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RUSS 306L.80: Evil and the Supernatural in Russian Literature

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Evil and the Supernatural in Russian Culture
RUSS 306L fall semester 2021
Tues and Thurs, 2-3:20pm in LA 338

Office Hours: M 10-11am and 12-1pm, Tues 1-2pm in LA 330

Evil & the Supernatural in Russian Culture

Evil is seemingly omnipresent in mass culture today—one need only turn on a television, surf the web, dip into a novel, or download a movie. What is the nature of evil? Where does it come from? How does it spread? How can it be combated? What is the relationship between conceptions of evil and the supernatural? How do specific historical and cultural contexts influence notions about the nature of evil? How about the perceived role of the supernatural in causing and/or spreading evil?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students in this course will read, discuss and critically analyze a wide array of classic texts in Russian 19th and 20th century Russian literature in which the themes of evil and/or the supernatural play a vital role. By using Russian literary texts as a key lens to study the perceived nature of evil, students will acquire the ability to identify key manifestations of perceived evil in disparate periods of Russian history and culture. Moreover, they will learn to distinguish among various ideas and theories about the nature of evil and its perceived root causes in human life. Students will see the vital link between ideas and conceptions about the nature of evil as reflected in a specific text and the historical and cultural context in which the text was originally created. Both in class discussions and debates as well as in written analytical papers, students will analyze and evaluate the relationship between reigning conceptions of evil in Russian culture in disparate historical periods and belief in specific natural and supernatural forces as major causes of evil in daily life. By exploring conceptions of evil as reflected and explored in Russian literary classics, students will equip themselves to analyze and evaluate more critically contemporary ideas and theories about the nature and root causes of evil in the world as reflected in mass culture of the twenty-first century.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:

Regular attendance & timely reading of all assigned works
Active participation in class discussion (and timely preparation of discussion question sheets)
Possible short in-class writing (no more than twice in the semester)
One 4-5 page short paper
One longer 8-10 page analytical paper* (minimum of two outside sources)

DHC (Honor's College) ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS:

In addition to the GENERAL REQUIREMENTS listed above, students taking the course for DHC Honors credit will be required to sign up to present a reading for one class period (either individually or in groups, depending on the number of DHC students enrolled in the course). Each class presentation will: 1) introduce the work assigned for the day; 2) familiarize the class with one key related work or a secondary source or a piece of scholarship related to the assigned work; 3) lead class discussion for that day. As part of preparation for leading class discussion, DHC students will be expected to meet with the instructor during an office hour at least one full week prior to the date of the presentation in order to discuss expectations.

Finally, within a period of one week after making this presentation, DHC students will be expected to turn in a two-page typed self-evaluation of their presentation exercise. The evaluation should address three main questions: 1) what did you learn from this presentation experience? 2) what do you feel you did especially well? 3) where do you feel you could improve in future presentations of material and/or in acting as a facilitator of classroom discussion?

REQUIRED TEXTS and MATERIALS: the cost is \$45 for all materials due to your professor

The Magic Ring (Fairy Tales from the Collection by Afanas'ev)
Sleeping Beauty and Other Fairy Tales (from the Collection by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm)
Ruslan and Ludmila by Alexander Pushkin
The Queen of Spades and Other Stories by Alexander Pushkin
Diary of a Madman and Other Stories by Nikolai Gogol
Hero of Our Time by Mikhail Lermontov
The Testament of Professor Dowell DVD of 1984 Soviet film based on a novel by A. Belyaev
Life of Insects by Viktor Pelevin
Coursepack (works by Chekhov, Bulgakov, Pilniak, Daniil Kharms, Anna Starobinets, etc)

GRADING:

25% Attendance, Class Participation and Discussion (DHC presentations included here if

appropriate)

25%	Discussion Question Sheets and in-class writing (whatever out of this is assigned)
20%	Short Paper (4-5 pages)
30%	Long Paper (8-10 pages)

GRADING SCALE

A = 93-100	C+ = 77-79	D- = 65
A- = 90-92	C = 73-76	F = 64 and below
B+ = 87-89	C- = 70-72	
B = 83-86	D+ = 68-69	
B- = 80-82	D = 66-67	

PAPER GUIDELINES:

All papers should be typed or done on a computer. Respect your work—give each paper a title and include your name and the date! Use a standard 12 point font (Times New Roman recommended) and double-space. Proofread each assignment for typos, poor wording, mechanics, etc. Late work will be penalized one letter grade per day. Plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form. Please ask if you have a question about what constitutes plagiarism, but on the whole, if you consult another work for ideas, copy or paraphrase from another source, etc., then you need to acknowledge the source (including the work you consulted and the page number/s) in your paper with a footnote.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:

It is essential to the learning process that students treat each other and the instructor with respect. Under the Student Conduct Code, students who are found to be disruptive may be asked to leave the classroom. Disruptive behaviors may include but are not limited to:

- Using electronic communication devices, including cell phones and laptops for purposes unrelated to ongoing class activities.
- Carrying on side conversations that are distracting to the instructor and other students.
- Verbally interrupting the class with comments or questions not relevant to the course or to the current discussion.
- Failure to participate in assigned group activities.
- Significantly interfering with instructor's work activities during or outside of class.

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance and you have not already registered with DSS, please contact DSS in Lommasson 154. I will be glad to work with you and DSS to provide an appropriate accommodation.

Syllabus

****Note that what you see listed on the syllabus is what you should prepare for that day of class. For example, on Tues, Sept 28 you should come to class having already read "The Queen of Spades" by Pushkin.**

August

Tues	31	Intro, Discussion of Syllabus and Expectations Analyzing Culture as a System: Intro to Semiotic Theory
Tapping into The Source: The Lightsaber Duel Revisited		
General Intro: Evil and the Supernatural		
A Few Key Conceptions of Evil in Russian Culture		

September

Thurs	2	"Baba Yaga," "Vasilisa the Fair" in <i>The Magic Ring</i> collection "Hansel and Gretel" in <i>Sleeping Beauty and Other Fairy Tales</i>
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Tues	7	"The Frog Princess," "The Tale of Prince Ivan, the Firebird, and the Grey Wolf" in <i>The Magic Ring</i> collection "The Frog Prince," "The Golden Bird" in <i>Sleeping Beauty</i>
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and Other Fairy Tales

Thurs 9 Pushkin, *Ruslan and Ludmila* (first half for today's class, p. 1-54)

Tues 14 Pushkin, *Ruslan and Ludmila* (finish the book)

Thurs 16 Pushkin, *Ruslan and Ludmila* (overview and film excerpts)

Tues 21 Pushkin, "The Shot," "The Snowstorm," "The Undertaker"
in *The Queen of Spades and Other Stories*

Thurs 23 Pushkin, *The Bronze Horsman* (in the coursepack)

Tues 28 Pushkin, "The Queen of Spades" in *The Queen of Spades
and Other Stories*

Thurs 30 Gogol, "Diary of a Madman," "The Nose"
in *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*

October

Tues 5 Gogol, "The Overcoat" in *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*

Thurs 7 Lermontov, *Hero of Our Time* ("Bela, Max Maximych, "Taman")

Tues 12 Lermontov, *Hero of Our Time* ("Princess Mary")

Thurs 14 Lermontov, *Hero of Our Time* ("The Fatalist")

Tues 19 **Short Analytical Paper (4-5pp.) Due Today:** Close analysis of
one work (or up to two works) that we have read up to this point. You should focus your discussion on themes in the work or works
related to evil and/or the supernatural.

In Class: Evil & the Supernatural in Painting and Non-Verbal Art

Thurs 21 Chekhov, "Ward No. 6" (in the coursepack)

Tues 26 Lecture/Discussion on the Russian Revolution and Stalinism
Begin reading Bulgakov's *The Fatal Eggs* for today.

Thurs 28 Bulgakov, *The Fatal Eggs* (in the coursepack)

November

Tues 2 Pilniak, *Ivan Moscow* (in the coursepack)

Thurs 4 Pilniak, *Ivan Moscow* (in the coursepack)

Tues 9 Daniil Kharms, a number of very short stories (in the coursepack;
Read all of them up to but not including *The Old Woman*)

Thurs 11 **NO CLASS** **Veterans Day**

Tues 16 Kharms, *The Old Woman* (in the coursepack)

Thurs 18 Ideally, we will begin *The Testament of Professor Dowell* in class.
We will watch whatever of the film we can fit into our class time.

Your homework will be to finish the film outside of class
and to work on your long paper outlines.

Tues 23 **1-2 Page Outline of Long Paper due today**

In class: Discussion of film *The Testament of Professor Dowell*

Thurs 25 **NO CLASS Thanksgiving Holiday**

Tues 30 Pelevin, *Life of Insects*, p. 1-74

December

Thurs 2 Pelevin, *Life of Insects*, p. 75-end

Tues 7 Discussion: Pelevin's *Life of Insects*:
Crimea and Post-Soviet Space Then (1993) and Now

Thurs 9 stories by Anna Starobinets (in the coursepack)

Your **long paper** (8-10 pp.) for this course is due on **Wed., Dec. 15 by 5pm**

You may send me an electronic version of the final long paper if you wish, but I definitely want
to receive a printed version that you should slide under my office door in LA 330.