

The Émigrés: Lives of Remarkable Russians

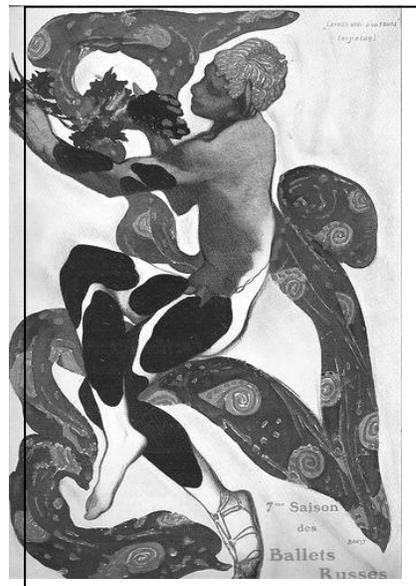
Fall 2011 Russian 260
Tues/Thurs 2:45-4:00 pm 201 Lawrence Hall

Instructor: Marijeta Bozovic
Office hours: Tues/Thurs 1:00-2:30 and by appt.
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Course Description:

Inspired by W.G. Sebald's novel *The Emigrants*, this course examines the phenomenon of Russian émigré culture through the work and life stories of four remarkable artists—Ivan Bunin, Igor Stravinsky, Vladimir Nabokov, and Joseph Brodsky.



Bunin, Stravinsky, and Nabokov all fled the Russian Revolution for Europe; Brodsky was expelled from the Soviet Union half a century later. Between them they account for two Nobel prizes in literature, a revolution in modern music, and another in the English-language novel. All four drew upon a rich Russian cultural heritage, projected against the new influences that they encountered abroad, to create works of art that shook their fields. All four had complicated and fascinating relationships with European and American society, as well as with the Russian émigré community, a vibrant world unto itself.

This course will explore themes of exile, memory and nostalgia; hybrid cultural identities and cosmopolitan elites; language and bilingualism; as well as the aims and aesthetics of émigré modernism in different media. We will study closely the works of these four artists and writers, and the cultural framework of Russian émigré circles. These four life stories will be historically contextualized within the structures and institutions of literary life—such as competing schools, literary cafés, magazines, and publication and performance history—of Russian Berlin, Russian Paris, and Russian New York. We will read novels, essays, and poetry; listen to music; look at painting and the visual arts; and watch footage of performances, as well as film. The course will move from the 1920s salons of Paris and Berlin to American college towns and New York City in the 1990s.

Global Engagements:

This course explores what happens to national cultures outside of the confines of the state, and to individuals divorced of context: when imperial Russia ceased to exist, many of these writers and artists found themselves without a passport, and at risk of losing an identity. Paradoxically, two of the most 'autonomous' individual artists of the twentieth century, Nabokov and Stravinsky, were victims of its greatest mass upheavals and tragedies: both fled first the Soviet Union for Europe, and then again had to flee Nazi-occupied Europe for the United States. Their self-consciously monumental works reflect, or perhaps attempt an escape from the ash heaps of history. In turn, the transnational traditions that these artists helped to inspire have gone on to change the configurations of our cultural world.

For the **Global Engagements assignment**, you will be given the option to write about émigré and immigration experiences not limited to Russians and to the subjects covered in the course. I encourage you to embark on comparative studies with writers such as Sebald or J.M. Coetzee, or of more recent filmmakers, musicians, and artists with a complex history of immigration. Alternatively, you might choose to write papers approaching émigré and immigration experiences from another discipline, such as sociology, psychology, or political theory.

Requirements:

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| • Class Participation | 20% |
| • Moodle Discussion Questions | 15% |
| • Midterm Paper (6 pages) | 15% |
| • Oral Presentation (10 minutes) | 15% |
| • Take-home Final Exam (waived for excellent MDQs) | 10% |
| • Final Paper/GE Assignment (10 pages) | 25% |

You will be expected to post one discussion question/brief response (4-8 sentences) to the readings through our moodle forum before each class. A good discussion question might propose an interpretation; address something that you found difficult; stage an intervention from a different perspective; or offer a reading of a short passage. Please remember to direct your readers to the text you are discussing (quote short passages, provide page or line numbers). All responses must be posted by midnight the evening before class, giving you the opportunity to read each other's postings before we meet. These assignments are intended to help all of us prepare for class discussion—I will often bring up your questions during class.

Oral presentations take place in the second half of the semester, and should provide you with an opportunity to develop your thoughts and individual projects before embarking on the final paper. The take-home final exam will consist of short passage analyses, and will be waived for students with consistent and thoughtful moodle discussion questions.

Required Materials:

- Vasily Kandinsky & the World of Art: selected writings and images (available through moodle or in class)
- Vladislav Khodasevich & Marina Tsvetaeva: selected poems
- Ivan Bunin: *Life of Arseniev* and *Dark Avenues*
- Igor Stravinsky: selected performance clips (moodle or in class)
+ selections from *Igor Stravinsky, an Autobiography* (moodle, or order your own copy)
- Vladimir Nabokov: *The Gift*, *Pnin*, and *Speak, Memory*
+ selected short stories from *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov* (moodle, or order your own)
- Joseph Brodsky: *Watermark* and selected poems
+ “Guide to a Renamed City,” “In a Room and a Half” etc. from *Less Than One* (moodle)
- W. G. Sebald: *The Emigrants*

The underlined titles are available at the Colgate Bookstore, on reserve at the library, or through Amazon. All additional materials will be posted on moodle under each week's assignments.

Recommended Reference Books:

- V. Alexandrov, ed.: *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*
- D. Bethea: *Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile*
- S. Boym: *The Future of Nostalgia*
- J. Connolly: *The Works of Ivan Bunin*
- J. Glad: *Russia Abroad: Writers, History, Politics*
- C. Gray: *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863-1922*
- O. Matich & M. Heim: *The Third Wave: Russian Literature in Emigration*
- M. Raeff: *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration*
- G. Struve: *Russian Writers in Exile: Problems of Émigré Literature*
- S. Walsh: *Stravinsky: A Creative Spring* and *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*

TOPICS AND READINGS:

Week 1: Introduction

- Mon. Aug. 29** Syllabus and assignments
- Tues. Aug. 30** Historical overview of Russian emigration; geography of the diaspora; émigré publications, performances, and salon culture.
- from Raeff, *Russia Abroad*: “Introduction” (pp. 3-15) and “To Keep and to Cherish” (pp. 95-117)
- Thurs. Sept. 1** Exile and émigré identity; nostalgia and the travelogue.
- from Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*: “Hypochondria of the Heart” (pp. 3-31 & 41-51)

Week 2: The World of Art and Kandinsky

- Tues. Sept. 6** Visual culture and the avant-garde.
- from Gray, *The Great Experiment*: “The World of Art” (pp. 37-64)
 - Images on moodle
- Thurs. Sept. 8** Total art and revolution.
- from Gray, *The Great Experiment*: “1914-1917” (pp. 185-218)
 - Short excerpts from Kandinsky’s writings
 - Images on moodle

Week 3: The poetry of exile

- Tues. Sept. 13** The poets: Khodasevich and Tsvetaeva.
- Selected poems
 - Brodsky, “Footnote to a poem” (pp.195-267); Nabokov, “On Khodasevich” (pp. 223-227)
 - from Glad, *Russia Abroad*: “Literature” (pp. 249-256 & 265-284)
- Thurs. Sept. 15**
- Selected poems
 - begin reading *Life of Arseniev*, Book One (pp. 17-54)

Week 4: Ivan Bunin

- Tues. Sept. 20** Dreams of a Russian childhood.
- *Life of Arseniev*, Books Two, Three, Four (pp. 55-159)
- Thurs. Sept. 22**
- *Life of Arseniev*, Book Five (pp. 160-233)

Week 5: Bunin

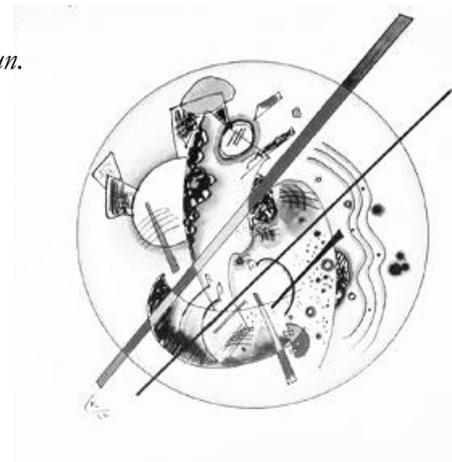
- Tues. Sept. 27** Exile as romantic travelogue.
- *Dark Avenues* (pp. 5-95)
- Thurs. Oct. 1**
- *Dark Avenues* (pp. 97-177)

Week 6: Igor Stravinsky and the Ballets Russes

- Tues. Oct. 4** Introducing the *Ballets Russes*: Debussy’s *Afternoon of a Faun*.
- finish *Dark Avenues* (pp. 181-275)
- Thurs. Oct. 6** Stravinsky’s *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*.
- Video clips on moodle

Week 7: Stravinsky

- Thurs. Oct. 13** Scandal and *The Rites of Spring*.
- Video clips on moodle
 - from *Stravinsky, an Autobiography* (pp. 3-53)
- Fri. Oct. 14** Midterm paper due via email by 6pm



Week 8: Stravinsky and Balanchine (+ class presentations begin)

- Tues. Oct. 18** Ballets with Balanchine: *Apollon* and *Agon*.
• Video clips on moodle
• from *Stravinsky, an Autobiography* (pp. 120-157 & 173-176)
- Thurs. Oct. 20** *The Rake's Progress*.
• Video clips on moodle

Week 9: Vladimir Nabokov

- Tues. Oct. 25** The short stories; Sirin and Nabokov.
• “A Letter that Never Reached Russia” (pp. 137-140); “A Guide to Berlin” (pp. 155-160); “Visit to a Museum” (pp. 277-285); “Spring in Fialta” (pp. 413-429); “Signs and Symbols” (pp. 598-603) + begin reading *The Gift*
- Thurs. Oct. 27** • *The Gift* (pp. 3-145)

Week 10: Nabokov

- Tues. Nov. 1** Exile and *bildungsroman*.
• *The Gift* (pp. 146-258)
- Thurs. Nov. 3** • *The Gift* (pp. 259-366)

Week 11: Nabokov

- Tues. Nov. 8** Laughter and cruelty; the university novel.
• *Pnin* (pp. 7-100)
- Thurs. Nov. 10** • *Pnin* (pp. 101-191)
• Video clips on moodle from Stanley Kubrick's film *Lolita*

Week 12: Nabokov

- Tues. Nov. 15** Fiction and autobiography; games with time.
• *Speak, Memory* (pp. 9-118)
- Thurs. Nov. 17** • *Speak, Memory* (pp. 119-213)

Week 13: Joseph Brodsky

- Tues. Nov. 22** The first three waves.
• finish *Speak, Memory* (pp. 214-310)
• Selected poems by Brodsky

Week 14: Brodsky

- Tues. Nov. 29** The dream of world culture—and the end of an era?
• *Watermark* (pp. 3-135)
- Thurs. Dec. 1** • “A Guide to a Renamed City” (pp. 69-94); “In a Room and a Half” (pp. 447-501); “The Condition We Call Exile” (pp. 22-43)
• Selected poems
• Moodle/screening: Andrei Khrzhanovsky's film *A Room and a Half*

Week 15: Conclusions

- Tues. Dec. 6** The end of the émigré era, or a new culture of hyphenated identities?
• Sebald, *The Emigrants* (pp. 3-116)
- Thurs. Dec. 8** • *The Emigrants* (pp. 117-237)
- Fri. Dec. 9** **Final paper due via email by 6pm**
- Fri. Dec. 16** **Take-home final exam (unless waived) due via email by 6pm**