. She then becomes a kind of local heroine, and she receives a marriage proposal from a Mr. Luzhin ("mud puddle," a good description of his character). From arrangements he offers, it is clear that he wants a poor young woman so that he can tyrannize her in his own household.

D. After some agonized introspection, Dunya accepts his proposal, on the assumption that he will help her family.

E. In her letter to her son, the mother rubs in this assumption of Dunya's with seemingly gentle maternal urgings: Love your sister; she wants to do so much for you!

F. Raskol'nikov is furious. He is furious at Svidrigailov for attempting to corrupt Dunya. In his imagination, Svidrigailov becomes the epitome of evil. Every time he sees a corrupt person, he calls him a "Svidrigailov."

V. Raskol'nikov is willing to sacrifice his own soul to kill and rob an old pawnbroker woman and to use the proceeds to help himself and others in need. He plots the murder carefully.

VI. Raskol'nikov staggers under the load of his obsessions and difficulties, and he tries to find surcease in one of St. Petersburg's fresh and green parks.

A. After drinking a glass of vodka, he suddenly falls asleep under some bushes. The result is a terrible nightmare, which has resounded in literary history ever since. Dostoevsky was at his most terrifyingly talented when he portrayed dreams.

B. In his dream, Raskol'nikov is a child again, going with his father to the cemetery where his brother is buried. In passing a tavern, they see an upsetting scene: A drunken peasant is inviting a drunken crowd into a cart hitched to a broken-down old horse that could not possibly pull such a load.

C. When the horse strains to move, the poor animal is whipped from all sides and, eventually, across the eyes. As the hysteria of the crowd rises, the peasant then raises an iron bar and swings it with full force down on the horse's head. Dostoevsky does not spare the sadistic details.

D. The young boy finally manages to struggle loose and tries to embrace the horse, but his father restrains him. Helplessly, the boy sobs, "Why?"

E. Raskol'nikov wakes up at this point, believing that he cannot commit the murder. On his way home, he sees the pawnbroker's half-sister, who lives with the pawnbroker. He hears her say that she will be away at a certain time. Raskol'nikov knows the coast will be clear. By sheer chance, the murder is on again!

VII. It is a rare reader of Dostoevsky who forgets the scene of the murder. It is so realistic that André Gide once asked if Dostoevsky had ever killed anyone. Raskol'nikov appears to have committed the perfect crime. But what happens to the conscience of such a man? This we shall see in the next lecture.

Suggested Reading:

Fedor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, Norton Critical Edition of the novel, with commentary by critics espousing different points of view.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does the letter from Pul'kheria, Raskol'nikov's mother, play into both the positive and negative sides of his character?
2. How does Dostoevsky construct and use the famous dream about beating the horse to show the complexity of Raskol'nikov's many different impulses?

Timeline

863	Cyril and Methodius devise an alphabet for a common Slavic language.
988	Prince Vladimir brings Byzantine Christianity to Kiev.
1185	Kievan epic poem "The Lay of the Host of Prince Igor" is composed.
1237–1240	Tatar heirs of Genghis Khan conquer Kiev; the "Tatar yoke" begins and lasts more than 200 years.
1547	Ivan IV ("the Terrible") is crowned as the first "tsar" in Moscow.
1703	Peter I orders construction of St. Petersburg, to be the capital of his empire.
1799	Birth of Aleksandr Pushkin, Russia's greatest poet.
1811	Aleksandr I establishes the Lycée, which educates Pushkin and a brilliant group of contemporaries.
1812	The Napoleonic armies invade Russia.
1815	The Russian army, with many French-speaking officers, occupies Paris.
1825	Decembrist Uprising (includes friends of Pushkin) in St. Petersburg.
1837	Pushkin's duel with D'Anthès results in the poet's death.
1842	Gogol's *Dead Souls* leads to wide fame for the author.
1845	Dostoevsky's first novel, *Poor Folk*, creates instant fame for the young author.
1849	Arrest and sentencing of Dostoevsky, ostensibly to execution, actually to shackled Siberian imprisonment.
1852	Death of Gogol', as he lay with leeches hanging from his nose.

1854–1855	Crimean War, disastrous for Russia, with one exception: It provided material for Tolstoy’s first published work, *Tales of Sevastopol’*.
1856	Death of Tsar Nikolai I; ascension to the throne of Aleksandr II, most liberal of all Russian tsars.
1859	Dostoevsky, released from Siberian exile, returns to European Russia.
1860s	Most liberal and creative time in tsarist Russian culture and politics.
1861	Liberation of Russian serfs, a huge majority of Russia’s Slavic population.
1862	Beginning of great polemical novels, including Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons*, and resulting polemics between liberals and conservatives.
1866	Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*.
1865–1869	Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*.
1876–1877	Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*; polemics arise over issues of women’s rights and their rightful position in Russian society.
1881	Dostoevsky’s final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, followed shortly by the author’s death.
1881	Tsar Aleksandr killed by a revolutionary terrorist’s bomb; succeeded by his son, Aleksandr III, a far more conservative ruler.
1880s	Growing political unrest in Russia, with resulting violence and corresponding acts of governmental repression.
1882–1885	Series of repressive, often bloody acts of violence; pogroms against religious minorities, particularly against Jews; dissension within the government about how to deal with them.
1891	Unexpected death of Aleksandr III; ascension to the throne of his son, Nikolai II, a young man not well prepared to rule the country.
1892	End of the Golden Age of Russian Literature; proclamations of new trends in Russian literature, away from realism, and away from Romanticism in Russian music.
1892	Maxim Gorky begins to attract attention as the voice of the urban lower classes, previously unrepresented in Russian literature.
1896	Chekhov’s play *The Seagull*, after a disastrous performance in St. Petersburg, becomes a great success in Moscow, thanks to Stanislavsky’s direction at the Moscow Art Theatre; Chekhov and Stanislavsky become a worldwide theatrical force.
1901	Nascent political parties begin to take on form in literature: Marxist group expresses radical ideas; group of poets and writers concentrates on aesthetic issues; conservative group feels frightened by strong changes taking place in Russian life and culture.
1901	Tolstoy, around whom a group of pacifist and reforming Christians had formed, is excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church.
1903	Large and violent anti-Jewish pogrom, in the southern city of Kishinev, observed and condemned around the world; Tolstoy claims it is a result of government policy, not an expression of popular Russian feeling.
1904	Death of Chekhov abroad; his body brought back to Russia in a freight car marked “fresh oysters”; described by Gorky.
1904–1905	Russo-Japanese War is disaster for Russia, large part of Russia’s navy sunk; calls for reform result in tsarist manifesto granting some elected representation in the government.

1905	First Marxist political uprising to establish a socialist state; put down by tsarist police; arrest and exile of Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin.
1906	Gorky's disastrous visit to the United States—thrown out of a New York hotel for traveling with his mistress.
1906–1913	Large emigré groups of anti-tsarist Russian politicians and revolutionaries active in Western Europe and the United States.
1910	Tolstoy runs away from famous country home at Iasnaia Poliana and dies in a railway stationmaster's room; church refuses Christian prayers at funeral; buried in famous grave at home estate.
1914	Beginning of World War I; agrarian Russia, with little help from England and France, fights industrialized powers of Germany and Austria/Hungary; some initial successes against Austrian army, soon overborne by huge losses of soldiers in battles against Germans.
February/March 1917	Popular uprisings against tsar result in abdication of Nikolai II; a range of Russian political parties clumsily tries to govern through parliament (Duma).
October/November 1917	Bolshevik party, led by Lenin and Trotsky, takes power through successful coup d'état, ostensibly in the name of the working class; legislative body called *Soviet* ("council") forms.
1918	New Bolshevik government signs peace treaty with Kaiser's Germany, ceding many Western territories to foe.
1918–1922	Bloody civil war within the territory of the previous Russian Empire, eventuating a new state called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; government determined to bring on socialism quickly and thoroughly; period called "War Communism."

1920–1922	Huge number of intellectuals and artists find it very difficult to work under the Soviets; they undergo repression; many emigrate to Western Europe and the United States; Gorky, who had been close to Lenin, among them.
1923–1928	A period of ideological retrenchment, when government pulls back some of its forces under a program called the New Economic Policy (NEP); political police force ("Cheka") remains in power.
1924	Death of Lenin; beginning of a bloody struggle for power within the USSR.
1920s	Many literary and cultural movements struggle for position under the Soviet regime; Maiakovsky lays claim to the title of Revolution's Tribune; Sholokhov begins to write a major novel about the fate of the Cossacks; Zoshchenko observes it all with a sharp eye for parody and humor.
1928–1929	Consolidation of Stalin's power; beginning of collectivization of Soviet agriculture; beginning of five-year plans for the whole Soviet society.
1928–1933	Gorky returns to USSR; works with Soviet authorities to establish central line in literature and culture: socialist realism.
1930	Suicide of Maiakovsky sends shock wave among Soviet writers.
1933–1934	Millions of deaths from starvation resulting from clumsy and crude policies connected with collectivization of agriculture.
1936	Death of Gorky; beginning of mass Stalinist purges—widespread arrests and millions of deaths.
1933–1940	Pasternak, like many other poets and writers, concentrates on artistic translations and works, which keeps him out of political trouble.

1939	Stalin and Hitler sign the Pact of Mutual Assistance; World War II begins with occupation of western Poland by Nazi Germany and eastern Poland by the Soviet Union; soon, Soviets also occupy Baltic countries.
1941	Nazi invasion of the USSR and Soviet alliance with England and free France; soon followed by alliance with the United States.
1945	Allied victory over Nazi Germany; hopes for a peaceful, cooperative postwar world defeated by the growing reality of the Cold War between the East and West.
1946	Soviet government publicly attacks Zoshchenko, together with other highly respected cultural figures; postwar policy of cultural repression begins in earnest.
1953	Death of Stalin; hopes for some easement in cultural policy.
1956	Khrushchev's famous speech denounces some of Stalin's crimes; release of millions of political prisoners from forced labor camps.
1958–1964	"The Thaw," new policy under Khrushchev, allows slightly more freedom for literature.
1958	Publication abroad of Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*; awarded Nobel Prize; author forced to turn it down.
1962	Khrushchev authorizes publication of Solzhenitsyn's novel describing a day in one of the Soviet forced labor camps, whose existence had previously been officially denied.
1964	Khrushchev peacefully removed from power and allowed to live; among intellectuals, continuing hopes for gradually increasing freedom.
1968	Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia; end of intellectuals' hopes for increasing feeedom.
1970s and early 1980s	Era under the leadership of Brezhnev, who held back threats of governmental terror but kept a tight public rein on freedom; era of covert self-publishing (*samizdat*) on typewriters with many carbon copies.
1974	Solzhenitsyn is expelled from the Soviet Union; his residence becomes Vermont in the United States.
1985	Gorbachev comes to power with slogans of restructuring and open public expression of opinion.
1991	End of the Soviet Union after attempted *putsch*; proclamation of a new Russian Federal Republic, free from one-party control.
1994	Solzhenitsyn returns to the new Russian Republic.
2000	Election of Putin as president of the Russian Republic; new policy of consolidating power; wide and free expression of public opinion remains.

Glossary

Bolshevik: Literally, "member of the majority," the faction of the Russian Marxist Revolutionary Party under Lenin's leadership that sought and achieved a violent uprising to overthrow the Russian monarchy and establish a socialist state.

Cap of Monomakh: Headpiece presumably worn by a famous prince of Kiev, Vladimir Monomakh, during his coronation. Later, the tsars used the cap at their own coronation ceremonies.

Church Slavic: Written form of the language used by all Slavic peoples during the 9th century. The language received an alphabet devised by the brothers Cyril and Methodius, Christian monks and professors at the University of Constantinople. Church Slavic is now used in prayer services in the Slavic branches of the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church.

Cossack: Originally runaway serfs in the 15th and 16th centuries, the Cossacks formed their own independent territory. In the 17th century, they signed a treaty of alliance with the Muscovite tsar and became the crack cavalry troops of the Russian army.

Cyrillic alphabet: Alphabet constructed some decades after the death of St. Cyril (869), using some Greek and some Roman letters, plus a few derived from other sources. It accurately reflects, with few exceptions, the phonetics of the Russian language even today.

Decembrist Uprising (1825): A group of aristocrats, many of whom were officers in the Russian army when it occupied Paris right after Napoleon's fall, naively hoped to bring a parliamentary republic to Russia after a political coup in St. Petersburg with almost no support from the population at large.

Dvoeverie: Literally "two faiths intermixed." In the late 10th century, when Vladimir, prince of Kiev, returned with the Eastern Orthodox Christian faith, he decreed that the population should become Christian. Under pressure, people agreed, although large numbers of peasants retained elements of the old faith for many centuries. These elements eventually found their ways into Christianity.

Eastern Slavs: People who, in the 10th century, spoke a dialect of the common Slavic language. As the centuries went by, their dialects developed into the Eastern Slavic languages: Russian, White Russian, and Ukrainian.

Forest Brotherhood and the White Army: The Forest Brotherhood is typical of the groups that fought in Siberia to establish Soviet control over the region. The White Army was organized by a wide coalition of parties that did not want to live under the Soviet regime. The Whites included a wide range of political opinions, from traditional monarchists to democratic parties that wanted to establish a Russian parliamentary democracy.

Futurists, imagists, acmeists: Groups of poets who used new kinds of artistic effects deemed revolutionary. Such artistic developments continued through much of the 1920s, only to be quashed in the Stalinist crackdown of the 1930s.

GULAG: Russian abbreviation for the State Administration of (Forced Labor) Camps (*Gosudarstvennoe Upravlenie Lagerei*). Solzhenitsyn's novel saw such camps as a huge archipelago spread throughout the USSR.

Infernal'nitsa: Literally, "infernal woman." Dostoevsky used the term to describe his notion of the woman who controlled men by her violent and attractive passions.

Inspector general: The Russian Empire covered an enormous territory, with many different peoples and ethnic groups. Communication and transportation were slow, often requiring weeks. When news of local malfeasance reached St. Petersburg, the authorities would often send out such a seasoned inspector to analyze the local situation and root out the trouble.

Iurodivyi: Often rendered as "a fool in Christ"; such a person, often a poor wanderer, would mouth expressions that would seem senseless, although they supposedly contained great depth and holiness. Such people enjoyed great respect among East Slavic peasants, and the holy fools could often safely say things that others would not dare to express.

Kenotic saint: In Greek, *kenosis* literally means "emptying out"; in one of Paul's epistles, Jesus empties himself out of godliness and takes on the form of a suffering human being. The kenotic saints tried to emulate Jesus and would never resist evil with violence.

KGB: Literally, "Committee for State Security" (*Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti*). Successor to previous political police groups, the KGB acquired the reputation, well deserved, for repressive, rigorous, sometimes murderous action against all opponents to the regime, as well as those who *might* become opponents of the regime.

Moscow Art Theatre: Founded by Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko to reform what they regarded as worn-out conventions of the theater. The theater acquired a worldwide reputation and enormous prestige, closely connected with the work of Chekhov and Gorky.

Novella (Russian: *povest'*): A work of literary prose, longer than a short story but shorter than a novel. The Russian writers of the 19th century developed the form to a high artistic level.

Optina Pustyn': Famous monastery in 19th-century Russia, to which many troubled people went in search of help from its famous church elders, who were perceptive psychologists. A certain Father Amvrosii evidently brought great help and care to the troubled Dostoevsky. Many of the priest's words turn up on the lips of Father Zosima in Dostoevsky's last novel.

Polovetsians: National group who occupied a territory to the south and east of the 13th-century East Slavs. Despite the fact that the Polovetsians were allies, an East Slavic armed force, under the leadership of Prince Igor, tried to conquer them, with disastrous military results (but good literature for the East Slavs).

Rus': Territory extending in all directions from the city of Kiev in the 10th through the 12th centuries. Rus' was established by the East Slavs and produced the cultural basis for the Russian form of Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

Serf: East Slavic agricultural peasants were forced into slavery, or serfdom, from the end of the 15th through the middle of the 19th centuries. A serf was subject to the authority of aristocratic landowners, backed by the power of the tsar.

Soul: Russian popular and legal term used to refer to a serf (*dusha*); an aristocrat's economic status was often measured by how many souls he or she possessed.

Tatars: Turkic-speaking people who spread westward from the edges of Mongolia through the territories of the Slavs in the 14th and 15th centuries. They possessed a military and economic technology very advanced for that time. Their military power was nearly invincible, and they ruled over Slavic territories for more than 200 years.

Troika: Vehicle attached to three horses, whose positions were arranged in a way to obtain the maximum possible speed. For many centuries, it was the fastest available vehicle, especially useful in the vast expanses of the Russian Empire. The word—literally, "the three of them"—is often used to indicate a triumvirate, a powerful combination of three elements, or a playing card with the number 3.