Professor Irwin Weil is a Professor in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature at Northwestern University. He earned his B.A. and M.A. at the University of Chicago and his Ph.D. at Harvard University. Professor Weil is the recipient of the Northwestern University College of Arts and Sciences Award for distinguished teaching and the Gold Pushkin Medal from the International Association of Teachers of Russian and Russian Literature for outstanding teaching and research.

Guidebook Contents

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THE GREAT COURSES®

Literature & English Language

Classics of Russian Literature

Taught by: Professor Irwin Weil,
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Part 3

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
Part III

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 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 Twenty-Five

M. Gorky (Aleksei M. Peshkov), 1868–1936

Scope: Gorky's real name means "pawn"; his pseudonym means "bitter." In those two words, we have the essence of this remarkable personality, who had real talent, which he sometimes, but not always, revealed in writing that shook Russia and the world. For several years in the early 20th century, he even eclipsed the fame of Tolstoy. Destined to live on the chronological edge between two political and social systems, which were separated by two revolutions and a bloody civil war, he became a symbol of that change, ending his career as a kind of Soviet icon. Of course, he was no saint, and wide propagandistic worship only served to conceal the reality of his life and work. It also meant that he was extravagantly praised by some and equally extravagantly reviled by others. His appearance in New York City in 1906 resulted in a scandal that drove away Mark Twain, who had been the head of a committee formed to welcome Gorky to the land of the free and the home of the brave. Let's examine the reality, briefly, but as objectively as we can. I believe we will find both literary art and human decency well worth our effort and attention.

Outline

I. Gorky was born into an artisan family. His real name was Peshkov. He later adopted his grandfather's pseudonym of Gorky. Gorky's father, Maksim, married into the Kashirin family, which had a dye shop in Nizhnii Novgorod.

A. Gorky's father was proud to be a Peshkov and not a Kashirin, a family he considered vulgar and materialistic.

B. Maksim eloped with Gorky's mother and sailed down the Volga River to Astrakhan, almost 1,000 miles away. In that colorful, ethnically mixed city, the father died of cholera, which he caught from his two-year-old son, who then recovered from the disease. His mother could never be warm to him, because she held him responsible for the death of his father.

C. The young child was then brought back up the Volga River to Nizhnii Novgorod, where most of the family disliked him as the offspring of a man who had fled the family business.

D. The one exception in the household who treated him kindly was his grandmother, Akulina, whom he remembered with an intense warmth. Typical for women of her class at that time, she was illiterate. But she evidently had a colossal memory and managed to remember thousands of lines from Russian folk poetry, which she recited with such feeling and talent that she held the passengers of the Volga ship mesmerized for almost a month during the trip back from Astrakhan to Nizhnii Novgorod. Her natural talent was at least as powerful as that of her grandson, who later acquired a worldwide reputation as an author.

E. Gorky left the household at an early age and made his way through many jobs in many places; he acquired a wide acquaintance of the people, towns, and villages across the vast territory of European Russia.

F. He first attracted a wide reputation in the 1890s as a writer of short stories about the Russian *bosiaki* ("the barefooted people"), who wandered about the land and exhibited, at least in Gorky's stories, a fierce sense of individual independence and strong will.

G. Lev Tolstoy himself made the statement that Gorky made the reader feel the spirit of the ordinary Russian people in a way that no other author, including himself, had been able to do.

H. Then, in 1902, Stanislavsky produced one of Gorky's plays, usually translated as *The Lower Depths* (literally, in Russian, "on the bottom"). The play deals with the theme of life-giving illusion, as opposed to the death-dealing reality of life. In American literature, Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* is taken directly from Gorky's famous play.

I. The theatrical technique of the Moscow Art Theatre was so powerful and impressive that Gorky quickly acquired an international reputation, which for several years, even rivaled the fame of Lev Tolstoy himself.

II. With his ever-growing reputation and with the public recognition that he had come from a lower part of Russian society, not previously represented in Russian literature, it was not surprising that Gorky attracted the attention of the radical revolutionaries, at a time when the Russian Marxists split into two factions and Lenin was recognized as the head of the Bolsheviks (literally, "the people of the majority"). A strong personal relationship soon developed between the political leader and the author.

A. In 1906, after the abortive revolutionary attempt to seize power a year earlier, Gorky came to the United States, at the instruction of Lenin, to raise funds for the Russian revolutionaries. Such was the sympathy among many Americans for those they saw as Russian democratic reformers that Mark Twain himself headed a committee to meet and talk with the famous Russian writer.

B. The tsarist diplomats in Washington, desperate to head off the momentum of the project, circulated among the New York newspapers the fact that Gorky was traveling with his common-law wife, an actress from the Moscow Art Theatre.

C. Because Gorky had signed an exclusive agreement with the Hearst newspapers, the other papers gleefully spread the news that the Russian

radical had come to destroy the famously high moral level of family life in New York at that time.

D. Gorky and his woman friend were expelled from the hotel late at night. Mark Twain ran away from the situation as fast as he could. The young Columbia University professor John Dewey, later one of our most eminent philosophers, took in the couple.

E. It was not one of the outstandingly noble moments in American literary history. Gorky did manage to speak before some socialist groups at the time, but his notions about American democracy and public decency were not very high.

F. He settled on the Italian island Capri, where he lived until an amnesty in 1913 allowed him to return to Russia. During those years, there were many polemics among the revolutionaries in exile, and Gorky played the role of a maverick, whom Lenin found not very easy to control.

III. Shortly after this time, Gorky produced some of his best writing. He wrote a series of autobiographical sketches, which in their collected form, gave a powerful picture of his own development as a writer, as well as a moving account of the 19th-century Russia that he knew. His use of the language, both at its literary level and at the level of contemporary speech, was superb.

A. His account of Akulina, the loving grandmother, is extremely moving. It was she who taught him the possibilities of grace and love. Her plain, old body seemed to him supple and harmonious, and her kindness seemed to flow directly out of a soul that embodied the beauty of the faith in the Christian Madonna.

B. Akulina also introduced him to the beauties of Russian folk poetry, with recitations that astounded all who heard her. She well knew the reaction in folklore to stubborn people like her grandson:

> Sunuli ego v adskoe plamia,
> Ladno-li Evstigneiushka s nami...
> Guby u nego spesivo naduty,
> A-ugarno, govorit, u vas v adu-to.
>
> They stuck him into hell's flames:
> Well, Evstigneiushka, how do you like it in our place?...
> He pursed his lips arrogantly (hands on his hips).
> Well, it's pretty smoky at your place in hell.

C. The most powerful figure in the sketches is the grandfather. His God was the vengeful master of certain parts from the Bible. The whip with which he beat his grandson had a sting the young man never forgot.

D. It took strength to overcome the punitive force of the old man and imaginative leaps of faith to hear the stories about grandpa's earlier days as a Volga boatman, attached by a rope to the heavy barges, while others played the role of human dray horses. These childhood experiences played a large role in the formation of the writer's own imagination and narrative force.

E. There is an unforgettable moment when the young man, already an adolescent, returns to the Kashirin household. He suddenly butts his grandfather in the stomach, to which action the old man replies: "*Chto, koziol, opiat' bodat'sia prishol? Ekh, ty razboinik, ves' v otsa, Farmazon...Bonapart tsena kopeika!*" ("Well, you goat, have you come again to butt me? Ekh, you bandit, just like your father! Free Mason ...Bonapart, the price of a kopeck!")

F. It would be hard to find a better representation of the rhythm of Russian speech than in the mouth of the man who, entirely unwittingly, prepared his grandson to produce some of the best Russian writing of the 20th century.

IV. The autobiographical and memoir forms gave Gorky a literary stance that worked extremely well for him. Through his "I," we can see powerfully animated characters. The fact that he always holds himself to be noble and correct, a somewhat unbelievable proposition, does not get in the way of his portrayal of others, who come to life in a very special way.

A. Such a portrayal is particularly impressive in his memoirs of Lev Tolstoy, whom he presents as a human being, rather than as a literary giant. Of course, his admiration for the man's genius is there, but it is kept behind a kind of curtain erected by the picture of the man, with all of his foibles.

B. Tolstoy had tended to regard Gorky as a representative of the Russian people, which the younger man somewhat resented, because he felt treated as a category, rather than as an individual human being.

C. Consequently, we get some glimpses of the very powerful and creative Tolstoy, who holds cards in his hands like a bird and who talks about God as if he and the deity were two bears in the same den!

D. We also get a view of the crotchety old man who could be banal and dismissive.

E. The memoir comes off as one of the best pictures we have of Tolstoy as a human being. And its force is typical of many memoirs by Gorky. In spite of some of his own tendentiousness as a writer, he gives a lively picture of Russia on the verge of revolution.

F. Gorky also wrote some beautiful memoirs of Chekhov, who cautioned him to learn the art of restraint, advice that Gorky resented.

Suggested Reading:

Maxim Gorky, *Autobiography of Maxim Gorky,* translated by Isidor Schneider.

Edward Wasiolek, ed., "Gorky's Memoirs of Lev Tolstoy," in *Critical Essays on Tolstoy.*

Irwin Weil, *M. Gorky: His Literary Development and Influence on Soviet Intellectual Life.*

Questions to Consider:

1. One of Gorky's most powerful portrayals was that of his loving grandmother, Akulina. His grandfather had a much different, far crueler character. In what way does his presentation of the grandfather illuminate both the author and his grandmother more fully?
2. The Tolstoy whom we see through Gorky's memoirs is a very special presentation of the older writer. How do Gorky's own ambivalent feelings play into the flowing personal picture of Tolstoy?

Lecture Twenty-Six
Literature and Revolution

Scope: During the First World War, two revolutions took place in what had been the tsarist empire of Russia. The first, in February–March 1917, overthrew Tsar Nikolai II and attempted to establish a democratic government. The second, under V. I. Lenin and his Bolsheviks in October–November 1917, overthrew the provisional democracy and sought to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat. In 1923, the name Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was adopted, which lasted until 1991. The new government was determined to put into practice the doctrine of Marxism, which meant that its leaders had to direct and control every aspect of human life toward the goal of a perfect society, labeled "complete communism." Naturally, Russian literature, long concerned with the "eternal questions," became a prime target and concern of such a regime. Gorky, in spite of his initial shock at the violence connected with the revolution, stayed loyal to the revolutionary cause. At times, though, he tried to protect writers and intellectuals from the excesses of Communist Party control.

Outline

I. The tsar's attempt to fight the Japanese in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 ended in a humiliating Russian defeat. In 1905, revolutionary parties briefly tried to set up authority in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Soon afterward, the tsar issued a somewhat liberalizing manifesto, which at least attempted to increase the role of the parliament (Duma).

- **A.** In 1914, Russia entered World War I, suffering staggeringly huge losses of life. By 1917, the Russian home front was disintegrating, and the democratic parties forced the tsar to abdicate.
- **B.** Some seven months later, Lenin and his Bolsheviks forced the Duma out and set up their own power in the name of another ruling body, the Soviet.
  1. They negotiated a treaty with Germany, ceding large parts of what had been the western provinces of the empire.
  2. They also had to fight a civil war against a wide range of internal opponents, often called Whites, and they had to face an invasion by the Polish army.
- **C.** In the early 1920s, a new government was established, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

II. Gorky was destined to play a prominent and important role in this process, although its twists and turns surprised him as much as they surprised the world looking on.

A. Gorky was shocked by the amount of violence and killing connected with the establishment of the new Bolshevik regime, and he wrote a famous series of newspaper attacks on what he and many other writers and intellectuals considered the totalitarian actions taken by Lenin and his followers.

B. Lenin tolerated this response for several months, possibly out of gratitude for Gorky's consistent and substantial pre-revolutionary support.

C. Eventually, Lenin closed the newspaper. Gorky then created and sponsored a world literature organization to attract the best translators in Russia. The plan was to create high-quality translations of the classics of world literature, to be made available at low cost for the population of the USSR.

D. Gorky also repeatedly exploited his close relationship with Lenin on behalf of writers and intellectuals who found themselves in trouble with the repressive and often violent new government agencies of control.

E. It was his unsuccessful attempt to save the life of a fine poet, Gumilev, that precipitated his departure from the USSR in 1922. Gorky spent a large part of his exile in Italy. Lenin was not entirely unhappy to see him go.

F. In 1927, three years after Lenin's death, Stalin was already consolidating his power, and his agents persuaded Gorky to return to a changed homeland, where he enjoyed a massively organized celebration in his honor.

III. By this time, Gorky was deeply involved in the intense political and social struggles connected with Soviet control and direction of culture, made even more complicated by a host of political and personal intrigues among writers.

A. A whole series of new organizations came to life, each one promising to create and promote an entirely new kind of literature, reflecting the new style and psychology of an entity called, rather pompously, "the new Soviet man." The popular phrase arose as a Marxist *tabula rasa*, that is, a wax tablet scraped completely free of its previous form and shape.

B. It is not hard to understand that these new phrases included a great deal of nonsense. But many artists at the time thought the struggles might open the road to a new and perhaps more exciting kind of art, music, and literature.

C. From the Bolshevik viewpoint, these people who wanted an entirely new literature made unreliable allies. The culturally conservative Bolshevists turned to Gorky, a traditional supporter of their government who believed in traditional literature.

D. His idea of revolution meant making traditional writers, whose works had previously belonged to a small, privileged elite segment of the Russian population, the beloved personal property of the common people. The idea of the revolution, as Gorky saw it, was to raise their cultural level to the same height as that of the former Russian aristocracy.

E. This attitude put Gorky at odds with some of the most revolutionary figures in artistic circles at that time. Some Soviet critics went so far as to consider him ideologically unsound and even counter-revolutionary. These charges were not to be taken lightly in the atmosphere of that period.

F. As long as Gorky remained in Italy, the radical writers could sneer at him, tucked away in his comfortable villa near the shores of the gentle Mediterranean, far from the cold of the Russian winter and the blast-furnace heat of literary polemics amidst Bolshevik politics.

G. After Gorky returned to the Soviet Union and clearly became the subject of government-sponsored adulation, it became much harder in the USSR to attack him or his ideas.

IV. Stalin's governmental apparatus came up with a new plan to direct Soviet literature.

A. No longer would artists and writers be allowed to group and regroup themselves into unseemly bands of squabbling and cacophonous ideologists. Instead, they would all be gathered together within an organization formed and tended by the state.

B. The administrators of this behemoth would see to it that the writers were inspired by love for the collective ideals of socialism and united by their loyalty (or at least the expression thereof) to the all-seeing and all-caring Soviet state.

C. From Stalin's point of view, the logical person to be the protagonist of the new organization was Gorky, a writer whose prestige came from pre-revolutionary times and lent itself also to the twists and turns of the Soviet epoch.

D. Gorky, after his return to the USSR, had hoped that his position under Stalin would be similar to what it was under Lenin in the early days of the revolution, before 1922. He was soon disillusioned.

E. But in the early 1930s, he thought he saw a chance to put Soviet literature on what he thought was the right track. The new organization would be called the Soviet Writers' Union. It would command considerable state funds, which would be awarded generously to those writers who would follow the state line.

V. That new line was soon designated as *socialist realism*.

A. What Gorky had in mind was the use of the best kind of realist prose produced in 19th-century France and Russia. He was thinking of Balzac and Tolstoy. But instead of an attack on the weaknesses of bourgeois society, it would praise the energies devoted to the creation of a socialist society.

B. Hardly a formula for producing exciting reading, this approach often was satirized by a deliberate misuse of the old Hollywood slogan: "Boy meets tractor; boy falls in love with tractor; boy marries tractor."

C. In spite of Gorky's high-minded intentions—he emotionally stated that he was not seeking to control what writers would say—this union and its ideology turned out to produce some of the most somniferous reading ever to hit the bookshelves of a not very eager reading world.

D. As Stalin consolidated his power ever more tightly in the 1930s, Gorky's own position became more and more untenable. Praised in official terms exaggerated to the point of nausea, he was seen in the most unflattering way by those who understood anything about real literature, especially by his old friends.

E. Increasingly isolated in luxurious surroundings provided and controlled by the state organs of security, he died in 1936 under conditions that seemed ambiguous at best.

F. The Soviet Union soon proclaimed that he had been killed by fascist agents. Many people thought he had been killed by Stalin's agents. There is good evidence that he died a natural death, at least partly resulting from his depression, brought on by the circumstances of his life under Stalinist control.

G. Shortly after his death, the Soviet government began the dreadful Stalinist purges, which swept up millions of innocent people into forced labor camps and to sentences of death by firing squad.

VI. Gorky's name is often seen in a negative light, which overlooks his achievements, including his efforts to protect writers, even in Stalinist times, and to preserve the possibility of Russian culture in the 1920s.

Suggested Reading:

Alexander Kaun, *Maxim Gorky and His Russia.*

Lev Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution.*

Questions to Consider:

1. In response to Gorky's ideas of creating a mass audience that would be literate and well-read in the classics, some people said that such a project would only lower the general cultural level, because most people are incapable of appreciating the best of world literature. What are the elements of good literary education that would alleviate such a problem? Would a socialist government be able to bring about such an education?

2. Medieval writers managed to produce a lively literature in describing the lives of the saints. Why would socialist writers not be able to produce an analogous body of literature that one could call *The Lives of the Socialist Saints*?

Lecture Twenty-Seven

The Tribune—Vladimir Maiakovsky, 1893–1930

Scope: To create the literature of the new—and of the soon-to-be spotless—world of socialism, which would prepare the way eventually for complete communism, Maiakovsky joined in the new organization called Proletarian Culture (*Proletkul't*). This organization was to include genuine workers, who could write with a new proletarian class consciousness. Alas, despite their consciousness, their writing was abominable. Maiakovsky, on the other hand, had a brilliant poetic talent, and his verse became an important part of the work that the Soviet government presented to the world as proof of the creative force of socialism. His evocation of the Sun to visit the proletarian poet, his cry for a creative surge from 'the army of the arts," even his paeon to the futuristic (albeit bourgeois) architecture of the Brooklyn Bridge, all stoked the fires of passionate socialism. This view was quite a contrast with Gorky's attachment to the best of world culture that had existed before the revolution.

Outline

I. Vladimir Maiakovsky was one of the most interesting Russian writers of the 20th century, a genuine master of all levels of the Russian language.

- **A.** Maiakovsky proudly called himself both a futurist and a tribune of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet regime. It was he who articulated the phrase about throwing Pushkin, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy overboard from the steamer of modernity. Yet some of his best poetic lines made use of the Old Church Slavic language and religious imagery taken from ancient sources. He burned with the genuine fire of political passion, and his works aroused genuine passion, not stifled yawns, in his readers.
- **B.** In his early years, Maiakovsky loved to engage in extreme and outrageous behavior at public gatherings, where he might bawl out his poetry or simply use profane and pornographic language intended to shock the bourgeoisie.
- **C.** He soon acquired a reputation for his poetry not only among the radicals of his day but also among established poets and intellectuals. There was something marvelously unpredictable in his every move, and his powerful use of the language made a strong impression.
- **D.** In October of 1917, Maiakovsky was more than ready to dedicate his talent and poetry to the Bolshevik Revolution and the new state.

II. In the early years of the Bolshevik regime, from 1918 to 1922, often described as "war communism," there was an attempt to change the whole structure of the former Russian state and society, much in the spirit of the *tabula rasa*.

- **A.** Old economic organizations were crushed, and anyone who had experience in administering an estate or an enterprise was stripped of his or her position and, not infrequently, of life itself. "Topsy-turvy" might well have been the slogan of the day.
- **B.** It was hardly surprising that such a policy led to a catastrophic decline of living standards, to mass undernourishment and even starvation, and to a significant increase in mortality during the cold Russian winter months, resulting from a terrible shortage of coal and heating fuel.

III. It was in this context that Maiakovsky wrote "Order No. 2 to the Army of the Arts."

- **A.** The very fact that he uses the word *army* to refer to people who are presumably his fellow artists tells us his notions about the organization of creative endeavor under the new regime.
- **B.** He then refers to the various groups who have been striving to create different styles in poetry and literature—futurists (Maiakovsky was considered one), imagists, and acmeists—all of them enmeshed in a spider web of rhymes. Maiakovsky seems to think they have achieved nothing of real worth.
- **C.** He then turns to those who have taken on the title of proletarians in culture, whom he accuses of being satisfied to sew patches on an old-fashioned coat, worn out by Pushkin.
- **D.** All of these people, plus the careerists and the romantics, are warned:

Bros'te,
zabud'te,
Pliun'te.
I na rifmy,
I na arii,
I na rozovyi kust,
I na prochie melekhliundii
Iz arsenalov iskusstv.

Throw it off,
Forget about it,
Spit on it—
On the rhymes,
On the arias,
And on the rosebush,
And on all the other phony moaning
From the storehouse of the arts.

E. He then proceeds to warn them: If you do not do what I say, they will come at you with rifle butts. Maiakovsky does not mince words; he spares neither his rivals nor the description of painful punishment awaiting them if they refuse to follow orders.

F. And why is his program for the art necessary to the young regime? He gives a bleak picture of a country where the locomotives groan for lack of coal and oil and for the absence of technicians and mechanics. He demands an art that will "*vyvoloch' respubliku iz griazi*" ("yank the republic out of the muck").

G. Such is the way Maiakovsky saw his country in the hands of a revolution for which he had yearned and fought. He could not deny that the nation was sunk in a terrible mess, and he cried out to the artists to help save it, in disciplined ranks very similar to the military.

IV. The tone is quite different from a famous poem that Maiakovsky had composed only a year earlier, in 1920: "An Extraordinary Adventure Which Happened to Vladimir Maiakovsky in a Summer Country House."

A. The poem renders a scene in the middle of summer, with the sun, all scarlet, creating an almost unbearable heat. This scene so enrages the poet that he sends a tremendous shout to the center of the universe.

B. To his enormous surprise, the sun replies to his shout, which was an invitation. The chief luminary agrees to come to tea.

C. Overcoming his initial fears, Maiakovsky finds much in common with the sun. It seems that it is not so easy to shine all the time, while one is constantly on the move, giving light to Earth. The work is almost as draining as it is for the poet who has to turn out propaganda posters!

> I skoro,
> Druzhby ne taia,
> B'iu po plechu ego ia.
> A solntse tozhe:
> Ty da ia,
> Nas, tovarishch, dvoe!
>
> And soon,
> Not shirking our friendship,
> I clapped him on the shoulder,
> And the sun replied,
> You and I,
> That makes two of us, comrade!

D. It turns out that both of them share the same duty: to shine always and everywhere; nothing can interfere with this duty.

E. Maiakovsky pictures himself as an equal with the center of the universe, sharing the cosmic duty of lighting up the world. The poem is a wonderfully cheeky proclamation of the poet's power. How short a distance it is from this confident, not to say arrogant, stance to the republic that has to be pulled out of the mud!

V. Maiakovsky finds a solution to some of his and the socialist republic's problems in a rather unexpected place: Brooklyn, New York.

A. In 1925, Maiakovsky paid a visit to the United States and came to adore Roebling's Brooklyn Bridge. To be sure, one of its claims to fame turns out to be the glorious fact that the Russian poet stood there while composing his verses. Nevertheless, the bridge itself stirs up strong feelings in the poet.

B. He begins with the notion that President Calvin Coolidge will shout and blush (red as the flag of the USSR) at the notion that a Soviet poet praises something in the United States:

> Kak v tserkov' idet pomeshavshiisia veruiushchii,
> Kak v skit udaliaetsia strog i prost, -
> Tak ia v vechernei sereiushchei mereshchi
> Vkhozhu, smirennyi, na Bruklinskii most.
>
> As a believer, who has gone out of his mind, enters a church,
> And then goes into a monastery, severe and simple,
> So I, in a graying evening fantasy,
> Humbled, step onto the Brooklyn Bridge.

C. It seems that all of New York has forgotten its troubles and its high buildings, and one hears only the soft drone of the elevated trains.

D. There is a softness about the scene that contrasts sharply with the determination of those who set a heavy steel foot into Manhattan and used cables to drag Brooklyn in by the lip.

E. The reader understands that Maiakovsky sees in the impressive architecture and technology of the bridge a creation for the future. This vision takes him out of his polemics with fellow artists and with the increasingly bureaucratic politicians at home.

F. Then, suddenly, he remembers that he is still a Soviet poet; the lyrical mood cannot be allowed to go too far. He pictures desperate unemployed workers leaping off the bridge into the Hudson River. Never mind that the bridge spans the East River, not the Hudson. The poor fellows would have had to do a broad jump all the way across Manhattan. Such a distortion of plain facts does not seem to have bothered the Soviet poet.

G. Still, the poem ends on a triumphant note, in praise of the bridge and the spirit it represents. The United States and the future of technology obviously deeply appeal to Maiakovsky.

Suggested Reading:

Vladimir Maiakovsky, *The Bedbug and Selected Poetry*, edited and with commentary by Patricia Blake; translated by Max Hayward and George Reavey.

Lawrence Stahlberger, *The Symbolic System of Majakovskij*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What attitude toward nature does the Bolshevik poet take when he invites the Sun to visit him at work? Does this affect our understanding of the way the Bolsheviks attempted to construct a socialist society that would lead to a communist paradise on Earth?
2. Why would a patriotic Soviet poet come to capitalist New York's Brooklyn Bridge in order to find a pattern of construction for the future triumph of communism? Did Maiakovsky's vision capture the bridge properly?

Lecture Twenty-Eight
The Revolution Makes a U-Turn

Scope: As the 1920s went forward, it became clear that socialist dreams were not sufficiently powerful to deal with economic and political realities. Maiakovsky's work began to take on a more defensive, less hopeful tone. He felt that he had to stave off attacks from his fellow socialists, as he shows in "At the Top of My Voice." Then, in 1929, he completed a very ambivalent and moving play, *The Bedbug*. Woody Allen's film *Sleeper* is, in many ways, derived from this play. The piece goes from an ironic derision of "*bourgeoisius vulgaris*" to a nostalgic fondness for the same and a hideous foretaste of Stalinist arrests and killings. One year later, Maiakovsky played Russian roulette with a loaded pistol and lost! His monument, not far from the center of Moscow, still preserves his defiant stance and the image of his expansive poetry.

Outline

I. In the early 1920s, the Soviet Union was paying the price for all the dislocation that had been caused by the terrible loss of life in World War I, the revolution, the civil war, and the efforts at war communism, which had led nowhere.

- **A.** The economy was in ruins, as was the psychology of the country. In response, the Soviet government decided to promulgate the NEP (New Economic Policy). Individual economic enterprises were encouraged. Government controls were loosened, and the country began to stabilize.
- **B.** For Maiakovsky, this new policy seemed like a total betrayal of the cause for which the revolutionaries were supposed to be fighting. Increasingly, he found himself entangled in political and bureaucratic difficulties. He was discovering that it could be just as difficult, if not more so, to deal with a socialist regime as it had been to deal with the pre-revolutionary Russian reality.

II. In 1928–1929, Maiakovsky wrote a new play, *The Bedbug* (in Russian, the marvelous sound *khlop*). In its opening part, it deals with his consternation at the NEP.

- **A.** At the beginning of the play, the major human character (in conjunction with the equally important bedbug of the title) appears in a strongly satirized version of the new free markets that appeared under the NEP.
- **B.** Prisypkin, with his absurd cultural pretensions—he will change his name to Pierre Skripkin (connected with the Russian word for "violin")—is about to marry a girl named Elzevir Renaissance from a well-placed bourgeois family. Given that Prisypkin is a proletarian and

a member of the Communist Party, the union will be one of Marxist revolutionaries and the forces of capitalism.

C. We soon learn, however, that he had previously been engaged to marry a young woman with a much more traditional Russian name, Zoia Beriozkina. When Zoia learns of this very Maiakovsky-like treachery, there is hell to pay. Prisypkin, ever gallant, threatens to call the police if Zoia attempts to interfere with his "freedom of love."

D. In a subsequent scene, Prisypkin's old revolutionary friends condemn his social climbing and his empty cultural pretensions. Even worse, they get the news that Zoia has attempted suicide—another reference to an incident in Maiakovsky's life.

E. The wedding day is set, and Maiakovsky gives us a burlesque of what a socialist civic wedding might be like in our wildest nightmares. The whole mess gets more and more grotesque, until someone sticks a fish in the bride's bosom.

F. Because of the immense aroma of alcohol in the air, the place soon goes up in flames, and the firemen's water turns into ice. Maiakovsky cannot resist a post-pyronuptual poem on the incendiary dangers of smoking in bed and reading poems by his opponents: One can fall into slumber while the fire starts.

III. The second part of the play occurs 50 years after the fire, when presumably, the whole world will have turned communist. One assumes that Maiakovsky will give the reader a notion of what the perfect state and society will be like.

A. There are a certain number of surprises here: The tone of the future is by no means totally uplifting, and the character of Prisypkin, who was preserved, together with his bedbug, in the ice resulting from the efforts of the firemen at the wedding, takes a considerable leap upward in the reader's sympathy.

B. It seems that the whole communist world is about to vote on the question of whether or not Prisypkin and the bedbug should be resurrected. Of course, the vote turns out to be overwhelmingly positive.

C. Only one person in the new world objects: Zoia Beriozkina, who has survived her attempt at suicide. She remembers all too well the characteristics of the person about to be resurrected!

D. Almost immediately, Zoia's fears turn out to be justified. Prisypkin brings a disease far more powerful than the wonders of the brave new communist world—beer! The previously well-organized society is now totally corrupted by Prisypkin's introduction of alcohol.

E. Even more seriously, the bedbug escapes detection, and the whole society is launched in a mock-heroic expedition to bring it back for scientific observation.

F. By this time, Prisypkin has managed to infect the new world with his old world diseases of sloth, alcoholism, loose language, and looser love. We begin to realize that he looks rather appealing in contrast to a utopian future world that lacks the warmth and interest of human feelings and passions, no matter how filled they are with officially defined vice.

IV. It becomes clear that the only place for Prisypkin and his dear bedbug is the city zoo. The final scene, in which Prisypkin turns up in a cage, together with his bad habits and bedbug, is one of the most famous scenes from dramaturgy in Soviet times.

A. The chairman of the city Soviet gives a talk about the disgusting nature of the two specimens that the people are about to see. Maiakovsky pulls out all the rhetorical stops in describing the repellant character, not only of the bourgeoisie, but of those who call themselves proletarians but act like the bourgeoisie.

B. The curtain is then lifted from the cage, and we observe Prisypkin with his friend, the bedbug. Only now do we understand the charm and the warmth of the former world.

C. The keeper goes to unlock the cage, revolver in hand. Anyone who knows the Soviet reality, which became clear to the world after this play was written, knows exactly to what the grim reference is made: the Soviet forced labor camps that imprisoned tens of millions and, in no small number of cases, executed their inhabitants.

D. Unexpectedly, Prisypkin jumps out and rushes forward to address the audience in the real theatre. He addresses them as his own and asks them how they returned from a frozen state. He asks them to join him and poses the question: "Why am I suffering?"

E. Prisypkin is dragged off by the zoo attendants. The grim and prophetic message is not hard to understand; consequently, the play was banned from the Soviet stage in Stalinist Russia. Only after 1953 and the death of the dictator was performance of the play revived.

F. Maiakovsky's own attitude comes across clearly. He is disgusted by the degree of sycophancy and lying promulgated by the very regime that he had been so eager to establish. Its notion of the great new communist utopia was one that would lead to imprisonment of the human spirit, rather than to the creative awakening that the poet had wanted to see.

V. Maiakovsky's last years were painful.

A. He had to watch his reputation sink and listen to the exultant accusations of his enemies, who believed that he was not a communist. He had to watch a society getting more and more distant from his own early ideals.

B. Suddenly, in 1930, the Soviet world was shocked by the news of Maiakovsky's suicide. The story was told that he played Russian roulette, not for the first time, and this time, he lost.

1. Recently, there have been some claims that he was killed by Stalin's security organs.
2. I have thus far seen no conclusive proof of that story, although many Russians believe it.

VI. Maiakovsky did leave a short final poem, one of his best:

A. It begins in the quiet of the night, describing love's boat, which has smashed—not "on the dashing rocks," as Romeo says in his famous final lines—but against what the Russians call *byt*, the daily experience that all of us know. Maiakovsky then ends with an exquisite quatrain, perhaps the best he ever wrote:

Ty posmotri, kakaia v mire tish'.
Noch' oblozhila nebo zvezdnoi dan'iu.
V takie vot chasy vstaesh' i govorish'
Vekam, istorii i mirozdaniiu.

Just you look at the quiet in the world.
Night has laid across the sky a starry tribute.
In just such hours you take a stance and talk
To centuries, to history, and to the whole universe.

B. This poet, who considered himself the tribune of the Revolution, with a loud voice and intrusive manners, turns out to have a lyric voice virtually unmatched in the 20th century.

Suggested Reading:

Vladimir Maiakovsky, *Vladimir Majakovskij—Memoirs and Essays* (some in English, some in Russian), edited by Beng Jangfeldt and Nils Ake Nilsson.

Herbert Marshall, *Mayakovsky*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How do the elements of the future new society in the second half of *The Bedbug* compare with Maiakovsky's initial description of Soviet society in the 1920s? Does he predict genuine human progress for the future?
2. What elements in the life of the poet led him to suicide at the beginning of the 1930s? How did they lead to the flowing lyricism of his last poem?

Lecture Twenty-Nine

Mikhail Aleksandrovich Sholokhov, 1905–1984

Scope: Sholokhov's best work goes along lines very different from what we have seen in Gorky and Maiakovsky. If to them, the revolution represented something highly desired and necessary, Sholokhov saw it as a tragic force that wiped out a whole community—the Cossacks—who were very dear and close to him. It was entirely natural that these people, with their vigorous and colorful (albeit crude) culture, who had occupied a privileged position for three centuries under the tsars, formed the most active and militarily effective resistance to the establishment of a new revolutionary regime. In the first part of *And Quiet Flows the Don*, Sholokhov gives a vivid picture of pre-World War I Cossack life, with its rich farms, love of horses, lust for women, and a military tradition that habitually struck terror in the hearts of all enemies, foreign and domestic, of the tsar. Seen largely through the eyes of a decent man, Gregor Melekhov, Cossack life and lands appear in all their glory and all their defects.

Outline

I. In the cases of Gorky and Maiakovsky, for all their differences, we have two men who are very much in the middle of events occurring in Russian urban areas around the time of the revolution and its immediate aftermath. They are both excited about the political events of their time, because they see in them enormous possibilities for the people of Russia and the USSR.

A. Sholokhov is a different case: He shows Cossacks who lived far from urban areas and who, for the most part, saw in these events nothing but destruction for themselves and for the culture they loved.

B. Sholokhov's most famous, Nobel Prize-winning novel, *And Quiet Flows the Don*, shows traditional Cossack life and its unusual place in the tsar's empire.

C. The people who became Cossacks in the 16th and 17th centuries had been serfs on Russian landed estates. They fled to the rich lands located in the southwest reaches of the empire, just north of the Caucasus mountains, where they learned an extraordinary kind of horsemanship from the native populations.

D. Later on, in the 17th century, they signed a treaty of alliance with the Muscovite tsar, who promised to respect their ownership of the farmland in their area and gave them more autonomy than any other group possessed in the Muscovite lands at that time.

E. In return, the Cossacks promised to put their fearsome fighting abilities and cavalry under the command of the Russian army.

F. By the beginning of the 20th century, probably no community of people working the land in Russia was more loyal to the tsarist system than the Cossacks.

G. Sholokhov came to maturity as a writer in early Soviet times, and he knew that if he wanted to satisfy his ambitions as a writer, he had to frame his novel in terms that would not cause the Soviets to prevent its publication.

H. The result is a remarkable work of literature, written in the 1920s and early 1930s, that expresses love for and attraction to the colorful Cossack traditions while ostensibly showing its fealty to the new Soviet system being established and consolidated at that time.

II. The first part of the novel is entitled "Peace" and the second part "War." This choice might have been a conscious reversal of Tolstoy's famous title. In the first section, Sholokhov deals with the experience and passions of the Melekhov family, who have a farm in a typical Cossack village in the early 20th century.

A. The 19th-century progenitor of the family, Prokofii, had been a Cossack soldier in the Russo-Turkish Wars, from which he returned home with a Turkish war bride. She had to endure the hostility of the Cossack village, whose inhabitants, especially on the female side, found her obnoxious and unacceptable.

B. They were shocked by her foreign and non-Christian ways. It became clear to them that she was the cause of all the misfortunes of the village, especially the sickness of its cattle.

C. In a hideous opening scene, the Cossack villagers seize her while she is pregnant and trample her to death. The women do, however, manage to save the infant she was carrying, and he (Pantaleimon) grows up to be the patriarch of the family in the novel.

D. His son, Gregor, is the protagonist of the novel, through whose eyes we see the events leading to war and revolution. Gregor can sometimes be cruel and oppressive.

E. Early in the novel, we see him fishing and wading in the cold waters of the rain-swept Don River. The force of the current and the sudden drops in the river's bottom soon make us feel the power of nature in Cossack territory.

F. In order to warm themselves, Gregor and Aksinia, the wife of Stepan, a neighbor of Gregor's family, jump into a haystack together. Gregor is enamored of the lady, and only the sudden arrival of his father makes him jump out, with his body steaming partly from the Don water and partly from other causes.

G. Gregor's father is terribly worried about his son's attraction, knowing full well the trouble and disorder such an affair can bring into the small and well-knit fabric of the Cossack village.

H. In spite of Gregor's arranged marriage to Natalia Kashunova, the affair with Aksinia continues, and Gregor realizes he will have to leave his home and his family. He runs off to work for wages on the estate of the aristocratic Lisnitsky family. Gregor is, thus, reduced to the status of a hired worker, a class much despised by the Cossacks, who value their independence as fighters and farmers on their own small plots of land.

III. The protagonist's affair is not the only force that causes serious divisions in the Cossack society. A great deal of political agitation is going on, and the various parties, especially those on the left, are looking for support in the population.

A. One fine day in the village, a stranger suddenly appears. His name is Osip Stockman, He asks his Cossack driver many detailed questions about life in the village and says that he has come to set up a locksmith's shop.

B. No sooner does he set up shop than he invites many of the poorer Cossacks to his house, for tea and card playing, which quickly turn into reading and lectures about the historical origins of the Cossack community.

C. The Cossacks are quite surprised to learn that they are descendants of people who once were serfs but who ran away to this territory. In the beginning, they resent the statement, as it seems to make them part of the peasantry, whom they distrust and dislike. But the accurate historical knowledge seeps in.

D. Shortly after Stockman's arrival, a serious conflict arises between the Ukrainian peasants and the Cossacks, both of whom have brought their wheat to the same mill for processing. An argument erupts about their respective places in the service line. Nasty words lead to blows, and soon, there is a threat of serious violence and even arson.

E. A previously unknown man in a black hat suddenly steps into the breach; it is Stockman. With a smile on his face and with impressive gestures, he addresses the Cossacks as countrymen, fellow Russians, and people descended from the same class and stock as the Ukrainian peasants.

F. The Cossacks reel from the shock of the statement and start to remonstrate. Meanwhile, the moment of peak stress has passed, and serious mob violence has been averted. The novel makes clear that the leftist radicals had a program that stressed ideology over national enmity, and they intended to try to unite people around that ideology.

G. Of course, the local police soon get wind of what has happened, and they call in Stockman for questioning. They advise him, in no uncertain

terms, to leave the district. They have no use for a person who stops violence between nationalities and tells the truth about history!

H. Near the end of the first part of the novel, Stockman is arrested and deported, under police guard, from the region. The local people are amazed to see someone who actually has the nerve to challenge the authority and power of the tsar.

I. The reader understands that great forces are in motion that will make terrible rents in the fabric of a village that has been so well and organically integrated over many previous generations.

IV. Finally, of course, the first major step in the actual destruction of the village comes with the onset of World War I, with Russian forces fighting against the armies of industrially developed Germany and Austria-Hungary.

A. Near the onset of the war, we see the Cossacks called up for their usual terms of military training. Even Gregor, who now lives and works outside the Cossack village, on the Lisnitsky estate, nevertheless has to report to the army training camp, bringing equipment and a horse from home.

B. Gregor exhibits characteristics that in some important ways differ from the traits of those around him. Although sometimes capable of crudeness and even cruelty to women, he is also capable of a sensitivity and compassion unusual for the ordinary Cossack. While he is reaping in the field, his scythe hits a duck that has been concealed in the tall grass. He instinctively picks up the wounded animal and tries to warm it with his body.

C. In the training camp, we see a terrible scene of gang rape. The young men get hold of a young serving woman and roughly set her down in a barn for their sexual pleasure. The one person to protest is Gregor, who braves the displeasure of his fellow Cossacks in an attempt to prevent the rape. They overpower him, in spite of his struggles, but it is clear that he has a conscience very different from theirs. Through his eyes, we will see the coming portentous events quite differently from the way other Cossacks do.

V. The coming violence of World War I and its revolutionary aftermath will consume the Cossack world with fire and almost total destruction. Gregor will be in the midst of horrific events. Yet in many ways, both large and small, he will retain an unusual sense of humanity and moral balance, as we will see in the next lecture.

Suggested Reading:

C. G. Bearne, *Sholokhov.*
Mikhail Sholokhov, *And Quiet Flows the Don*, translated by Stephen Garry.

Questions to Consider:

1. What were the main elements of stability in Cossack traditions and life as it appeared in the time before the beginning of World War I in 1914? Remember that the traditions covered many aspects of spiritual and material life.
2. What were the main forces, as depicted in Sholokhov's novel, that upset this stability even before the events starting in 1914? How many of them came from outside the Cossack world, and how many from inside?

Lecture Thirty

Revolutions and Civil War

Scope: When Sholokhov's Cossacks think of war, they think of the Cossack traditions of cavalry charges and hand-to-hand combat. In World War I, they face the armies of industrialized Germany and Austria-Hungary. The novel's presentation of historical change is only intensified by the ideological strife, new for the Cossacks, involved in revolutions and civil war. Suddenly, all of the old social norms turn topsy-turvy, and a politically uneducated man like Gregor, as well as his family and friends, are hard pressed to know in which direction to turn. They end up on many different sides, hardly recognizing people that they have known since childhood. In many ways, the same holds true for the supposedly stalwart ranks of the Bolsheviks, who position themselves to destroy the Cossack culture and life. The novel is an unsurpassed presentation of what it feels like to experience revolution firsthand. Some 35 years after writing the novel, Sholokhov would occupy a very different position when he called for the execution of some dissidents in the USSR. Then, some of his previously loyal readers excoriated him with a horrendous curse for a writer: "We wish you complete sterility."

Outline

I. World War I was a disastrous time for Russia. Tsar Nikolai II unwisely brought Russia into the fighting, and the economic and military weaknesses of his country soon became apparent. In ghastly battles against the Germans in East Prussia, the Russians lost literally millions of men. Meanwhile, the internal political and economic structure of the country began to fall apart.

A. Gregor and his family learned about the war's outbreak while they were wielding scythes on a blisteringly hot summer day, with the sweat pouring down their bodies. Suddenly, they saw a Cossack horseman in the distance, riding hell for leather across the plain. The horse was visibly dropping saliva in the summer dust, leaving wet spots on the parched ground.

B. Their natural reaction was wonderment that a Cossack would so obviously misuse a horse. Then they heard the rider shout the word "Alarm!" Instantly, they knew general mobilization was under way, and the well-drilled men rushed to get their equipment and report for duty.

C. In the beginning, things seemed to go normally. Gregor was a courageous fighting man and, as an expert horseman, well knew how to wield a wicked saber. Yet the killing of an Austrian soldier gave him no pleasure, and he felt a terrible heaviness after his so-called triumph.

D. Sholokhov draws a clear distinction between Gregor and Uriupin, the truly cruel soldier who glories in killing. He and Gregor come close to blows when Uriupin doesn't hesitate to kill the unarmed and friendly Austrian who was all too eager to surrender. Gregor's firm principle becomes: No killing of unarmed prisoners!

E. There are other, more subversive elements in the Russian army. The company officer Lisnitsky, on whose family's farm Gregor worked, meets a rather mysterious young man, built like a cork elm, who always wants to volunteer for dangerous duty. His name is Bunchuk, a recognizably Ukrainian name, and he claims that he wants to learn the science of war.

F. Lisnitsy finds him rather suspicious and starts to investigate. It turns out that Bunchuk wants Russia to be defeated in the war as a prelude to a general workers' revolution, which will sweep the tsar and his supporters from power.

G. Lisnitsky is first astounded, then disgusted. He decides to report Bunchuk to his superiors, but it is too late: The Marxist has deserted and disappeared.

H. Parallel to these events, Gregor has been wounded and sent to a hospital in Moscow. There, he meets a Ukrainian Marxist, Garanzha, who argues that Gregor has simply become an unthinking pawn in the hands of the government. This propaganda sinks deeply into Gregor's consciousness. He has no knowledge with which to answer the charge.

I. Perhaps even more tellingly, there is a very different kind of local revolt in the village. Gregor's sister-in-law, Daria, an intelligent but self-destructive young woman, decides to enjoy herself with any man to whom she takes a fancy. When Gregor's father tries to discipline her, she turns on him with fury, inviting him to satisfy her if he does not want others to do it. He retreats in confusion and learns, for the first time, what it means to face resistance to his previously unchallenged patriarchal authority.

J. Clearly, big changes are underway.

II. Then, news comes about the enormous change in Russia's government: in February–March of 1917, Tsar Nikolai II abdicates and a democratic parliamentary republic is created. Soon, the extreme leftists under Lenin are attacking the new government from the left, and former tsarist generals are attacking from the right.

A. The Cossacks are totally bewildered by the ongoing changes. The Cossack soldiers are led out to swear a new oath of allegiance, this time to the new provisional government. They cannot consider a second oath seriously, because they previously took an oath in favor of the tsar that was supposed to last until death.

B. The Cossack s are sent to St. Petersburg, where numerous political arguments erupt. Particularly dramatic is the confrontation of Lisnitsky with a Bolshevik soldier, Dugin, who questions why the Lisnitsky family should keep its 8,000-acre estate, when poorer people, such as the soldier's family, can barely scratch a living out of their small land parcel.

C. On a train where Cossacks are being urged to join the right-wing forces attempting to overthrow the provisional government, Bunchuk reappears. He speaks cleverly to prevent the Cossacks from joining, and, in the process, he executes in cold blood one of the officers who tries to resist his agitation.

D. Gregor finds himself surrounded by conflicting political opinions: There are those who want an independent Cossack land, and there are those who want to fight for the tsar and those who support the Bolshevik cause. Gregor does not have the education or sophistication to refute their views, and he finds himself pulled in many directions.

E. The strongest influence on him at that time is Podtielkov, the Bolshevik commander, who persuades him to come over to the side of the extreme revolutionaries. On one point, however, even the fluent Podtielkov shows uncharacteristic embarrassment. When Gregor asks the commander about the future ownership of the land, Podtielkov momentarily hesitates. He cannot tell the Cossacks about the plans for collectivization of agriculture, which will wipe out their individual farms.

III. In October–November of 1917, the question of political control in 20th-century Russia was, of course, settled by the Bolshevik seizure of power from the Duma and its democratic parties. Lenin and his followers were determined to create what they called a "dictatorship of the proletariat."

A. The result of this political upset was a hideously bloody and destructive civil war, which lasted from late 1918 until 1922. The Cossacks, with their military traditions, were deeply and tragically immersed in the general butchery.

B. In the beginning of the part of the novel devoted to the civil war, the reader sees Bunchuk reporting to a commander named Abramson in the Bolshevik military headquarters. Not only do we see a Jewish officer, previously unthinkable in the Russian context, but he virtually forces Bunchuk to admit a woman into his group, which is taking instruction about the use of the machine gun.

C. The young woman, Anna Pogódko, also turns out to be Jewish, and she exhibits unusual spirit and intelligence in the group. Bunchuk cannot resist her energy and spirit; soon, they become lovers.

D. Their relationship is presented in a rather sensitive, touching way, but their conversation is entirely different from what we hear among the Cossacks. When they talk about their happiness in terms of a mighty, perfectly harmonized hymn to socialism, we realize that we are hearing empty rhetoric, rather than the expression of human feeling.

E. The relationship between the two develops in a perfectly believable way. There are moments when she gets angry at him, especially when he finds himself impotent after a time when he has been supervising the execution by firing squads of hundreds of arrested Cossacks.

F. She is a real support for Bunchuk in times of battle, and he is devastated, virtually dehumanized, when she is killed by an enemy bullet.

G. Gregor, meanwhile, finds it impossible to remain with the Red troops when Podtielkov insists, against orders, on massacring the White officers captured after a battle. All the way through the book, Gregor has stood against the slaughter of unarmed prisoners.

H. Gregor returns home to the Cossack village, where he hears the news that the Red forces are invading the district and behaving badly. The Cossacks pull themselves together and, once more, make a formidable local fighting force.

I. Podtielkov's forces are surrounded and have no choice but to surrender themselves and their arms to the Cossacks. *And Quiet Flows the Don* ends with the brutal execution of almost the whole Red force.

J. Sholokhov has managed to show convincingly the enormous amount of cruelty and suffering imposed at a time when society is pulled up by its roots. There is probably no better existing picture of a giant revolution in action.

IV. Sholokhov, here and in other places, shows a considerable amount of insight and courage in his writing. It is sad to recount what happened to him later, in the 1960s. By that time, his work had become a kind of classic in the history of Soviet literature; his novel had been awarded the Nobel Prize.

A. When two Soviet writers, Daniil and Siniavsky, sent some of their dissenting works abroad, Sholokhov was the one Soviet writer who came out in support of the government's arresting them. To express their feelings, which they could not do openly, his readers mailed back to him 10,000 copies of *And Quiet Flows the Don.*

B. In an open letter sent both to *Pravda* and *The New York Times*, a courageous Soviet woman, Lidia Chukovskaia, eloquently spoke to Sholokhov's support of the arrests.

C. She reminded him that one of the greatest qualities of Russian literature was its deep compassion for those who suffer. She reminded him of his own sympathy for the Cossacks expressed at a difficult time.

D. She then pointed out that he not only sided with the Soviet government's repression of the two arrested writers and critics, but he even urged that they should be executed.

E. For such a deed, Chukovskaia said, Russian literature could wish him, the prize-winning Mikhail Sholokhov, only one thing: "utter sterility."

Suggested Reading:

Isaak Babel, *The Collected Stories*, which includes "Red Cavalry" and other stories that offer a different account of the Cossacks who fought on the side of the Red Army and the Bolsheviks.

Roy Medevedev, *Problems in the Literary Biography of Mikhail Sholokhov*.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what way could an intelligent yet almost totally uneducated Cossack understand the basic changes taking place in the country that had once been called Russia but was now headed toward the appellation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics?
2. How would a writer such as Sholokhov, who had made his reputation during the struggle to establish a socialist Soviet Union, react to later Soviet intellectuals who wanted to see a more sophisticated, advanced society that would offer its citizens wider freedoms and choices?

Lecture Thirty-One

Mikhail Mikhailovich Zoshchenko, 1895–1958

Scope: Thus far, we have dealt with Soviet writers who took the revolution and the Soviet regime very seriously. Probably the most popular writer in the Soviet Union, Mikhail Zoshchenko, took a different approach: He considered the whole experience fodder for satire and laughter. Somewhat in the style of our own newspaper satirists Art Buchwald and Russell Baker, Zoshchenko wrote mostly short stories, sometimes very short, that shed a ridiculous light on the many hypocritical and often downright crazy aspects of Soviet propaganda and life. Miraculously, in the context of Soviet control, he got away with it for quite some time, often under the protective cover of a narrative style that seemed to disassociate the author from the civic vices he so lovingly portrayed. The lightness and skill of his presentation seemed to forestall any possible ideological offense. A good example of his deftness, as well as his remarkable and unusual courage, can be found in the story "Pelageia," which takes off from the milieu connected with the famous Soviet campaign for mass literacy.

Outline

I. A different view of Soviet literature and life is presented by the most popular Russian writer in Soviet times, Mikhail Zoshchenko. In the 1920s, he started to delight Soviet readers with short pieces that obviously poked fun at what he considered the absurd aspects of socialist slogans and life under socialist control. In a wonderfully fantastic way, he combined the sloganeering popular at that time and a kind of slang used by largely uneducated people.

A. For almost 25 years, Zoshchenko succeeded in protecting himself by hiding behind the form of his stories. Writing in a style often used in popular stories and anecdotes, he could always claim that the statements and attitudes of the characters did not represent his own way of thinking.

B. Perhaps one of his best and most touching stories had to do with the broad public campaign against illiteracy in the USSR. Certainly one could hardly argue against such a campaign. One of the greatest achievements of the Soviet Union was to turn a population that had been kept extensively illiterate by the tsarist regime into an almost completely literate people.

C. Yet, as implied by Zoshchenko, there were many possible ways of attacking the problem. Some of them exhibited a much greater degree of human sensitivity than did others.

D. Zoshchenko illustrates this point in a story called "Pelageia," a rather simple Russian woman's name, often used by peasants. Such a woman was married to a former peasant who had become a responsible Soviet official. In the process of making a career, he had acquired no small amount of self-importance. He was especially embarrassed to be married to an illiterate woman.

E. The official tried to urge his wife to become literate, but she simply waved his words aside, not even looking at the special textbook he brought her.

F. But matters changed when she discovered a perfumed envelope with a woman's handwriting on it while she was repairing her husband's jacket. For the first time, she regretted that she had not listened to the words of the anti-illiteracy campaign. Was he cheating on her?

G. For two solid months, she undertook the painful job of learning how to read.

H. Finally, she mastered the text and read the letter. One of her husband's female colleagues had given him the literacy textbook and told him to explain that it was disgusting to be an illiterate peasant woman.

I. Pelageia read the letter through twice. Then, feeling somehow secretly insulted, she pressed her lips together and began to cry.

J. In this very simple story, Zoshchenko put together the common feeling of insult at the constant condescension of the Soviet government toward its own people.

II. Zoshchenko wrote a series of stories touching on some of the most pressing problems of everyday life. His comic approach, involving satire and parodies of the common slogans of socialism, made the stories all the more delightful.

A. One of the ubiquitous problems of Soviet existence was the ever-present housing shortage. It became necessary for families to live in one or two rooms, and millions of people had to share kitchens and bathrooms in "communal apartments."

B. Zoshchenko became a master at exploiting the changing human foibles that resulted from such circumstances. In the process, he also caught the incredible agility shown by individuals who had to cope with living under such conditions.

C. One of his best-known sketches, written earlier, in 1925, dealt with what he called "the crisis." It opens with a phrase about the author's heart starting to beat with joy—he just noticed a load of bricks being carted through the street, in other words, some kind of new housing was being built!

D. He even fantasizes about what it might mean for a family to live in more than one room.

E. It turns out that the narrator of the story had to rent the only thing available: a bathroom. He soon got married, and his wife came to the conclusion that all kinds of nice people live in bathrooms.

F. The only problem was that the other 32 tenants of the apartment also had to use the facilities, and they didn't take kindly to the suggestion that they confine to Saturdays their actions of washing and eliminating.

G. Things got a bit more complicated when the couple had a baby, but there was a bright side to the situation: The infant experienced daily bathing.

H. Then, the mother-in-law couldn't help but want to live close to her grandchild, so she moved in, with the promise that her son would also soon join her.

I. Even the long-suffering narrator reacts to this turn of events and moves out and away from the city of Moscow. He sends his family money by mail.

III. The Soviet officials used to boast a great deal about the wide availability of free socialist health care. There were, in fact, a number of reasons for them to take pride in the system. Infant mortality was sharply reduced, in contrast to pre-revolutionary times, and public sanitation was vastly improved. When it came to individual treatment of patients, however, there was a common popular Soviet saying: "Our health care is worth every *kopeck* [penny] we do not spend on it."

A. Zoshchenko was something of a hypochondriac, and he knew about Soviet hospitals. In his well-known story "The History of an Illness," he describes the first thing he sees when entering a Soviet hospital: a sign that reads "Delivery of corpses, every Thursday, 3:00–4:00."

B. When he expresses surprise, the hospital attendant tells him to stop his criticism. Otherwise, he himself will be duly delivered between those hours.

C. Not surprisingly, the narrator's treatments do not go well. Each step of the way, the hospital staff makes the material conditions worse by their utter indifference to the patient's welfare.

D. The climax comes when the narrator learns that his wife had been mistakenly notified to pick up his dead body. This news so angers him that he finally decides to complain officially. But when he remembers what sorts of things happen there at the hospital, he decides not to complain after all.

IV. Zoshchenko's popularity surely arose both from his sharp appraisal and the lightness of his humor in portraying the absurdity of the daily circumstances of Stalin's Russia. He also captured the considerable courage of people caught in a series of binds yet ready to laugh at themselves and the circumstances of their lives.

A. The Soviet government boasted about achieving equality for women. One of its claims was that more than 90 percent of medical personnel were female, implying that these women were trained doctors. In reality, they were qualified only to treat routine illnesses and earned low wages. Overworked and stressed out, they were often short-tempered.

B. Another fact of Soviet medical life was the common use of vodka to treat illness.

C. That Zoshchenko caught all these aspects of everyday life is what made his work so very popular.

Suggested Reading:

Mikhail Zoshchenko, *Nervous People and Other Stories*, translated by Maria Gordon and Hugh McLean, with a critical introduction by McLean. (Skip the early part and read the title story.)

Questions to Consider:

1. Why would an intelligent and sympathetic author write a satirical and humorous story about the attempt to bring literacy to a previously illiterate person?
2. What sort of temperament would form in a society in which the government talks about meeting the real material needs of the population and insists that people publicly support its every move, yet in actuality, it is difficult to find a decent place to live and medical service is provided by people who are too rushed to give decent attention and care?

Lecture Thirty-Two

Among the Godless—Religion and Family Life

Scope: One of the deepest psychological problems for ordinary people in Soviet Russia had to do with religion. The regime, speaking for the society, whether or not the society liked it, loudly proclaimed the Soviet Union a godless, materialist, atheist country. Religion was officially branded backward and primitive, conceived to make people obedient to a previous reactionary regime. This position flew straight in the face of millions who held on to a deep and traditional Christian faith. In addition to the denunciation of religion, other changes in society also affected the family in fundamental ways. In his satires, Zoshchenko catches these effects and the general instability that people felt.

Outline

I. One of the most important elements of pre-revolutionary Russian consciousness, and one of the strongest props of the tsarist regime, was the Russian branch of the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church. Consequently, a basic tenet of the Soviet regime was an aggressively stated and promulgated godlessness.

A. Good socialist people were expected to reject the very idea of God. Atheism was the Soviet order of the day. For a people steeped in religious tradition, as the Russians were, this order was a difficult one to obey, almost a challenge to the very idea of what it meant to be a Russian.

B. Zoshchenko wrote a series of stories on Soviet citizens facing the problems caused by the official removal of the Christian God from the extensive heavens above the huge Russian land. One could, of course, argue that the Soviet high officials themselves were to replace the Christian God as figures of adoration. But gods on Earth are no match for a deity above.

C. In a story called "Rosa-Maria," Zoshchenko deals with some of these issues. The story concerns a village official who was so progressive that he had once belonged to an atheist group. But he was being nagged by his wife and her mother to have his baby daughter christened in the Church.

D. He is fearful of how his socialist comrades will react to a christening, yet he is facing both his nagging family and something inside of him that urges religious action.

E. When he gets to the church, however, he cannot refrain from making derisive remarks about the priest's appearance, the ceremony, the very idea of the whole process in a socialist era.

F. The priest finally gets fed up with this petty harassment and warns the official that such remarks cannot possibly help the future fate of the baby girl who is the subject of the ceremony.

G. This altercation leads to more anger on both sides, and the priest tells the family to take the child away. The other relatives shush the father and persuade the priest to go ahead with the ceremony.

H. All goes well until the priest asks for the intended name of the baby. When he hears the name Rosa, he refuses to go on; it is not in his list of saints' names. The father protests that it is already entered in the civic registry, but the priest is adamant.

I. At that point, a visitor suggests the name Rosa-Maria, which the priest accepts as long as he is required to pronounce aloud only the second, holy part of the name.

J. Zoshchenko ends the story with a moral: Do not enter the church if your philosophy is hostile to it. If you do go in, do not annoy the priest with stupid remarks.

II. Soviet people tended to find another refuge from the stresses of daily life and the difficulties of family life, which a housing shortage and other external pressures had made intensely close, with all of the attendant characteristics: feelings of attachment were very strong, as were negative feelings, including resentment and jealousy.

A. Zoshchenko catches this situation in a series of stories, some of them not far from the classical French bedroom farce, with a special Soviet and Russian flavor. One of them is called "An Amusing Adventure." It starts by describing an affair between two married people, a young woman from a petty bourgeois family who has fallen in love with an actor whom she saw and admired on the stage.

B. They try to find a meeting place for their trysts, but nothing is available. The young woman gets permission from her friend, a ballet dancer, to use the dancer's apartment. On the way to the tryst, the actor gets into an argument on a trolley car and spits in his opponent's face. Luckily, the man was leaving the vehicle, and the actor did not have to face a fight.

C. When the couple meets at the apartment, their conversation is interrupted by a knock at the door. The voice is that of the woman's husband, who then leaves a tender love note for the ballet dancer whose apartment the couple is using.

D. The woman's dancer friend returns and their conversation is interrupted by the woman's husband, who has come back to see his

dancer paramour. The two women insist that the actor escape through another apartment, but when he enters this apartment, he finds the outer door locked.

E. While trapped there, the actor is discovered by a man who opens the outside door; this man, it turns out, is also arriving for a tryst. To his horror, the actor suddenly realizes this man is the one into whose face he spat earlier.

F. As the actor is manhandled and hustled out the door, he sees the woman arriving for the tryst. She is his own wife! From a timid mouse-like fellow, he suddenly turns into an enraged, roaring lion.

G. When the people in the adjoining room hear the noise, they come rushing in, and the scene turns into a marital conference: Who shall marry whom; who shall stay with whom?

H. In the end, they all decide to go on exactly as they were at the beginning of the story, with some of the men seeing some of the women on the sly.

III. Zoshchenko clearly implies that human nature and human pretensions do not change significantly, regardless of historical and ideological changes.

A. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Zoshchenko's reading public responded to him with great affection. His sketches were enormously popular, and the Soviet authorities seemed to accept him.

B. Immediately after the war, many Soviet people expected a somewhat more lenient regime. After all, they had undergone enormous sacrifices, with the loss of more than 20 million people, to defeat a ferocious and well-armed enemy. Their loyalty to the country could hardly be questioned.

C. The response of the Stalinist regime was a strong crackdown on the population as a whole. The arrests and exiles into forced labor camps continued at an even greater pace.

D. One of the most widely publicized events in this campaign was the castigation and humiliation of Zoshchenko, in the company of one of the finest poets of the 20th century, Anna Akhmatova. They were accused of a number of crimes by a functionary named Zhdanov, whose name became another word for repression in the USSR.

E. Zhdanov claimed that Zoshchenko saw the USSR as a zoo, in which monkeys live better than human beings.

F. Zhdanov called Anna Akhmatova "half nun, half whore," certainly reaching a new level of literary criticism.

G. There were, of course, wide circles of intellectuals, in the USSR and abroad, who sympathized with Zoshchenko and Akhmatova. Within the USSR, however, it was virtually impossible to express this

sympathy openly. Akhmatova had great inner strength and managed to survive rather heroically.

H. Zoshchenko did not have that kind of strength, and he was hurt badly by his exclusion from published literature. He survived Stalin by only four years and was unable to make his voice heard publicly.

I. In the more open days of the 1960s, his stories were republished, and he stands today as a representative of those people who struggled, often with a potent use of humor, against the repression of a tyrannical and powerful regime.

Suggested Reading:

Mikhail Zoshchenko, *Nervous People and Other Stories*.

Questions to Consider:

1. The ideas of atheism are, after all, quite powerful: They propelled a strong revolution (by "godless ones," as the Soviets proudly called themselves). Why were they ultimately so unsuccessful in winning the genuine allegiance of the vast majority of Russians, several generations of whom lived under strong propaganda from the godless ones?
2. What is there in the nature of humor that makes it so obviously dangerous to a repressive political regime? Why can those in power in such a regime not just laugh it off?

Lecture Thirty-Three

Boris Leonidovich Pasternak, 1890–1960

Scope: Pasternak became one of the major prophets of the 20th century. Raised in a family of artists and musicians, he eventually settled on poetry as his means of artistic expression. Not only were his own poems of very high quality, but he also mastered the art of translation in an unusually powerful way. His translations of Shakespeare breathed a new and different life into the art of the Elizabethan poet, and they kept Pasternak in a field of endeavor much less politically dangerous in the Stalinist USSR than writing his own poetry. Later, in the era of Khrushchev's so-called "thaw," he took the chance of publishing a novel, which gained instant international fame and caused Pasternak to feel the fury of the Soviet government.

Outline

I. Pasternak was born into a highly cultivated and prominent family. His father was a well-known artist and designer who made famous illustrations for some of Tolstoy's works. His mother was a well-known concert pianist.

A. Pasternak himself was interested in music as a young child; later, he received his higher education in Germany, where he found himself attracted to philosophy. As a young man, he started publishing poetry and soon achieved a reputation as part of a new generation of Russian poets who were exploring new forms of poetry, akin to that of the futurists.

B. In the early years of the revolution, Pasternak had considerable sympathy for the spirit and changes that seemed to be sweeping the country.

C. In the 1930s, the Soviet government became uncomfortable with its radical literary allies. With its official support for socialist realism, the regime became increasingly conservative in cultural matters.

D. Pasternak turned out to be sensitive to the changes in the political climate and adept at surviving at a time when many cultural figures became victims of Stalinist arrests and executions.

II. Pasternak turned a great deal of his energy toward magnificent artistic translation. Perhaps best known among his translations are five Shakespearean tragedies.

A. One of his most beautiful renditions comes near the end of *Othello*, when the Moor is standing over his beautiful sleeping wife, Desdemona, and contemplating the lovely light he is about to extinguish:

It is the cause, it is the cause my soul,
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!

Takov moi dolg. Takov moi dolg. Styzhus'
Nazvat' pred vami, devstvennye zvezdy,...

He then goes on:

If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
I can again thy former light restore,
Should I repent me; but once put out thy light,
Thou cunningst pattern of excelling nature,
I know not where is that Promethean heat
That can thy light relume.

Kogda ia pogashu
Svetil'nik i ob etom pozhaleiu,
Ne gore—mozhno vnov' ego zazhech',
Kogda zh ia ugashu tebia, siian'e
Zhivogo chuda, redkost' bez tseny,
Na svete ne naidetsia Prometeia
Chtob vnov' tebia zazhech' kak ty byla.

Even those who do not know Russian can appreciate the incredible rhythm of these Russian lines.

B. In *Hamlet*, the prince has harsh words of farewell to Polonius, whom Hamlet has just stabbed to death behind the arras in his mother's bedroom:

Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!
I took thee for thy better; take thy fortune;
Thou findst to be too busy is some danger.

Proshchai, vertliavyi, glupyi khlopotun!
Tebia ia sputal s kem-to povazhnee.
Ty vidish', suetlivost' ne k dobru.

Pasternak here catches the rough bouncing of Hamlet's angry yet anguished words and his disappointment at not having caught King Claudius.

C. Finally, there are the extraordinary renderings of Elizabethan songs. When Ophelia reacts to the murder of her father by the prince whom she wants to love, she sings:

He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone;
At his head a grass green turf
At his heels, a stone

Tomorrow is St. Valentine's Day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.
Then up he rose and donn'd his clothes,
And dupped the chamber door;
Let in the maid, that out a maid
Never departed more.

Pomer ledi, pomer on,
Pomer, tol'ko sleg.
V golovakh zelenyi drok,
Kamushek u nog.

S rassaveta v valentinov den'
Ia proberus' k dveriam
I u okna soglas'e dam
Byt' valentinoi vam.
On vstal, odelsia, otper dver',
I ta, chto v dver' voshla,
Uzhe ne devushkoi ushla
Iz etogo ugla.

Pasternak has caught the melodic line precisely, and the effect retains all the Shakespearean pathos.

III. After World War II, Pasternak came to the conclusion that his times demanded prose rather than poetry; thus, he brought out the manuscript of a novel that he had written with a sort of epilogue in poetry. He called it *Doctor Zhivago*. He gave his title character a family name that is an older Russian form of the word "alive."

A. Pasternak submitted the completed manuscript to his Soviet publishers, and it remained with them for almost two years. There were very strong polemics inside the publishing house, with powerful voices on both the positive and the negative sides.

B. Finally, the Soviets decided that the novel contained views on the revolution and the Soviet regime that were too dangerous to publish. They wanted revisions that Pasternak was loath to make.

C. The writer then put the manuscript into the hands of an Italian communist publisher, Feltrinelli. Pasternak instructed him to wait for a year. If the Soviets still refused publication, Feltrinelli was to publish the manuscript exactly as he received it, regardless of what Pasternak might have to say publicly.

D. When the year went by, Feltrinelli went ahead, and all hell broke loose among Soviet publishers. Pasternak made a public statement against publication, knowing full well the instructions he had already given.

E. The novel was published abroad and made a powerful impression internationally, much to the embarrassment of the Soviet regime. Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize, obviously on the basis of the novel.

F. This development precipitated a vicious campaign against Pasternak in the Soviet press, where, among other things, he was accused of being "a pig who soils his own nest"—quite an original phrase of congratulations to a countryman who has just been awarded the Nobel Prize!

Suggested Reading and Viewing:

Lazar Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak: The Poet and His Politics*.

Grigorii Kozintsev, *Hamlet*, the film with English subtitles, translated by Boris Pasternak, with music by Dmitri Shostakovich.

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* and *Othello*, in *The Complete Works*, edited by W. J. Craig.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what way would the regime of Claudius, the usurping king in *Hamlet*, who is being opposed by the title character, resonate in the imagination of a sensitive poet living under the Soviet regime or under any repressive regime?
2. How would the ultimately misdirected but strong and sincere passion of Othello resound in the ears of a great 20th-century poet writing in another language whose culture greatly values the work of Shakespeare?

Lecture Thirty-Four

The Poet In and Beyond Society

Scope: The title of *Doctor Zhivago* includes the old form of the genitive case in the word for "alive." This genitive is also used as the accusative only for animate words attached to living humans or animals. In short, Pasternak is talking about life itself in its oldest, traditional form. Finding himself in a society calling itself socialist, with full value assigned to the collective, the poet—referring both to the title character and the author— wants to establish himself as an individual, separate from the collective. Repeatedly, Soviet society wants to draft the doctor, who creates some of Pasternak's best poetry, into its over-organized and overarching *civitas*. The result is a continuous struggle, which cannot be diverted by marriage or love affairs, by political propaganda, by warfare, or even by the full powers of nature herself. When the poet sees the beauty of the snowbound Russian woods, he uses it to separate himself from the world around him. The result leads to isolation, poetry of the first order, and death.

Outline

I. *Doctor Zhivago* makes us look at some of the major historical and political events of early-20th-century Russia and the USSR through the deeply introspective eyes of the title character, who is both a medical doctor and a major poet. The whole emphasis of the novel is on an individual who finds many ways to separate himself from the society around him.

A. The novel begins near the beginning of the 20th century. As a young boy, on a cold day in the Russian winter, Iurii Zhivago witnesses the burial of his mother. That evening, we sense a Russian blizzard through the force of Pasternak's poetic prose. It seemed that the snowstorm would bury both the cabbage patch and his mother, ever more deeply and helplessly, into the ground.

B. This image is the first of many throughout the novel that show Zhivago's isolation from a Russia that both natural forces and human events are driving away from him. His deeply poetic sensibility allows him to remember the now lost wealth of the Zhivago family as a kind of golden dream.

C. The first part of the novel shows the events leading up to World War I and the two revolutions of 1917. We see the confused political and religious thought coursing through the last decades of tsarist rule.

D. The revolutionaries demand that people think exactly as the leftists do. We understand that Zhivago will never be at home among people who

spout unceasingly and unreflectively a rigid ideology in words that become hopeless clichés.

II. Zhivago serves as an army doctor among Russian troops in World War I. In one of the novel's many coincidental events, he meets Lara, a nurse in the military hospital where he is serving. He knew her when they were both young. There begins a growing attraction between them.

A. Going home to Moscow, Zhivago is given what he later finds out is a priceless gift—a hunter's freshly killed duck. It makes an unusual feast when he arrives home in hunger-ridden Moscow.

B. Zhivago serves enthusiastically in the socialist medical services; he is convinced, for a time, that the society can become better. Some of his friends consider his convictions impossibly Red, but he sticks to his guns.

C. While he continues his medical work, the situation in Moscow goes from bad to worse, with shortages of all necessary food and supplies, general malnutrition, and rampaging sickness, especially during the terrible winter months.

D. Finally, it is clear there is nothing to keep the family in Moscow. They decide to leave for a former estate that belonged to the family of Zhivago's wife, thousands of miles to the east, in Siberia.

III. The most impressive part of the novel is the description of the subsequent train trip, which takes the family deep into Siberia. Pasternak manages to get across the huge expanse of the country, whitened and seemingly stretched by the endless snows of the Russian winter. At the same time, he also manages to communicate the terrible tensions of the time, both political and military, when imprisonment or even death can come at any moment.

A. At stations, food is purchased by barter. Zhivago's wife, Tonia, can exchange a beautiful towel, embroidered with cockerels, oxbows, and wheels, for half a roasted hare. Such were the relative values of goods in revolutionary times.

B. Also on the train are people who have been conscripted for heavy labor: rich, smart lawyers and stockbrokers. All of them have been classified as members of the formerly exploiting classes. They are side by side with floor polishers, rag pickers, and escaped lunatics.

C. In still other freight cars are soldiers with rifles and bandoliers of cartridges hanging over their shoulders and around their waists. No one argues with them when they take food from the station vendors without paying.

D. For Zhivago, the most memorable part of the journey occurs when snow blocks the tracks ahead. All civilian passengers are mobilized, and they shovel snow for three days. The view of the snow-packed valley and hills is caught magnificently in Pasternak's words.

E. On the other hand, when the weather changes, "the sky, drunk with spring and giddy with its fumes…let down clouds, drooping at the edges like felt…and rain leapt from them, warm, smelling of soil and sweat, and washing the last armor-plating of ice from the earth." It is clear that these words are poetry in prose, written by a powerful observer and inhabitant of nature.

IV. The estate in the beautiful countryside is a perfect place for Zhivago to work on his poems. Later, he goes into the small city of Yuriatin, where there is a library, and there, he sees Lara. Once again, Pasternak uses coincidence in a way that many readers consider farfetched and clumsy.

A. Zhivago still finds the energy and passion to enter into a liaison with Lara, thereby betraying his wife, Tonia. Zhivago's illicit affair does not last long, however, because he is kidnapped by horsemen.

B. The horsemen are part of the "Forest Brotherhood," a group of revolutionaries who are trying to wrest control of Siberia from the hands of the counter-revolutionary army of Whites. Their former doctor was killed, and now they force Zhivago to come with them and provide medical services.

C. Zhivago is forced to spend a year with these committed revolutionaries.

D. They are bloody and obsessive to a terrible extreme, with the constant repetition of clichés appropriate only to self-satisfied people. Their talk grates terribly on Zhivago's poetic sensibilities, yet he gives them loyal medical service and even a certain degree of human sympathy.

E. Zhivago finally manages to escape and return to Lara. Meanwhile, his family has left Siberia for Moscow. He then discovers that Lara, too, must leave; her presence has become politically dangerous. Her husband is a military man sought by the Red punishment organizations.

F. Zhivago is left almost completely on his own, eventually returning to a Moscow that has become Soviet and to a society that has no real place for him. He dies of a heart attack.

V. The cycle is complete. Zhivago has systematically separated himself, step by step, from any surrounding society in which he might have lived. He is separated from his classical Russian culture, from his family, from his friends, and from his passionate love. The novel defines the lot of the individual in a tragic and moving way.

A. Pasternak composed this novel in the midst of a society whose official ideology passionately dedicated itself to collectivism, deliberately ignoring the needs of countless thousands, even millions, of individuals.

B. At the end of the book are poems, ostensibly created by Zhivago. The second stanza of the first poem eloquently states Pasternak's identification of the individual both with Hamlet and with Christ:

Na menia nastavlen sumrak nochi
Tysiach'iu binoklei na osi.
Esli tol'ko mozhno, Avva Otche,
Chashu etu mimo pronesi.

The gloom of night is set upon me
With a thousand binoculars on an axis.
If it's only possible, Abba Father,
Take this cup past me.

And the closing lines of the poem state his view on his life:

Ia, odin, vse tonet v fariseistve.
Zhizn' prozhit' – ne pole pereiti.

I am alone—everything is drowning among the Pharisees.
To live life is not as simple as crossing a field.

Doctor Zhivago is a novel in prose written by one of the greatest poets of the 20th century.

Suggested Reading:

Victor Erlich, ed., *Pasternak: A Collection of Critical Essays.*

Ronald Hingley, *Pasternak: A Biography.*

Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago* (a novel and series of poems), with prose translated by Max Hayward and Manya Harari and poems translated by Bernard Guerney.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways does Pasternak see Russian nature, in all of its expansiveness, in the pages of *Doctor Zhivago*? Does this vision in any way relate to the political situation in Russia at that time?
2. Zhivago, like Pasternak, engages in two great love affairs, one with his wife, Tonia, and the other with his mistress, Lara. In what ways do these relationships define the character of the poet who represents Pasternak's idea of a strong individual personality living in a time that emphasizes collectivism?

Lecture Thirty-Five

Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn, Born 1918

Scope: Up to the 1960s, the Soviet Union officially claimed that there were no slave labor camps in the USSR. The air was struck by a kind of lightning when, in 1962, a new work by a previously unknown high school math teacher took the world by storm. It was Solzhenitsyn's novella *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.* Through the soft voice of an uneducated man from a provincial collective farm, now a prisoner in the GULAG (an abbreviation for labor camps, soon to become world famous), the reader becomes aware of the horrendous reality of Stalin's camps. Throughout its pages, the book reflects the mentality of a decent human being who deeply believes in producing good work no matter the circumstances. In many ways, the novel conforms to the shibboleths favored by the socialist regime. Yet its indictment of that same regime is crushing and, ultimately, lethal. Solzhenitsyn, subsequently in exile in New England, now back in a very different Russia, continues to write and speak in the voice of a prophet. Many in Russia look upon him today as the worn-out tribune of a long-gone time. I see him as the voice of Russian determination and strength.

Outline

I. In the early 1960s, the name of Solzhenitsyn suddenly became world famous. A former high school math teacher, then a soldier in World War II, incarcerated in a forced labor camp for one of his letters intercepted by the KGB (security police), he wrote a movingly simple account of one day in a Soviet forced labor camp.

   A. The manuscript fell into the hands of Tvardovsky, a popular Soviet poet and editor of the most liberal Soviet journal of that day. He was so impressed that he personally took it to Khrushchev, the Soviet premier. Khrushchev admitted that this account was one of the few literary works that he had managed to read without sticking himself with pins to avoid slumber. The resulting publication stunned the Soviet reading public and the world.

   B. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* views the Soviet penal world through the eyes of a former collective farm worker and soldier in World War II. The Nazi soldiers capture him, he escapes back to the Soviet lines, and the authorities arrest him and accuse him of being a spy. He experiences a fate common to thousands of other Soviet soldiers at that time.

   C. In the camp, he meets many different kinds of people, many of them far more educated and/or experienced than he is. As he sees them, we get a

sense of the population and its mores in this vast archipelago of camps (*Gulag Archipelago*), as Solzhenitsyn would later call it.

D. There is the captain, the former commander of a Soviet naval ship, who was arrested because he received a Christmas card from a former British sea captain, an ally during the war. This man cannot put up with the nonsense in the camp, nor can he keep silent. He ends up in a cold cell, in light clothing, with very little food or water. He will come out a cripple for life, if he survives at all.

E. There is a medic who examines Ivan. It turns out that he has no medical training at all. He is a poet who was arrested for his verse. The camp commander likes the verse, so he gives the man a lighter job on the inside, pretending to be a medic attending to the men. In this confinement, he can write poetry that would be immediately condemned on the outside.

F. There are two intellectuals from Moscow, whose educated Russian dialect Ivan can barely understand. He witnesses their polemic about films by the great Soviet cinematographer Sergei Eisenstein. The argument about esthetic judgment versus political decency goes way over Ivan's head. But he does bring them lunch.

G. These and many other characters come alive through Ivan's untutored observation. Their various views of the world and of the Soviet reality come through without any argument or discussion—Ivan is in no position to argue with them. Solzhenitsyn makes us believe that we are right there beside them. No amount of attempted dehumanization in the administration of the camp can take away their colorful individuality.

II. What impressed Khrushchev the most deeply—and it really is a powerful part of the story—is Ivan's devotion to his work on the camp's construction project.

A. We cannot forget that Ivan is working on a building that will be part of a prison to confine him and others like him, yet this purpose does not seem to enter Ivan's consciousness. He simply gives all his attention and effort to laying bricks properly, even though the Siberian cold is so intense that it freezes the mortar almost before he can apply it to his part of the wall.

B. To keep the construction shack warm, the prisoners must improvise some kind of covering for the windows. Ivan and one of his fellow prisoners decide to snatch a roll of heavy felt from piles belonging to another gang. With great dexterity and boldness, they manage to make the heist and bring the roll of felt, kept vertical between them, back to their shack.

C. Later on, a man from the camp administration discovers their larceny and threatens to inform on them. He is almost immediately surrounded by prisoners wielding heavy shovels and warned what they will do to

him if he plays the snitching game. He gets the message, but fast! The prisoners know well the importance of solidarity in the midst of their suffering. Seldom does poetic justice taste so sweet as it does in this scene.

D. When the actual bricklaying begins, Ivan finds himself totally absorbed. It seems safe to assume that most readers are not professional layers of brick, yet the details of the process become almost immediately clear. Ivan knows what it means to do a good job, and he is determined to do it. The errors and clumsiness of some of his fellow prisoners simply make him find ways to compensate.

E. He works so intently that he pays no attention to quitting time. All the others are ready to leave the job, but Ivan keeps going so as not to waste the mortar, which will freeze if he leaves it. He secures his trowel so he will have it the next day, and he even cannot resist a last knowing look at the work he has just completed—he knows high-quality work when he sees it!

F. When Ivan finally joins the others who are ready to leave the worksite, he finds the men and guards in an uproar: A man is missing. The guards know that they will pay a heavy price if they come back one man short, and there is real panic.

G. It turns out that a Bulgarian prisoner had found a warm spot for himself and had gone to sleep. When the guards roughly bring him back to the group, the other prisoners turn against him. They call him a spy—a genuine spy—not one like them, who had merely been convicted as such! The poor fellow was lucky to get off with a blow on the neck by Tiurin, the gang boss, who by that gesture saved the Bulgarian from much worse treatment from the other prisoners.

H. The contrast between Ivan's honest concentration on his work and the phoney nature of the accusations about spying only intensifies the central argument of Solzhenitsyn's tale: It is impossible to turn human beings completely away from the best parts of their humanity.

III. When the men return to the camp, we see the last hours of the one day mentioned in the title. The men have but one bit of time to call their own.

A. At the entrance to the camp, the guards are waiting to frisk the returning men. Ivan suddenly remembers that he has a piece of steel that he picked up at the worksite. He can use it to make a small knife, but if the guard finds it, he will be in trouble. Cleverly, he presents himself before the guard least likely to search him thoroughly and manages to hold on to his treasure. Such are the small victories in the camp.

B. The one discordant note is struck when the camp administrator comes to take the former naval captain to the freezing cell, just at the moment when the unfortunate man is enjoying a bit of food donated from the

outside. The fellow prisoners try to buck him up for the ordeal, but there is not much they can say.

C. Yet the story ends on a positive note. Ivan thinks over the events of the day, including the pleasure he took in the work. He had gotten extra food, he had successfully brought in the piece of steel, and he had gotten some tobacco. The day, in the midst of this terrible camp, had been almost happy. And there were more than 3,000 such days in his sentence.

D. In a simple, quiet way, Solzhenitsyn makes a more eloquent statement about the hideous Stalinist, so-called socialist, camps than the loudest and most passionate public denunciations could possibly have done. And he preserves the total humanity of the prisoners.

IV. Largely on the basis of this work and its enormous resonance both in Russia and around the world, Solzhenitsyn became a kind of universal celebrity in the 1960s and 1970s. He was awarded the Nobel Prize, for which the Soviet government would not let him travel to the acceptance ceremony. His voice was heard most strongly when his own government tried to stifle it.

A. In this period, he wrote increasingly open criticism of Soviet policy. He telephoned Andropov, who was then head of the KGB and later became premier of the country. On the phone, he actually told Andropov that he, Solzhenitsyn, was declaring war on the KGB; his fighting troops would be his books, including some still-secret manuscripts, which he threatened to release abroad at a strategic time.

B. Solzhenitsyn's words became increasingly bold or, perhaps, increasingly self-destructive, depending on one's point of view. He wrote a book called *The Calf That Butted Its Head Against the Oak Tree*, describing his own position in the USSR at that time. It gives a wonderful picture of how it felt to be an intellectual in that most anti-intellectual time and place.

C. Finally came the inevitable arrest. In his first-ever trip in an airplane, Solzhenitsyn expected to travel eastward, to Siberia. Instead, he could see that the plane was traveling westward. He was dumped at a Swiss airport. Solzhenitsyn was in exile; the Soviet government obviously thought it unwise to incarcerate or to execute him.

D. For more than 15 years, Solzhenitsyn chose to live in Vermont, where he worked diligently on volumes describing details of the forced labor camps and his version of the history that produced the revolutions of 1917.

E. To the shock of some, he publicly criticized American foreign policy and derided what he considered the utterly frivolous nature of American life, a subject about which he obviously knew very little and made no attempts to learn.

F. After 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, he agreed to return home if the authorities would agree to publish all his works and issue an apology for his unjust exile. They agreed to his conditions, and he has been living in Russia since that time.

G. What must be remembered is Solzhenitsyn's courage in the face of overwhelming odds. He stood for truth and decency in an indecent time.

Suggested Reading:

Michael Scammell, *Solzhenitsyn: A Biography*.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, authorized translation by H. T. Willetts, with an introduction and commentary by Katherine Shonk.

D. M. Thomas, *Alexander Solzhenitsyn. A Century in His Life*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Solzhenitsyn's story is told through the eyes and ears of Ivan Denisovich, a simple, uneducated man from a collective farm. Yet the many different characters, including the sophisticated intellectuals, come across vividly and convincingly. How does Solzhenitsyn manage this effect in such a short space?
2. The final lines about the experience having been a "good day" come across with striking irony. How does the author manage to convince us that human beings could possibly see this as a "good day"?

Lecture Thirty-Six
The Many Colors of Russian Literature

Scope: In the course of these lectures, we have come a considerable way together: We have traveled over 1,000 years, from early Kiev in the 9th century through the Soviet Union of the 20th century. We have seen how the early adoption of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, together with the continuation of the pre-Christian oral Slavic tradition, existed side by side in the 10th through the 12th centuries in the territory around Kiev. We then skipped forward to the early 19th century and saw how these disparate traditions came together in the Golden Age of Russian Literature. After consideration of the various trends manifest in the most famous period of Russian literature, we then moved forward to the 20th century and the era of Soviet culture. As we looked at the central issues of the literature that came out of the USSR, we saw how Russian literature redirected its notions about the eternal questions. And now we can look back on the territory traversed, hoping that these considerations and descriptions will help us to think ever more deeply about ourselves and the world, spurred on by the stimulus of Russian literature.

Outline

I. We have now given some consideration to three widely separated periods in the history of Russian literature.

A. We have examined samples of artistic creation from the 10th through the 13th centuries in the time of Kievan Rus'. We have then gone to the 19th and early 20th centuries to examine some of the brightest highlights of the Russian Golden Age. Giving some brief consideration to the transition between tsarist and Soviet Russia, we then entered the time of the USSR, covering most of the 20th century.

B. Again, we had to pick and choose. Necessarily, we omitted some important figures, but we did get some idea of the various contending points of view and ways of turning human experience into artistic expression. Let's take a bird's-eye view of where we have been and what we have learned.

II. The Kievan era of artistic creativity was represented by two different tendencies, expressed in two different languages. One of them, today called Church Slavic, was a language and an alphabet developed through religious documents, almost all of which were received through translation from Eastern Christian Byzantium.

A. These documents included magnificently moving translations of parts of the Old and the New Testaments. The dramatic familial and political relationships of the formerly Hebrew manuscripts were taken in their full breadth, giving both the patriarchal fire of Abraham and the sure, religiously political hand of David. The didactic effectiveness of Jesus and his struggles with the demonic forces in life also found their full reflection in the Russian imagination and in its later literature.

B. There was also a full range of patristic literature, describing the lives of the Christian saints and their efforts to live lives worthy of the God-Man whom they worshipped. His Greek name was Jesus, with its close Slavic approximation *Isus*. Later, there would be terrible fights over whether to spell his name with one letter *i* or two: *Isus* or *Iisus*.

C. There were those, such as the widely admired brothers Boris and Gleb, who thought that true Christians should not take full part in this world but should live entirely separate from this one. There were others who thought that true Christians should struggle for the ideals of Jesus in this world, using the power of the state where necessary. This philosophical division continued to appear far into the future of Russian literature, especially in the work of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

D. In contrast to the literature of the Church, there existed a rich oral tradition, whose roots went far back into pre-Christian times and values. Expressed in vernacular language, these works described a land and a nature boiling with emotions and forces with which human beings could struggle, but not always, or even often, successfully.

E. This vernacular tradition is most powerfully represented in the medieval epic *The Tale of Prince Igor*, which presents some notion of the old Slavic gods. The tale also gives a charming notion, impressive in its power, of the feminine spirit very much alive among the Slavic tribes. Iaroslavna, Igor's independent and loyal wife, provides a fine example of feminine strength to later writers.

F. East Slavic and later Russian folklore in the vernacular language also offer a picture of a dynamic world, peopled with ardent young men and lovely women, who encounter all kinds of devils, both from the pre-Christian and Christian vocabularies. These devils conjure up human passions, including the Russian love for horses, into whose forms humans can be changed almost instantly. The demons also can be called up by wizards and magicians. What a storehouse of characters for later Russian writers!

III. We then took the long leap of 600 years—from the 13th century to the 19th. This leap does not imply that there was nothing of worth written in the intervening period but, rather, reflects the need to stay within the time limits of the course and still gain some idea of the ancient traditions alive in the context of Russian literature. The Golden Age of Russian Literature and even the Soviet era both show influences inherited from a much earlier time.

IV. The originator of the Golden Age, and the person who played the largest individual role in shaping the powerful modern Russian literary language, was Pushkin, to whom we gave considerable attention.

A. He established the crystal-clear school of Russian literature, with a sense of rhythm and sound seldom paralleled by any other writer. His use of themes became paradigmatic for Russian writers who followed him, and his name is virtually hallowed in his country.

B. From history and politics to passion and love, there is hardly a topic Pushkin did not cover with passion and intelligence. It is a shame that difficulty of translation makes it hard for Westerners to appreciate his work. Luckily, great composers have been available to make some of his sounds ring in the ears of those who do not know Russian.

V. Gogol', part of whose life overlapped that of Pushkin, initiated a different kind of literature.

A. His language was much more highly decorated, much more involved with fanciful and original images, often going over the border from humor into a powerful version of the grotesque. He well appreciated the power and attraction of the demonic.

B. His devils come to the boil quickly, and his humor draws us through a fantasy of the Russian countryside, as well as through the contorted minds of his characters.We had the chance to view some of his remarkable prose and see the various slopes of his not entirely sane mind and spirit. Many critics consider him the most Russian of all the writers.

VI. Our longest gaze rested on Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, the most widely known and appreciated giants of the Russian literary tradition. Students, beleaguered by mountainous details of Russian literary history and/or grammar, often call them "Tolstoevsky," a kind of literary Siamese twinning of geniuses. Unquestionably, even in the minds of critics hostile to these writers' works and styles, their novels and short stories offer a towering presence of spiritual and artistic power.

A. Dostoevsky, both by his extraordinarily dramatic life and his power of argumentation, draws us in (or repels us) with titanic force.

1. His exploration of the eternal themes, stemming from Kievan times to our day, pressed the edges of human experience.
2. The power of human love and hate; the nature of morality, whether controlled or not; the basis for human and divine law; the existence or nonexistence of divinity; the presence of the diabolical in human affairs; the nature of politics—all of these things and much more are followed through the passions of human beings who seem to know all of our most closely guarded secrets.

B. Tolstoy presents us with a universe that, in some ways, seems to vie with God's own universe. From aristocrats to peasants, from Russians to people who come from many different cultures and languages, from foxes and wolves to horses and bears—and each one of his animals has a different personality and some even speak—all are brought to life with a sorcerer's magical wand.

C. Tolstoy's prose is simple and direct, the syntax much more straightforward than that of Dostoevsky, yet he makes the reader feel all the complexity of life and human psychology. This reader has never known an aristocrat personally, yet I feel that I know Prince Andrei and Count Pierre and Countess Natasha as well as I know any personal acquaintance.

VII. Turgenev draws us in by the fine, sometimes delicate, way he presents his people, their environment, and even their pets. We hear distinctly the claws of the greyhound tapping the fine parquet floor of a tastefully built Russian country house. In that tapping, we sense the rituals of afternoon tea of the inhabitants in the house.

A. Turgenev tried to deal with the political issues of his day, with a hope for a better, more humane country. He often found himself between two stools in the large political arguments, and he lacked the strength, sometimes, to hold his own or to fight his way out.

B. Few people had a finer sense of that magnificent language of Russian, and even fewer had his generosity of spirit, even when confronted by the literary giants among whom he lived.

VIII. Chekhov was probably the most subtle of the Russian writers. Known most widely and popularly in the West as a dramatist, his plays tread the fine border between comedy and tragedy.

A. He calls his first and last plays comedies, but the humor is very sly and connected with events and human fates that are anything but funny. His work certainly reflects a sensitive artist, also a medical doctor, who looks at the world through eyes that cannot be fooled by human pretense.

B. His exquisite short stories also catch human situations in a way that precludes all of our normal deceptions. He, the descendant of a serf, consciously squeezed the slavery out of his own soul.

IX. By the end of the 1890s, we have left the Golden Age behind, and various groups are struggling to capture the attention of the Russian reading public.

A. We have not had time to deal with the so-called Silver Age, from the 1890s to World War I, which produced some very good poetry, a new kind of prose, and many innovative, creative ideas about art and literature.

B. In the midst of these polemics, one heard the arguments of the revolutionary Marxists, who had their own ideas about the proper place and social tasks of literature and art. The polemics took on a much fiercer tone after the Bolshevik Revolution and rise to power in October–November of 1917.

C. At that point, the famous eternal questions became more directly connected with politics and the problems of administering a state with a total ideological plan for all aspects of the country, most especially for literature and art.

X. The most famous pre-revolutionary writer who became closely associated with the Bolsheviks and the Soviet government was M. Gorky.

A. Indeed, in the long run, his reputation among intelligent readers was greatly harmed by the continual heavy-handed Soviet propaganda touting him as the "great proletarian writer." Furthermore, Gorky himself sometimes added to the damage by some of his impulsive and raucus political phrases.

B. Yet his very best writing showed a wonderful mastery of the Russian language and its richly varied popular usages. The Bolshevik regime also carefully concealed his many efforts, no small number of them successful, to protect both human life and human creative endeavor from the repressive excesses of the Soviet government, especially in its early years.

XI. Maiakovsky was the most talented writer to offer his gifts enthusiastically to the Bolsheviks.

A. Calling himself the Tribune of the Revolution, he produced both poetry and posters to support the ideology and program of socialism, and these works often had fresh and interesting esthetic innovations.

B. Later, he became increasingly disillusioned, and his suicide produced real trauma among lovers of Russian culture.

XII. Sholokhov often saw the world through the eyes of the Cossacks, and his judgments sometimes lacked the balance of the more classically educated intellectuals.

A. His major novel was a real artistic achievement: Few people so successfully communicated the emotional experience of living through the day-to-day events and the shifting political winds of the revolution.

B. His reputation among intelligent readers was badly marred by his urging the execution of some dissident literary critics, but Russians still read his novel.

XIII. Zoshchenko dealt with the Soviet world through humor and parody.

A. A master of the everyday Russian language as it was swiftly changing (purists would say degenerating) under the pressure of Soviet life, he pictured the often unsung strength of those who had to bear the brunt of the daily struggle.

B. His popularity was genuine—not the result of an overactive state propaganda machine. He is highly regarded today, and artifacts connected with his life are greatly valued.

XIV. Pasternak was one of the finest poets of the 20th century.

A. His gift for poetic translation, including plays by Shakespeare, was virtually unmatched.

B. His reputation as a novelist only increased after the Soviet propaganda machine attacked him with scandalous and false accusations. His voice as a lone poet among crowds of insensitive people made itself heard and felt around the world.

XV. Solzhenitsyn startled both the Soviet Union and the world when his short novel punctured the official Soviet claim that the USSR had no penal labor camps.

A. Despite terrible political and police pressures, he maintained his position as witness to the truth.Threats of incarceration and execution did not move him, and actual exile only deepened his resolve to speak as a prophet.

B. Despite many contemporary claims that his is a voice of the past, his ideas endure. He represents a stubbornness that is truly Russian!

XVI. And there you have it! We have completed a gallop through Russian literature from the days of early Kiev through the 20th century.

A. There can be no claims of completeness or exhaustiveness—no small number of good writers and fine works have been skipped—Russian literature is a deep and expansive ocean! But I hope you have received a stimulating impression of the vast spiritual and artistic wealth of this magnificent language and culture.

B. If these words help you to ponder and to read some of the works—with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might—the goal of the lectures will have been achieved.

C. Where else will you find such a collection of great writers and souls? One might answer: only in the greatest epochs of world literature—from the Bible and the ancient Greeks through all of European (and, probably, Asian) history. I can only quote from parts of Turgenev's famous poem in prose:

Vo dni tiagostnykh razdumii o sud'bakh moei rodiny—ty odin mne podderzhka i opora, o velikii, moguchii, pravdivyi i svobodnyi russkii iazyk .... No nel'zia verit' chtoby takoi iazyk ne byl dan velikomu narodu!

In the heaviest days of despair about the fate of my native land—you alone are my helper and supporter, oh great, mighty, truth-bearing, and freedom-giving Russian language.... It's impossible to believe that such a language was not given to a great people!

Suggested Reading:

Edward J. Brown, *Literature Since the Revolution.*

D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature*, edited by Francis J. Whitfield.

Charles Moser, ed., *Cambridge History of Russian Literature.*

Questions to Consider:

1. Should Soviet literature be considered a continuation of the Russian tradition, or should it be considered a destruction of the previous culture?
2. Some critics claim that Russian literature is too heavily burdened with strong emotion, even sentimentality. Is this correct? What specific works support your opinion? Are there works that oppose your opinion?

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Mann, Robert, trans. *The Song of Prince Igor.* Eugene, Ore.: Vernyhora Press, 1979. The clearest English-language rendition of the famous East Slavic epic, with clear explanations and commentary; available through the Northwestern University bookstore.

Marshall, Herbert. *Mayakovsky.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1965. Memoirs of a British writer and critic who was personally close to Maiakovsky and his world.

Medvedev, Roy. *Problems in the Literary Biography of Mikhail Sholokhov.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977. A Russian publicist, well known in Soviet intellectual circles, examines the accusations of plagiarism often raised against Sholokhov.

Mirsky, D. S. *A History of Russian Literature.* Edited by Francis J. Whitfield. New York: Knopf, 1966. A work by a well-known and sensitive Russian aristocrat and scholar who worked in England, then met a tragic fate when he returned to the USSR.

Mochulsky, Konstantin. *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967. A beautifully written work, with an emphasis on the religious aspect of Dostoevsky's art and psychology.

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Mussorgsky, Modest. *Boris Godunov.* London: Decca Records, 1998. Conducted by Herbert Von Karajan. Mussorgsky's brilliant musical and dramatic adaptation of Pushkin's tragedy; one of the world's greatest operas.

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———. *Nikolai Gogol.* Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1944. The brilliant, sparkling book that introduced Nabokov as a critic to the American reading public.

Orwin, Donna Tussing, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. A kind of Tolstoy handbook done by past masters of the academic world.

Pasternak, Boris. *Doctor Zhivago.* Translated by Max Hayward, Manya Harari, and Bernard Guerney. New York: Pantheon Books, 1958. A carefully prepared translation of the novel by well-respected specialists in the field of Soviet studies; well done, despite the mistaken attacks by Edmund Wilson.

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———. "Egyptian Nights," in *Aleksandr Pushkin—Complete Prose Fiction.* Translated and with commentary by Paul Debreczeny. Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1983. Debreczeny is one of the outstanding Pushkin scholars in the United States.

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Randall, Francis B. "Belinsky's Letter to Gogol'," in *Vissarion Belinskii.* Newtonville, Mass.: Oriental Research Partners, 1987. An interesting and discursive discussion of the famous letter, with the author's own interpretations.

Riasanovsky, Nicolas. *History of Russia.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Widely regarded as one of the best and most balanced accounts of one of the world's most exciting histories.

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Schaffer, Peter. *Amadeus.* Los Angeles, Calif.: The Saul Zaentz Company, 1984. A play and a film based on Pushkin's play *Mozart and Salieri.* Although it departs a great deal from the original play, the film brilliantly captures Pushkin's frolicsome yet penetrating mood and intent.

Schapiro, Leonard. *Turgenev: His Life and Times*. New York: Random House, 1978. A fascinating examination of Turgenev's life.

Shakespeare, William. *Complete Works*. Edited by W. J. Craig. London: Oxford University Press, 1969. *Richard II, Henry IV, Part One, Henry IV, Part Two, Henry V*. Shakespeare's history plays, which interpret the guilt-ridden monarch in contrast to the great monarch, stimulated Pushkin's imagination as a dramatist.

Sholokhov, Mikhail. *And Quiet Flows the Don.* Translated by Stephen Garry. New York: Hill and Wang, New American Library, 1959. This is the standard English translation; reasonably competent, although it leaves out some sections of the original published text.

Solzenitsyn, Alexandr. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.* Translated by H. T. Willetts. With an introduction by Katherine Shonk. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005. A new translation of the most famous work, done with the approval of the writer.

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Stahlberger, Lawrence. *The Symbolic System of Majakovskij.* The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1964. Written under the influence and guidance of R. Jakobson, a scholar who knew the poet well.

Styan, J. L. *Chekhov in Performance.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978. Written by a British scholar who often crossed the line between literary criticism and theatrical performance.

Tchaikovsky, P. I. *Eugene Onegin.* Germany: Philips Classics sound recording, 1993. A chance for English speakers to get some of the rhythms of Pushkin, as adapted and changed by Tchaikovsky.

Thomas, D. M. *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn—A Century in His Life.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. Another approach to the issues of politics and literature that surround the writer's life.

Tolstoy, Lev. *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth.* Translated and edited by Michael Scammell. New York: Random House, Modern Library, 2002. Translation and commentary by an eminent American specialist in Russian literature.

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Trotsky, Leon. *Literature and Revolution.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960. A fascinating essay by the man who, after Lenin, did most to establish the USSR.

Turgenev, Ivan. *First Love and Other Stories.* Translated and with an introduction by Richard Freeborn. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. A translator with a good feeling for Turgenev's fine style.

———. *Fathers and Sons (A Norton Critical Edition).* Edited and translated by Ralph Matlaw. New York: W.W. Norton, 1966. An interesting collection of various views concerning Turgenev, both in and out of Russia.

Wasiolek, Edward. *Tolstoy's Major Fiction.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. A work by an original and challenging American critic.

———, ed. *Critical Essays on Tolstoy.* Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986. Commentary by a highly original American critic who knows Russia from firsthand experience.

Weil, Irwin. *Gorky: His Literary Development and Influence on Soviet Intellectual Life.* New York: Random House, 1966. I shall let the reader arrive at his or her own conclusions about the early work of this enthusiast of Russian literature.

Zenkovsky, Sergei A., ed. *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales.* New York: Dutton and Co., 1963. The best English-language collection of old Russian literature, organized by an excellent scholar.

Zoshchenko, Mikhail. *Nervous People and Other Stories.* Translated by Maria Gordon and Hugh McLean, with an introduction by Hugh McLean. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975. A good selection of the stories, with a very intelligent and knowledgeable account of the literary and political context.