

ES/RU 216: Nature in Russian Culture

Winter 2017

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7 pm]

Office hours: Mon & Thurs 1 - 3 and by
appointment [make an appointment using
BatesReach]

*Nature is not what you think her to be –
neither blind nor a soulless veil – to her
belong both spirit and what is free, both
love, and a tongue to speak.*

Fedor Tiutchev (1836)

*We live in a world of wonders created...by that consummate
revolutionary and wonder-worker: human reason. In
transforming nature, man transforms himself.*

Maksim Gorky (1935)

*The great riddle of our country is this: how can a place
with such extraordinary natural wealth be so poor?*

[said by a geologist in the central Urals, May 2003]

The vast Eurasian empire we know as Russia encompasses a dizzying number of different landscapes, peoples, climates and cultures. This course asks you to reflect on relationships between environment and culture, examining a broad array of places, historical moments and communities in the process. We consider politics, aesthetics, civil rights and civic life, religious traditions, patterns of land ownership, class, gender and technology – all of which inflect the complexity of relationships between humans and the more-than-human world. The material also addresses the revolutionary changes and violent transformations of the Soviet era, and contemporary legacies of state-enforced displacement and development. While the course focuses on Russia (the Russian Empire; the Soviet Union; post-Soviet Eurasia), such questions may pertain to many societies, and the ways we go about considering them will help you think about other places as well.

Course Objectives

- to introduce students to key aspects of Russian geography, culture and environmental history
- to emphasize the diversity and plurality of cultures in Russia, the USSR and post-Soviet Eurasia
- to consider how creative artists, writers and film makers build on and challenge cultural traditions
- to question how art and culture “matter” as we think about places that nurture us and environmental problems that challenge us
- to increase students’ skills in evaluating and interpreting visual and textual sources

Class Assignments

Attendance, engagement, Lyceum posts	15%
Small group presentations, one 5-minute and one 10-minute	10% and 20%
Two short, focused analytical papers, 3-pp each	15% each
One 8 – 10 pp. paper that builds on material covered in the course	25%

Detailed Assignments:

Attendance, engagement, Lyceum posts

I will regularly ask you to post on questions about the reading on Lyceum; I want us to practice *asking both focused and bigger questions* about the materials we engage with. *What questions does the material raise?* You must post at least five times before February break and three times afterward.

Small group presentation #1

Each student works with two other students on one of the following five-minute presentations:
10%

- small group presentations of reading: assigned readings that the whole class reads an *excerpt* from, small group reads entire piece and presents to the class (5 minute presentation). Emphasis on precision and clarity of overview, plus relevance to the themes of the class. [noted in syllabus as SGR]
- small group presentations of relevant environmental contexts/concerns (5 minutes). Emphasis on precision and clarity of overview, plus relevance to the themes of the class. [noted in syllabus as REC]

Small group presentation #2

Each student works with a small group (3 students) to do one ten-minute presentations on an artist or film: 20%

- Pre-revolutionary landscape: Feb. 2 [4 groups]
- Soviet landscape: Feb. 28 [4]
- Interpretations of the film *Stalker*: March 7 [3 groups]

Focused analytical papers (3-pp), one focusing on a text & one a film or painting by an artist. Due February 3 and March 10.

Final 8 – 10 pp. paper that builds on/extends something we talk about in class. Your topic/focus could be an artist, a piece of writing, a particular place/landscape, or a broader question that has arisen in our reading and discussion. Your paper must include both close analysis (of visual and/or textual material); a discussion of the natural/environmental context; and an explicit framing of the question you're raising. I will ask you to submit potential topics to me by March 17, with a paragraph of explanation about what you want to write on; a preliminary list of relevant passages or materials from the course; and a brief bibliography of 2 - 3 additional sources. The paper itself is due April 12, in lieu of a final exam.

Required Texts

The following are available for purchase through the Bates bookstore, and on reserve in Ladd Library. All additional readings will be made available through the course Lyceum page.
Josephson et al, *An Environmental History of Russia* Cambridge U. Press 0521689724

Classroom etiquette

- *I look forward to learning from you, to hearing your thoughts and questions about readings and lectures. You will learn not just from me or from the readings, but from each other. In order for that to happen, I expect you to attend all classes, to be respectful and attentive and good-humored. If you feel overwhelmed at any point – by this class or other life work – please come see me. Unexplained absences will raise concerns, and will result in a lower participation grade.*
- *Please try to leave the classroom as little as possible during class – coming and going is distracting both to me and to other students.*
- *Please do not use cell phones or computers during the class. It is distracting to me, to your fellow students, and to you as well. It's important for all of us that you be present to the work we do together in class. If you need to use a computer for note-taking, please talk with me and we'll figure something out.*

Accommodation. Bates welcomes students with disabilities and values their diverse experiences and perspectives. If you wish to request accommodations you should contact Abigail Nelson, Assistant Dean of Accessible Education and Student Support. E-mail accessibility@bates.edu, call 207-786-6222, or visit Lane Hall 101 to schedule an initial appointment. Please feel free to speak with me after class or during office hours if you have a disability that may affect your work in this course.

Students found guilty of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will fail the course. I want *your* work, *your* thoughts, *your* contributions to this class. If you find it difficult to complete particular assignments, come talk to me. The College's academic honesty policy can be found on line at <http://www.bates.edu/student-affairs/student-conduct/academic-integrity-policy/>

**** **Schedule of readings, topics, films [subject to change! I'll keep you posted]**

Geographies & Definitions: *Nature – Culture - Russia*

Tuesday Jan. 10

- Russian Alphabet: Sochi Olympics Opening Ceremony
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFvJ6ftZDzQ>
- Pollution devastating industrial Russian city” BBC report Dec. 8, 2016
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38247455>

Thursday Jan. 12

What does it mean to bring environment, literature and culture together? What might environmental reading involve in a Russian context?

- Varlaam Shalamov, “Lend-Lease”
- Douglas Weiner essay, “The Predatory Tribute-taking state: A Framework for Understanding Russian Environmental History,” Burke and Pomeranz, *The Environment and World History*
- Cameron Johnson, “The Project Helping Russian Reporters Speak out about Environmental Abuse” *The Guardian*, December 2015.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/04/russia-environment-reporters-paris-climate-talks>

Landscapes and Identities: The Forest

Jan. 17

REC: *Russia's European Forest – general information*

Josephson *et al.*, *An Environmental History of Russia*, pp. 23 – 38

Traditional folk tales: Prince Ivan and the Grey Wolf, Vasilisa the Beautiful, Ivanko the Bear's Son

Linda Ivanits, "Spirits of the Forest, Water and Fields," *Russian Folk Belief*, pp. 64 – 70

Robin Milner-Gulland, "Wooden Russia," *The Russians*, pp. 28 - 36

Jan. 19

Ivan Turgenev, "The Loner"

Vladimir Korolenko, "The Murmuring Forest"

excerpt from Costlow, *Heart-Pine Russia* selected paintings by Ivan Shishkin and Ilya Repin

Jan. 24

REC: *Urban forests and green space in Russia*

Iurii Norstein, "Hedgehog in a Fog"

Catherine Cheremeteff Jones, "Autumn and Mushroom Hunting," *A Year of Russian Feasts*

"Hunting season: a photographer goes looking for mushrooms in the Russian forest"

<http://calvertjournal.com/photography/show/3074/mushroom-picking-russian-woodland>)

stories and clips about Khimki Forest, Moscow

Jan. 26

REC: *forest fires & climate change* overview re:

climate change in Russia. Reading TBA

"Russian forest fires leave dozens dead," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sYwstmcU_dY

Tom Newlin, "Thoughts on a Road Not Taken"

Petr Aleshkovsky, *Life of Ferrett* (excerpts)

Agrarian Traditions/The peasantry

REC: *Climate, soil and agriculture in European Russia*

Jan. 31 *An Environmental History of Russia*, pp. 38 – 49.

Ivan Bunin, "The Mowers"

Fedor Dostoevsky, "The Peasant Marei"

Alexander Engelgardt, *Letters from the Country* (excerpt)

Feb. 2

Dmitrii Sarabianov, *Russian Art: From Neo-Classicism to the Avant-Garde* (excerpt)

Chris Ely, *This Meager Nature* (excerpt)

small group presentations on 19th century landscape artists: Levitan, Shishkin, Kuindzhi, Kandinsky

Feb. 3 First 3-pp paper due.

Feb. 7

REC: *Siberian Rivers*

Valentin Rasputin, *Farewell to Matyora* (excerpts)

Larisa Shepitko and Elem Klimov, *Farewell* (Film, 1983; clips)

An Environmental History of Russia, pp. 162 - 172

Feb. 9

SGR: Judith Pallott, "Meeting Anna Petrovna," Russia's *Unknown Agriculture*, pp. 1 – 16.

Gennadii Sidorov, "Old Women" (Film, 2003) selected

short photographic essays from Calvert journal

Soviet Modernization

Feb. 14

REC: *Minerals and mining in the Ural Mountains (where is Magnitogorsk!?)*

An Environmental History of Russia, pp. 71 – 86

Pieter Jan Smit, *Magnitogorsk* (1996)

Laura Henry and Vladimir Douhovnikoff, "Environmental Issues in Russia," *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 2008, pp. 438 – 442.

Feb. 16

REC: *Climate and Soil of Ukraine*

Oleksandr Dovzhenko, *Earth* (Film, 1930)

Dziga Vertov, *Enthusiasm: Symphony of the Donbass* (Film, 1931; clips)

Nicholas Werth, "Food Shortages, Hunger and Famine in the USSR, 1928-1933" *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies*

FEBRUARY BREAK

Feb. 28

Mark Bassin, "The Greening of Utopia: Nature, Social Vision, and Landscape Art in Stalinist Russia" small group presentations on individual artists: Goncharova, Deineka, Gerasimov, Plastov

March 2

Andrei Tarkovsky, *Stalker*

Geoff Dyer, "Danger! High-radiation arthouse!" *The Guardian*, Feb. 5, 2009

March 7 *Stalker* continued understanding and interpreting the film: small group presentations

March 10 Second 3-pp paper due.

Spaces of Resistance and Resilience (Russia and beyond)

March 9

Russia's *zapovedniks*: *An Environmental History of Russia*, pp. 56-60, 172-176

Douglas Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom* (excerpts)

Fred Strebreg, "Defending Russian Wilderness"

<http://environment.yale.edu/magazine/fall2010/print/defending-russian-wilderness>

“Gazprom, Rosneft and other Russian oil majors to extract hydrocarbons inside protected areas”
http://www.greenpeace.org/russia/en/news/25-03-2014_Protected_Areas_Oil/

March 14

Peter Thomson, *Sacred Sea: A Journey to Baikal*

March 16

REC: update on Baikal – Putin, NGO's, Climate Change
Thomson, *Sacred Sea: A Journey to Baikal*

March 17 – proposal for final essay due.

March 21

This week we will have an “exchange” with ENVR 203: students from that class will come to our Thursday class to discuss ongoing changes in the arctic climate, and students from our class will go to their class to talk about Rytkheu’s novel and its depiction of community, environment and resilience. Our aim is to create a space for multi-faceted conversation about changes in the physical environment, and how the communities described in Rykheu's novel might respond.
REC: Russian Indigenous Peoples of Siberia and the Far North – geographic and cultural map
Iurii Rytkheu, *Dream in Polar Fog*

March 23

Rytkheu, *Dream in Polar Fog*
Frederic Tonolli, *Children of the Whales* (documentary, 2007)

March 28

REC: Radiation Disasters in the Soviet Union before Chernobyl
Irina Polyanskaya “The Clean Zone,” Gessen, ed., *Half a Revolution: Contemporary Fiction by Russian Women*
Magdalena Stawkowski, “I am a Radioactive Mutant,” *American Ethnologist*, 2016.
Laura Henry and Vladimir Douhovnikoff, “Environmental Issues in Russia,” pp. 447-448. selected poetry by Olzhas Suleimenov

Environmentalism, national identity, eco-nationalism

March 30

Late-Soviet environmentalism and eco-nationalism; *An Environmental History of Russia*, pp. 274 – 284.

The Babushkas of Chernobyl (documentary, 2016)

Maria Sonevytsky and Adrian Ivakhiv, “Late Soviet Discourses of Nature and the Natural Musical Avtentyka, Native Faith, and “Cultural Ecology” after Chornobyl,” in *Current Directions in Ecomusicology*

April 6

Laura Henry and Vladimir Douhovnikoff, ““Environmental Issues in Russia,” pp. 448 - 451 (“Russian Citizens and the Environment”)

Svetlana Samsonova, “Moscow’s Protected Landscapes”

<http://www.thepolisblog.org/2013/07/moscow-nature-reserves.html> Gazprom & Petersburg

<http://calvertjournal.com/articles/show/3577/zaryadye-park-wild-urbanism-moscow-protest>

Nature – Culture – Russia: what have we learned?

April 8

Final essay due April 12. There will be no exam for this class.