

RUSSIAN LITERATURE IN CONTEXT

Russian writers often refer directly to the social, philosophical, and political disputes of the day in their novels and stories. In some cases, their fiction becomes a kind of laboratory for understanding the impact of these ideas on society. We will read some representative works from the 19th and early 20th centuries and ask in each case how the historical context enriches our understanding of the literary work.

For example, what impact did Dostoevsky's participation in an illegal socialist reading group have on *Crime and Punishment*? What does an awareness of the antagonism between liberals and radicals in the 1860s offer us when reading *Fathers and Sons*? How does Babel's childhood as a Jew in anti-Semitic Odessa influence his stories about the Red Army? An author shapes and embellishes extra-literary facts while at the same time looking for the right literary form. In class meetings we will look closely at the texts to figure out how they are put together.

One observer has called Russian novels "loose, baggy monsters," and that is how they are often perceived: doorstop-sized tomes with a huge cast of characters. We will read only one "baggy monster," *Crime and Punishment* (over the course of two weeks). Other selections are considerably shorter but equally masterful tales.

We will use the Norton edition of Gogol's stories, *The Overcoat and Other Tales of Good and Evil*, translated by David Magarshack; the Oxford Classics edition of *Fathers and Sons*, translated by Richard Freeborn; and the Penguin edition of *Crime and Punishment*, translated by Oliver Ready. The other selections will be made available online.

Week 1: A.S. Pushkin, "Queen of Spades"

Week 2: N.V. Gogol, "The Overcoat"

Week 3: I.S. Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*

Week 4: F.M. Dostoevsky: *Crime and Punishment*

Week 5: F.M. Dostoevsky: *Crime and Punishment*

Week 6: L.N. Tolstoy: "Death of Ivan Illych"

Week 7: A.P. Chekhov: "Gooseberries," and "Lady with a Dog"

Week 8: I.E. Babel "My First Goose" and "The Story of my Dovecot"

LEADERS: Nancy Kanach received her PhD in Russian literature from Cornell University and taught Russian literature at Princeton University while serving as a dean in the office of Dean of the College. Victor Ripp was a professor of Russian literature at Cornell University and is the author of *Turgenev's Russia* and, most recently, of *Hell's Traces*.

MONDAYS: 10:00 a.m. to noon, 8 weeks beginning September 27 through November 15

MAXIMUM: 20