

SERS0093: Identities in nineteenth-century Russian literature

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The aim of the course is to explore Russian literature and society in the nineteenth century through the prism of questions of identity. Literary, social and gender identities will be examined in order to build a picture of the forces governing Russian society and the ways in which they shape the literature of the period and, conversely, to explore how identity is constructed within a literary text. The course is split into three topics. The depiction of the estates of the realm (sosloviia), such as the gentry, merchants, clergy, is examined in order to develop knowledge of the dynamics of traditional Russian social life beyond the Europeanized capitals, and its role in literature. Questions of narrative voice, technique and structure are addressed in relation to Russian literature's most famous 'types', including the 'superfluous man', the 'poor clerk' and the nihilist. The position of women in Russian society and culture is examined through a comparison of works by women writers with the depiction of women in short works by two of the nineteenth century's most famous authors, Tolstoi and Dostoevskii. The course will be taught over two terms, focusing on three to four main texts for each topic, including some of the most famous works of nineteenth-century Russian literature as well as others you may not have heard of, but which you will hopefully find equally enjoyable and rewarding.

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