



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

Midlife Nabokov - 44842

Last update 27-08-2024

HU Credits: 2

Degree/Cycle: 2nd degree (Master)

Responsible Department: English

Academic year: 0

Semester: 2nd Semester

Teaching Languages: English

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Leona Toker

Coordinator Email: toker@mail.huji.ac.il

Coordinator Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:15-13:15 room 7824

Teaching Staff:

Prof. Leona Toker

Course/Module description:

The course is devoted to a shift of concerns and values that began in Vladimir Nabokov's fiction in the late 1930s. It focuses on the features that replaced the motif of the happiness of freedom that characterized much of his early fiction. Methodologies of close reading will be used to analyze the relationship between his narrative art and the ethical concerns of his fiction up to the late 1950s: though Nabokov refused to put literature at the service of political engagement, the themes and attitudes of his work were, in their own way, responsive to the socio-political realities of the twentieth century.

Course/Module aims:

To relate narratological issues to the ethical attitudes explored in each work.

To enhance the appreciation of the artistic merit and potential effects of literary works that reject "political engagement."

To point to indirect artistic expressions of ideological positions.

To practice methods of close narratological analysis.

To demonstrate the creative potential of multilingualism.

To refute sundry misconceptions about Nabokov's work.

To work towards a theory of narrative ethics.

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

- understand the nature of Nabokov's artistic achievement,
- analyze the structure, the contexts, and the aims of some of Nabokov's major works,
- observe a mid-career shift in the values and the methods of Nabokov's fiction,
- perfect methods of narratological and stylistic analysis,
- be prepared to tackle other texts by Nabokov and his contemporaries,
- be aware of the main trends in Nabokov criticism,

write research papers based on nuanced textual analysis.

Attendance requirements(%):

100

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction: close textual analysis in historical contexts

Course/Module Content:

Selected short stories of Nabokov's early period.

Nabokov's works associated with transition from Russian to English.

Nabokov's dystopian fiction.

Nabokov's novels of the 1950s

Required Reading:

Extracts from Nabokov's autobiography (will be distributed in class)

Short Stories: "Sounds," "Torpid Smoke," "Recruiting", "Cloud, Castle, Lake," "Signs and Symbols"

Novels:

Invitation to a Beheading,

The Real Life of Sebastian Knight,

Bend Sinister,

Lolita,

Invitation to a Beheading,

Additional Reading Material:

Nabokov's other works:

Mary,
King, Queen, Knave, Defense,
Glory,
Despair,
Laughter in the Dark
The Gift,
Strong Opinions,
Pale Fire,
Ada
"The Vane Sisters"
Transparent Things,
Look at the Harlequins!
The Original of Laura

Grading Scheme:

Essay / Project / Final Assignment / Home Exam / Referat 95 %
Active Participation / Team Assignment 5 %

Additional information:

The students must read the assigned materials in advance of the classes devoted to specific works. They must write a short written assignment (about 300 words) on one of the novels or stories and submit it before this work is discussed in class. The feedback on this paper is to be implemented in the final research paper (1200-1500) to be written on another work. Oral presentations in class, with topics chosen in consultation with the teacher, will be welcome.