

IRE, IRONY, IDEOLOGY: SATIRE AND HUMOUR IN RUSSIAN CULTURE

This course examines the production and reception of satire and other forms of humour in Russia from the beginning of the imperial period to the present, with an emphasis on the twentieth century. Additionally, it provides an introduction to major theories of humour, and their applicability in Russian cultural studies.

A theme common to all the periods to be considered is the tension between a more or less “organic” impulse towards satirical expression on the part of artists and the public, on one hand, and the various institutions dedicated to controlling, suppressing, or eradicating such expression, on the other. Textual production and consumption in Russia was dominated until the eighteenth century by the church, whose view of the comic mode was summed up in the phrase *smekh i grekh* (laughter and sin). With the secularization of Russian letters, authors began to produce satirical and other comic texts, drawing both on native folk traditions and short, humorous genres imported from Europe.

The place of the satirical in Soviet culture—initially celebrated as a potential “weapon” to be mobilized in the service of the Revolution—was rethought during the Cultural Revolution of the late 1920s and early 1930s, and with the canonization of socialist-realist aesthetics in 1934, it entered a new phase of development that emphasized different types of (and targets for) humour. The comic underwent further transformations in subsequent periods of Russian cultural history: the relatively liberal post-Stalinist Thaw; the so-called Age of Stagnation under Brezhnev; the compensatory discursive free-for-all of perestroika; and the nascent market conditions since 1992. We will examine texts from all of these periods, with an eye to how the combination of various media and the comic mode has been used as a vehicle for artistic engagement with the underlying tropes, values, and conflicts of Russian society.

PRELIMINARY READING

- Bergson, Henri. *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. 1900. Trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell. Copenhagen: Green Integer, 1999.
- Bulgakov, Mikhail. *The Master and Margarita*.
- Chapple, Richard L. *Soviet Satire of the Twenties*. Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1980.
- Douglas, Mary. “Jokes.” *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*. Ed. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson. Berkeley: U of California P, 1991. 291-310.
- Erofeev, Venedikt. *Moscow-Petushki*.
- Gogol’, Nikolai. ‘The Nose’, ‘Nevsky Avenue’ and other Petersburg tales.
- Il’f and Petrov. *The Twelve Chairs*.
- Koestler, Arthur. *The Act of Creation*. Chapter One, ‘The Jester’. London: Arkana, 1989.
- Milne, Lesley, ed. *Reflective Laughter: Aspects of Humour in Russian Culture*. London: Anthem Press, 2004.
- Ryan-Hayes, Karen L. *Contemporary Russian Satire: A Genre Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Siniavski, Andrei. “The Joke Inside the Joke.” *Sintaksis* 1978.
- Tucker, Janet G., ed. *Against the Grain : Parody, Satire, and Intertextuality in Russian Literature*. Bloomington, Ind: Slavica, 2002.
- Vishevsky, Anatoly. *Soviet Literary Culture in the 1970s: The Politics of Irony*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1993.

Title: Ire, Irony, Ideology: Satire and Humour in Russian Culture

Course Code:

Course-unit value: 0.5cu

Availability: Taught in either Term 1 or Term 2

Open to: MA in Russian Studies, MA in Russian East European Literature and Culture, MA in Gender Studies, MA in Comparative Literature, MRes, other MA degree programmes, subject to requirements

Prerequisite: Knowledge of Russian is NOT required

Course leader: Dr Seth Graham

Aims:

1. To survey the modes of satire and humour as manifested in Russian literature, film, folklore, and other genres from the beginning of the imperial age (16th c.) to the present.
2. To provide an introduction to general theories of humour and satire.

Objectives: By the end of the course, you will have acquired:

1. Knowledge of major satirical and humorous verbal and visual texts in Russia.
 2. An understanding of the major theoretical debates within humour studies.
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<u>Teaching & Learning Methods:</u>	<u>Number of Hours:</u>
Seminars	12
Lectures	5
Student presentations	3
Private Study	100

Assessment:

Assessment is based on **one coursework essay of approximately 5000 words**. Late submission is penalised according to the rules set out in the MA Handbook. The essay is double-marked and examined externally. Feedback forms with tutor's comments are returned to students without marks; the marks are released after they are confirmed at the MA Examination Board, held at the end of the academic year.