## Syllabus, English 361-001 (Fall 2017)

**CONTINENTAL FICTION IN TRANSLATION  
CHEKHOV TO CAMUS (1880-1950)**

Tu, Th 10:30-11:45, Robinson A349

## Instructor: John Foster Office: Robinson A426

E-Mail: jfoster@gmu.edu Hours: Tu, Th 3:00-4:30,

Phone: 703/993-1160 (during business hours) and by appointment.

**Required Books** (listed in chronological order, by date of publication. Notice that both Proust’s and Kafka’s novels originated before people had experienced the full impact of World War I):

1881 Giovanni Verga, I MALAVOGLIA: THE HOUSE BY THE MEDLAR TREE (Dedalus).

1890s Anton Chekhov, LADY WITH THE LITTLE DOG AND OTHER STORIES (Penguin).

1906 Robert Musil, THE CONFUSIONS OF YOUNG TORLESS (Penguin).

1919 Marcel Proust, WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE (Modern Library; based on earlier drafts written from 1907 to 1914).

1921 Evgeny Zamiatin, WE (Penguin).

1925 Franz Kafka, THE TRIAL (Schocken, written 1914-15). Breon Mitchell translation!

1936 Vladimir Nabokov, DESPAIR (Vintage, 1965 English revision of the Russian original).

1939 Marguerite Yourcenar, COUP DE GRÂCE (Farrar, Straus & Giroux).

1947 Albert Camus, THE PLAGUE (Vintage).

**Course Objectives:**

1. To read a selection of the best fiction from Western Europe and Russia between 1880 and 1950, using works translated from French, German, Italian, and Russian. As time permits, we shall view selections from films and graphic novel versions of several of the works.

2. To understand the main trends in fiction at this crisis-torn but creative period in Western lit­erature. We start with Chekhov and Verga, who exemplify the realism and naturalism typical of fiction written in the late 19th century. The middle sections of the course turn to the two waves of innov­ation that turned against these trends. First comes the modernist fiction of Musil and Proust, which looked inward to explore deeper psychological issues; then comes the experi­mental work of Nabokov and Kafka that sought to remake the experience of reading. The course ends with three writers who responded to period’s historical crises: Zamiatin and the aftermath of the Russian revolu­tion, Camus and the civilian experience of World War II, and Yourcenar as a pioneering female writer who dealt with similar crises.

3. To sharpen your skills as critical readers through discussions, a series of exercises, a course paper, and a final exam. In running from 1880 to 1950, this course begins where ENGH 360, "Continental Fiction from Goethe to Tolstoy," ended last spring. I plan to follow this course with ENGH 362, "Global Fiction since 1950,” to be given in 2018-19.

**Course Requirements:**

1. Class Citizenship: Regular attendance, participation in class discussions, and observance of the George Mason Honor Code (including no plagiarism). Quality of discussion and/or evidence of steady improvement will be factors in deciding close calls on the final grade. See page 4 of this syllabus for more details on grading.

2. Essay: One course paper, 2500 words long (8 to 10 pages), due as an e-mail attachment by Sunday, December 6. This should be an essay (not a research paper) on one or several novels from the course. More details and some sample topics will be available later. Counts 40%.

You are welcome to email me about paper topics, with questions on the reading, and so on.

3. Short Pieces of Writing: Two interpretation papers on Proust and Kafka, and two com­parison/contrast exercises, one on Chekhov and Verga and the other on Nabokov and Musil. This work, to be written out of class, offers feedback on your writing before the course essay and the final; it also replaces the midterm exam. You will submit this work as online attachments.

These four items appear IN CAPITALS on the course schedule at the times when they are due. They count 40%: the interpretation papers 1/8 each; the exercises 7½% each (3/5 as much).

4. Final Exam: A 2 1/2-hour final exam from 10:30 am to 1:00 pm on Tuesday, December 19. It will consist of brief IDs, a question on the novels in Unit IV, a passage for interpretation, and one essay question from a list given out on December 3. The essay question can be written as a take-home essay and handed in at the start of the exam. Counts 30%. 7

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**SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND EXERCISES:**

Please bring the assigned book to class in case we need to look at specific passages.

# UNIT I – PRELUDE TO MODERN FICTION

Naturalism and Realism (Compare to Hardy and Dreiser)

## Week I: Tu, Aug 29 Introductory Class: “A Map of Modern Fiction.”

Th, Aug 31 Chekhov: “The Lady with the Little Dog,” 223-40.

Week II: Tu, Sept 5 Verga, I Malavoglia: 1-85 (Ch. 1-7). Last Day to Add.

Th, Sept 7 Verga: 86-151 (Ch. 8-10).

Week III: Tu, Sept 12 Verga: 152-246. (Ch. 11-15). Last Day to Drop, 33% penalty.

Th, Sept 14 Chekhov: “In the Ravine,” 241-83.

Sun, Sept 17 EXERCISE ON CHEKHOV AND VERGA (due as an email attachment).

**UNIT II – MODERNISM COMES OF AGE**

The Inward Turn—Individuality, Psychology, Art (Compare to Henry James and Woolf)

Week IV: Tu, Sept 19 Proust, Within a Budding Grove: Paris and Gilberte, 79 (from “When New Year's Day came”) to the end of 121.

Th. Sept 21 Proust: Seaside at Balbec, 325 (from “I found my grandmother”) to 387 (to "the coolness of her soft palpitation")

Week V: Tu, Sept 26 Proust: Albertine and Elstir, 502-82 (from “That day, as for some days past” to “the little band to whom I should be introduced by him.”)

Th, Sept 28 Musil: 3-67 (to “crept back to the dormitory “).

Fr, Sept 29 Last Day to Drop, 67% penalty

Week VI: Mon, Oct 2 Selective Withdrawal Period Begins (runs until F Oct 30)

Tu, Oct 3 Musil: 67-160.

Th, Oct 5 Proust: Elstir and the band of girls, 582-640 (from “I paced up and down” to “pull a string or two if she’s to get through”)

Su, Oct 8 EXERCISE ON PROUST (due as an email attachment).

Week VII: Tu, Oct 10 NO CLASS: Columbus Day Weekend; Monday classes meet this day.

Th, Oct 12 Proust: Albertine again, 641-730 (from "I returned to the hotel" to the end of the volume.

**UNIT III – EXPERIMENTAL FICTION**

Remaking Reading—Parody, Surreal Fantasy, Indeterminacy.

(Compare to Joyce and Faulkner)

Week VIII: Tu, Oct 17 Nabokov: Despair, 3-129 (Ch. 1-7).

Th, Oct 19 Nabokov, 131-212 (Ch. 8-11).

Week IX: Tu, Oct 24 Kafka: The Trial: 3-79 + Fragment: “B’s Friend,” 235-43.

Th, Oct 26 Kafka, 80-139 (to “to devote himself totally to his case for a while.”) + Fragments: “Public Prosecutor,” “To Elsa,” and “Struggle with the Vice President,” 244-58.

Su, Oct 29 EXERCISE ON MUSIL AND NABOKOV (due as an email attachment).

Week X: Tu, Oct 31 Kafka, 139-198 + Fragment: “The Building,” 259-62.

Th, Nov 2 Kafka, 199-231 + Fragment: “Journey to His Mother,” 263-66 and “Publisher’s Note” and “Translator’s Preface,” vii-xxvi.

# UNIT IV – CRISIS FICTION

# Witnesses to Revolution, Dictatorship, and Total War

# (Compare to Orwell and Hemingway)

Week XI: Tu, Nov 7 Zamiatin: We, 3-82.

Th, Nov 9 Zamiatin, 83-134.

Sun, Nov 12 EXERCISE ON KAFKA (due as an email attachment).

Week XII: Tu, Nov 14 Zamiatin: 135-223.

Th, Nov 16 Camus, The Plague: 1-63 (Part I).

Week XIII: Tu, Nov 21 Camus, 67-164 (Part II).

Th, Nov 23 NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY.

Week XIV: Tu, Nov 28 Camus, 167-265 (Parts III-IV).

Th, Nov 30 Camus, 269-308 (Part V).

Sun, Dec 3 COURSE PAPER (due as an email attachment).

Week XV: Tu, Dec 5 Yourcenar: Coup de Grâce, 3-98.

Th, Dec 7 Yourcenar, 99-151. Material for the Final Exam. Course Rating.

Week XVI: Tu, Dec 19 FINAL EXAM, 10:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. (essay question may be treated as a take-home assignment and handed in as an email attachment)

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**STATEMENT ON PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual infor­mation from another per­son without giving that person credit. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intel­lectual theft and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting.

Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical cita­tion, foot­notes, or endnotes. A simple listing of books and articles at the end of a paper is not enough. I will pro­vide more guidance on documenta­tion in the assign­ment sheet for the course paper.

With reference to this class, you may certainly talk about the readings with other students. The orig­inal readers of these books often engaged in discussions of this kind, given the "newness" of their con­tent or style. In your written work, however, the ideas, organiza­tion, and language must be your own.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Students with a disability that needs an academic accom­modation should see me and must also con­tact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), which makes formal arrangements for all such accom­modations. ODS is located in Student Union I (Phone 703-993-2474; website: http://ods.gmu.edu).

**GMU Email Accounts**

Students must use their Mason email accounts to receive important University information, in­cluding messages related to this class. See http://masonlife.gmu.edu for more information.

**The Numerical Grading System**

I use number grades in evaluating student work, but the numbers are easily converted to the letter grades used on Mason transcripts; i. e., A = 96, B = 84, C = 72; or A- = 92, B+ = 88, B- = 80, etc. Generally speaking, the numbers correspond to the following levels of achievement, but I normally add comments in the margins and at the end of the assignment that respond in more detail to the specific piece of work.

========================== A level ==================================

99 = Outstanding: well-argued and thorough, with original insights.

96 = Exceptional command of the topic.

92 = Significance of topic discussed so as to illuminate the question very effectively.

========================== B level ==================================

88 = Discussion is well-managed, but could be more probing, wide-ranging, or convincing.

84 = Shows good insight, but the discussion is at times overly general, and/or relies too heavily on material presented in-class discussion.

80 = The topic chosen is suggestive, but the discussion lacks a sustained, compelling thesis.

========================== C level ==================================

76 = Has good insights, but the discussion has some errors of fact or interpretation.

72 = Has good insights, but the thesis is weak and there may also be errors of fact or interpretation.

68 = Shows some insight into the topic, but the thesis is debatable and there are major errors of fact or interpretation.

=========================== D level and Failing ==========================

Lower number grades are reserved for major failures in understanding and execution and may also be used to award partial credit (Generally only used for in-class work).

**Other Useful Campus Resources**

WRITING CENTER: A114 Robinson Hall -- (703) 993-1200 -- http://writingcenter.gmu.edu. Consult this website for other locations for writing assistance.

UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES: “Ask a Librarian” -- http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html

CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services): (703) 993-2380 -- http://caps.gmu.edu

UNIVERSITY POLICIES: The University Catalog, http://catalog.gmu.edu, is the central resource for university poli­cies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are available at http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.