

Horror, Laughter, Fear, Rage: Emotions in Literature and Culture

Term: Winter 2025

Time: TBA

Instructor: Valentina Apresyan

Room:

Office hours: by appointment

Office: TBA

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Course Overview

What makes us laugh when we read fiction? What makes us cry? What scares us? This course is about how stories move us – how they show emotion, and how they make us feel it. In this course, we will explore how literature both depicts emotional experiences and evokes emotions in the reader. We will investigate how the literary, psychological, and stylistic techniques writers use to portray emotions, and the cognitive and narrative mechanisms by which fear, shame, joy, nostalgia, anger, and other emotions are transferred to the audience.

Through close readings of Russian short stories ranging from Tolstoy, Gogol and Chekhov to Kharms, Bulgakov, Shalamov and Petrushevskaya, we will examine how stories trigger responses such as laughter, fear, or compassion. We will explore distinctions between described emotion (what characters feel) and evoked emotion (what readers feel), and assess what makes certain emotions more difficult to convey or induce. We will also consider how genre, authorship, and style shape emotional impact – how absurdism, realism, or horror each activate distinct affective mechanisms, and how different writers show different aspects of emotions.

Apart from fiction, the course includes excerpts of relevant works on literary theory, cognitive poetics, and psychology.

By the end of the course, you will have...

- Analyzed emotion representation and evocation in classical Russian short stories of the 19th – 20th centuries.
- Learned to identify specific emotional cues and narrative strategies (e.g., incongruity, deflation, defamiliarization, emotional mirroring).
- Practiced analytical, comparative, and creative techniques to reflect on emotional engagement in literature.

Teaching methods:

The course format incorporates close reading of short stories, discussions of literary and psychological research, practical exercises on text analysis, creative assignments, and either a research paper or a creative project in the form of a short story.

Expectations and norms

Students are expected to attend classes and actively engage in classwork, as well as submit their assignments punctually. The deadline for work submission is before the beginning of the class when a particular assignment is due. Extra credit is not available.

Students are responsible for monitoring their progress in the course and are encouraged to schedule office hour appointments with me to discuss class material and progress.

In the case of inability to attend due to serious reasons, students must inform me in advance to avoid missing classwork.

If students encounter difficulties keeping up with the course or have concerns about any aspect of the class, they are strongly encouraged to discuss the matter with me to prevent major issues from arising. I will be happy to listen, to discuss, to help, and to work together on the best solutions for any class-related matter.

Commitment to an inclusive classroom:

It is important that we create a learning environment that recognizes and celebrates the diversity of thoughts, ideas, backgrounds, and experiences of all students. Healthy debate and discussion is encouraged, including to point out implicit or explicit bias in any of the readings, but bullying and gaslighting will not be tolerated. At all times remember to practice empathy and recognize that we all (myself included) have much to learn from one another.

If you have any concerns about your performance in the class due to circumstances and experiences outside of class, please contact me. If anything was said in class that made you uncomfortable or you have concerns about the classroom atmosphere, please contact me. I will also have a means of providing anonymous feedback, from which I will make general announcements in class as necessary to address the concerns.

Academic honor principle

The faculty, administration, and students of Dartmouth College acknowledge the responsibility to maintain and perpetuate the principle of academic honor, and recognize that any instance of academic dishonesty is considered a violation of the *Academic Honor Principle*. For more information, see <https://policies.dartmouth.edu/policy/academic-honor-policy-undergraduate-students-arts-and-sciences>

Plagiarism is unacceptable. For all written coursework, sources should be cited appropriately, including any online sources. For more information: www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/sources/

For more information and guidance on standards of conduct, see <https://students.dartmouth.edu/community-standards/>

Student accessibility and accommodations

Students requesting disability-related accommodations and services for this course are required to register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS; [Apply for Services webpage](#); student.accessibility.services@dartmouth.edu; 1-603-646-9900) and to request that an accommodation email be sent to me in advance of the need for an accommodation. Then, students should schedule a follow-up meeting with me to determine relevant details such as what role SAS or its [Testing Center](#) may play in accommodation implementation. This process works best for everyone when completed as early in the quarter as possible. If students have questions about whether they are eligible for accommodations or have concerns about the implementation of their accommodations, they should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential.

Religious observances

Dartmouth has a deep commitment to support students' religious observances and diverse faith practices. Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me as soon as possible—before the end of the second week of the term at the latest—to discuss appropriate course adjustments.

Generative Artificial Intelligence

The use of GAI platforms in this class is guided by the same principle as the legitimate use of human input and advice, ensuring that it does not jeopardize the originality of your own work. This means that you can use GAI for tasks such as identifying useful resources, grammar checking, and assistance with translation, if applicable. However, you cannot use AI for generating your own work. If you use a generative AI, you must acknowledge its contribution by providing a clear citation. For example, if you use ChatGPT-4, you must cite ChatGPT-4, along with the date and text of your query. Failure to acknowledge the use of an AI tool for legitimate tasks or using AI to generate your own work, such as a paper, a short story, a creative assignment or its parts, comments for the discussion, or a homework submission, is considered a violation of the Academic Honor Principle.

Approximate schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Reading (fiction)	Assignments / Class work
1	Jan 5	Intro		Syllabus, course specifics
1	Jan 7	Laughter	Nikolay Gogol, <i>Nose</i> (optional – Saunders, on <i>Nose</i>)	discussion

1	Jan 9	Laughter	Daniil Kharms, <i>Blue notebook #10, Anecdotes from the life of Pushkin, The plummeting old women, The red-haired man</i> (optional – Intro by Yankelevich)	discussion
2	Jan 12	Laughter	Hubbard, <i>Writing humorous fiction</i>	writing practice
2	Jan 14	Fear	Nikolay Gogol, <i>The portrait</i>	discussion
2	Jan 16	Fear	Lyudmila Petrushevskaya, <i>There once lived a woman who tried to kill her neighbor's baby</i>	discussion Discussion 1
3	Jan 19	Fear	Handbook of emotions, on fear (optional Hye-Knudsen et al. <i>First They Scream, Then They Laugh: The Cognitive Intersections of Humor and Fear</i>)	writing practice
3	Jan 21	Grief	Anton Chekhov, <i>Misery</i>	discussion
3	Jan 23	Nostalgia	Vladimir Nabokov, <i>Spring in Fialta</i> (Foster, <i>Recollected emotion in Spring in Fialta</i>)	discussion Discussion 2
4	Jan 26	Nostalgia	Ivan Bunin, <i>In Paris</i>	discussion Creative submission 1
4	Jan 28	Joy	Anton Chekhov, <i>Gooseberries</i>	discussion
4	Jan 30	Joy	Mikhail Bulgakov, <i>Notes of a young doctor</i> (<i>The embroidered towel, The steel windpipe, The star rash</i>)	discussion Discussion 3
5	Feb 2	Joy	Lyudmila Petrushevskaya, <i>Girl Nose</i> , Handbook of emotions, on joy	discussion
5	Feb 4	Anger	<i>Condensed milk, The parcel, Berries</i> (optional Toker, <i>Varlam Shalamov's Condensed milk</i>)	discussion
5	Feb 6	Anger	Handbook of emotions, on anger	writing practice Discussion 4
6	Feb 9	Empathy	Leo Tolstoy, <i>Kholstomer</i> (optional LeBlanc on <i>Kholstomer</i>)	discussion Creative submission 2
6	Feb 11	Empathy	Varlam Shalamov, <i>Apostle Paul, Dry rations, Domino</i>	discussion
6	Feb 13	Empathy	Handbook of emotions, on empathy (optional Kuiken et al.)	writing practice Discussion 5
7	Feb 16	Detachment	Andrey Platonov, <i>The Potudan river</i> (optional Naiman, on <i>Potudan river</i>)	discussion
7	Feb 18	Love	Leo Tolstoy, <i>The death of Ivan Ilyich</i>	discussion
7	Feb 20	Love	Anton Chekhov, <i>The darling</i> (optional Saunders on <i>The darling</i>)	discussion Discussion 6
8	Feb 23	Love	Anton Chekhov, <i>Lady with a dog</i> (optional Parts, on Petrushevskaya, Chekhov, Tolstoy)	Creative submission 3
8	Feb 25	Shame	Leo Tolstoy, <i>After the ball</i>	discussion
8	Feb 27	Guilt	Konstantin Paustovsky, <i>The telegram</i> Handbook of emotions, on shame and guilt	discussion
9	March 2	Envy (FOMO)	Anton Chekhov, <i>The grasshopper</i>	discussion Discussion 7
9	March 4	Hope	Anton Chekhov, <i>Student</i>	discussion
9	March 6	Paper presentations		
10	March 9	Discussion of students' short stories		

Grading:

Class participation	20%
Discussions of short stories	21% (3% each)
Creative written submissions	24% (8% each)
Final paper or story	35%

Class participation

Students are expected to actively engage in class discussions, practices, and other activities. Every week we will read several short stories, and you are expected to participate in their discussion in class.

Reading discussions

Students are expected to post their analysis of emotions depicted/evoked in a short story of their choice every week.

Creative submission

A creative assignment – depict or evoke a chosen emotion in one page, and in an additional paragraph comment on the techniques you used.

Final project

For your final project, you may choose between two options – analytical or creative-critical.

Option 1: analytical essay

Length: 12–15 pages

Format: MLA or Chicago style, double-spaced, with references

Write an analysis of one or more short stories (from the syllabus or additional sources) focusing on the strategies the author uses to depict emotional experience and/or evoke emotion in the reader. You may focus on a single emotion (e.g., pity, horror, longing, joy) and trace its construction and effect in different stories or by different authors. You can explore a contrast between emotions and their literary and cognitive mechanisms, e.g. detachment vs. compassion, fear vs. humor. You can consider complex emotional experiences involving more than one emotion – e.g., when a story depicts joy but evokes pity, etc.

Option 2: Creative story + critical reflection

Creative story (5–6 pages)

Critical reflection (5–6 pages)

Write a short story (realist, absurdist, horror, comic, etc.) that centers on a specific emotional effect you wish to depict or evoke – e.g., guilt, compassion, longing, disgust, fear, joy, love, envy. Then write a short reflective essay analyzing your own story through the lens of the course. What emotion were you aiming to create or portray? What specific

strategies did you use? Were you influenced by any literary models? What do you consider successful and where might readers feel differently than intended?

Texts and materials (all readings will be provided on Canvas)

- **Fiction**

- o Kharms, Daniil. *Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings of Daniil Kharms*. Translated by Matvei Yankelevich, Overlook Press / Archipelago Books, 2007.
- o *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol*. Translator(s): Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. Publisher: Vintage Classics, 1998.
- o Bulgakov, Mikhail. *A Country Doctor's Notebook*. Translated by Michael Glenny. London: Harvill Press, 1975.
- o Chekhov, Anton. *The Essential Tales of Chekhov*. Edited by Richard Ford. Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Ecco Press, 2000.
- o *The New Adventures of Helen: Magical Tales by Ludmila Petrushevskaya*. Deep Vellum Publishing, 2021.
- o Shalamov, Varlam. *Kolyma Stories*. Translated by Donald Rayfield, New York Review Books, 2018.
- o Platonov, Andrey. *Soul and Other Stories*, translated by Robert Chandler, Elizabeth Chandler, and Olga Meerson, New York Review Books, 2007, pp. 69–93.
- o *The Golden Rose: Stories of Konstantin Paustovsky*, translated by Michael Duncan, Harvill Press, 1967, pp. 163–177.

- **Psychology**

- o Lewis, Michael, and Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones, editors. *Handbook of Emotions*. Guilford Press, 2000.
- o Kuiken, Don, and Mary Beth Oliver. "Aesthetic Engagement During Moments of Suffering." *Scientific Study of Literature*, vol. 3, no. 2, Dec. 2013, pp. 294–321.
- o Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, Jens, and Mathias Clasen. "Creepiness and the Uncanny." *Style*, vol. 57, no. 3, 2023, pp. 322–349.
- o Hye-Knudsen, Marc, Jens Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, Brian B. Boutwell, and Mathias Clasen. "First They Scream, Then They Laugh: The Cognitive Intersections of Humor and Fear." *Evolutionary Psychology*, vol. 22, no. 2, Apr.–June 2024, pp. 1–20.
- o Clay, Zanna, and Marco Iacoboni. "Mirroring Fictional Others." *The Aesthetic Mind: Philosophy and Psychology*, edited by Elisabeth Schellekens and Peter Goldie, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 299–329.

- **Literary theory and critical writing**

- o Shklovsky, Viktor. "Art as Device." *Theory of Prose*, translated by Benjamin Sher, Dalkey Archive Press, 1990, pp. 1–14.

- o Saunders, George. *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain: In Which Four Russians Give a Master Class on Writing, Reading, and Life*. Random House, 2021.
- o Parts, Lyudmila, editor. *The Russian Twentieth Century Short Story: A Critical Companion*. Academic Studies Press, 2009.
- o Moser, Charles A., ed. *The Russian Short Story: A Critical History*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983.

Additional readings

- Kuiken, Don, and Mary Beth Oliver. “Aesthetic Engagement During Moments of Suffering.” *Scientific Study of Literature*, vol. 3, no. 2, Dec. 2013, pp. 294–321.
- Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, Jens, and Mathias Clasen. “Creepiness and the Uncanny.” *Style*, vol. 57, no. 3, 2023, pp. 322–349.
- Hye-Knudsen, Marc, Jens Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, Brian B. Boutwell, and Mathias Clasen. “First They Scream, Then They Laugh: The Cognitive Intersections of Humor and Fear.” *Evolutionary Psychology*, vol. 22, no. 2, Apr.–June 2024, pp. 1–20.
- Clay, Zanna, and Marco Iacoboni. “Mirroring Fictional Others.” *The Aesthetic Mind: Philosophy and Psychology*, edited by Elisabeth Schellekens and Peter Goldie, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 299–329.
- LeBlanc, Ronald D. “No More Horsing Around: Sex, Love, and Motherhood in Tolstoi’s *Kholstomer*.” *Slavic Review*, vol. 70, no. 3, Fall 2011, pp. 545–568.
- Nakhimovsky, Alice Stone. *Laughter in the Void: An Introduction to the Writings of Daniil Kharmis and Alexander Vvedenskii*. Wiener Slawistischer Almanach – Sonderbände, vol. 5, Peter Lang, 1982.