The course accompanies the interdisciplinary, all-campus production of Pushkin’s *Boris Godunov*, to be premiered in Berlind theater April 12-15, 2007. A graduate section is available for those able to read primary and secondary materials in Russian, but this undergraduate course has no language (or any other) prerequisites. Guest seminar leaders include Simon Morrison and Chester Dunning.

We open on the history. For censorship reasons, select tsars and crises became privileged material for Russian 19th-c. historical dramatists, especially 1584 to 1613 (the death of Ivan the IV (the Terrible) —> Russia’s inter-dynastic Smuta or “time of troubles,” ending with the election of the first Romanov tsar. Our next focus is Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) and his most famous play (1825), originally called a “Comedy,” later retitled *Boris Godunov*. This play will be read first in its own context and then as part of the modernist Russian theater of Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940), who, together with Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953), planned and then abandoned a production of *Boris Godunov* for the Pushkin Centennial of 1937. We will circle round to the play several times in these accumulating contexts. The final post-production weeks will be devoted to a sampling of “other Boris Godunovs” (opera and film) and to the provocation of politics and history on stage.

In addition to providing literacy for the Berlind production, the course has two larger aims that transcend this one theatrical event. First, we hope to broaden the sense of “what music can do” in live staged drama (that is, neither fused with words as in opera nor floating behind words and events as background “filler”). Second, we aim to correct the idea that good drama must be bad history. By the standards of his time, Pushkin was an exceptionally good historian. He considered himself both the chronicler and the conscience of his people, and he saw no contradiction between these two missions. And like Meyerhold, who was indisputably the most gifted theater director to attempt a staging of the play, Pushkin envisaged a dramatic enactment that would somehow reveal the workings of history as well as the machinations of historical figures and power.

After his repatriation to the USSR, Prokofiev became highly skilled at realizing history musically, with and without literary mediation: the film scores for *Alexander Nevsky* and *Ivan the Terrible Part I*; the opera *War and Peace*. His incidental music for *Boris Godunov*, orchestral and choral, was conceived according to different, more daring principles than those applied either in opera or film.

Meyerhold did not respect all of Pushkin’s guidelines for casting and staging this play. Nor will the 2007 Berlind production follow all surviving hints and memoir testimony on Meyerhold / Prokofiev’s plans for 1937. This is appropriate, for it is in the nature of modernist drama to improvise collectively and create on the spot, taking advantage of available talent, the latest technology and—in the case of this provocative text—the most current Smuta or Time of Trouble.

**Format and requirements of the course:** Seminar. Attendance and participation essential. Each student submits a weekly “response critique” on some aspect of the reading, which will serve as starting point for class discussion. No midterm. Final paper, topic of student’s choice, 10-12 pages.

**Required texts** (Pequod and U-Store)

- A *Boris Godunov Reader* for COM / SLA 335 (available from Pequod) will contain most of the course readings.
Two books should be purchased:


Sequence of topics and readings:

Mon. Feb. 5 ....  Introductions.  The regnant myths:  BG, Pushkin, Meyerhold, Prokofiev, Stalin

Feb. 7 ....  Pretendership and the problems of historical and historical-musical drama

Mon. Feb. 12 ...  **Boris / Dimitry the Pretender in history**:  Basic events

Feb. 14 ...  Russia’s First Civil War (1598-1606):  the durable, subversive, inflammable themes

Mon. Feb. 19 ...  **Pushkin**.  Biography;  historical and dramatic imagination

Feb. 21 ...  Karamzin’s *History* and Pushkin’s *Boris Godunov* (introduction)

Mon. Feb. 26 ...  *Boris Godunov* first reading

Feb. 28 ...  *Boris Godunov* (context in the 1820s)

Mon. Mar. 5 ...  Russian 20th-c. theater:  **Meyerhold** versus Stanislavsky

Mar. 7 ...  Meyerhold in the context of the avant-garde Russian stage, 1920s-30s

Mon. Mar. 12 ...  Meyerhold on BG.  His notes for the production.  Re-reading select scenes.

Mar. 14 ...  Memoirists on Meyerhold’s rehearsals.

*Spring Break  March 19-23*

Mon. Mar. 26 ...  **Prokofiev** as theater/filmstage composer.  BG & Ivan the Terrible  *[Simon Morrison]*

Mar. 28 ...  Prokofiev’s BG score:  music and discussion  *[Simon Morrison]*

Mon. Apr. 2 ...  **The year 1937**:  The Stalinist Pushkin Jubilee (centennial of Pushkin’s death)

Apr. 4 ...  Pushkin’s BG again, select scenes:  the political references and their resonances

Mon. Apr. 9 ...  The *Uncensored Boris Godunov* and its apparatus

Apr. 11 ...  Pushkin as historical dramatist  (select re-reading of Dunning)  *[Chester Dunning]*

*Boris Godunov premiere* at Berlind April 12 – 14;  Symposium on Friday Apr 13

Mon. Apr. 16 ...  The aftermath:  the ends of Meyerhold, Prokofiev

Apr. 18 ...  The legacy:  other *Boris Godunovs*  [staged drama]

Mon. Apr. 23 ...  The legacy:  other *Boris Godunovs*  [opera selections]

Apr. 25 ...  Other *Boris Godunovs*  [film selections]

Mon. Apr. 30 ...  Student group projects / reports

May 2 ...  Student group projects / reports