

**RUSS 347 Late and Post-Soviet Russian Culture — Fall 2021****Prof. Laura Beraha**

688 Sherbrooke West, Room 335

[laura.beraha@mcgill.ca](mailto:laura.beraha@mcgill.ca)Class schedule

T/Th 4:00-5:30 pm

Tuesdays online

Thursdays on campus –

688 Sherbrooke West, Room 495

Office hours

Wednesdays 11:30am—2:00pm (on campus)

Thursdays 7:00-8:00pm (online)

Or by appointment (by email)

Erik Bulatov, *Horizon* (1971-1972)**Course readings and discussions in English****Pre-requisites:** One of the following or its equivalent – RUSS 217, RUSS 218, RUSS 223 or RUSS 224.

Equivalents welcomed from literary studies in other units, departments or universities, in European and/or Russian history.

**Credit weight:** 3 credits**Calendar Overview:** The re-invention of Russian culture in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Featuring Soviet beatniks, dissidents and cultural iconoclasts, covering pop-culture, Pepsi and PR, perestroika, and the encounter with Western postmodernism. In literature, we will be considering the emergence of ‘new’ voices (women’s prose, émigré writers), new or newly rediscovered genres (detective fiction, sci-fi, bard or sung poetry, the essay). In the visual arts, we will look for points of contact, overlap and competition with film, conceptualist or concrete poetry, installations, memes). For over two and a half centuries, Russian literature was seen as the cornerstone of cultural identity and national pride. How does it confront today the challenges of a post-literary age and, tenuously, post-Soviet era?**Course objectives:** Upon completion of this course you should feel confident in your ability to recognise and navigate the key texts, concerns and watchwords of this period, as well as their major Russian representatives.**Course Delivery:** This course has been designated as a hybrid or blended course, with Tuesday classes held online via Zoom and Thursday in-person meetings on campus. Apart from the books available at the LeJames bookstore (see below), all course materials have been posted online, including the shorter required texts, films, film clips and powerpoints that offer previews for and reviews of lectures. The online platform will be MyCourses.

Course content is divided into separate modules organised by author and/or trend. Modules contain reading or screening guides, background readings and powerpoint previews. In the General Course Information module you'll find, besides this Course Outline, topic menus and guidelines for all assignments, as well as a Target Term Schedule.

**MyCourses:** All students registered in this course have automatic access to its MyCourses site. The general address is <http://www.mcgill.ca/mycourses>. I will be updating course materials (shorter texts and background readings, assignment topics, reading guides, film clips, powerpoint previews, etc.) *regularly* throughout the term, so be sure check in good time before *each* class. Class announcements will be posted on a regular basis in the 'Announcements' section of the home page; the site also includes an email function for contacting me, the instructor.

All written assignments are to be submitted via the assignment function. The discussion board will be used for required posts (reading responses); you may also initiate posts to raise questions, follow-up on class discussions and recruit a partner or partners for your Team Presentation.

Finally, online class meetings will be hosted on Zoom, in the top navigation bar of our MyCourses home page.

### **Zoom**

Here's what you will need to do before the start of classes:

- create a basic account by clicking on the following link: <https://mcgill.zoom.us/>. You must sign in with your McGill username/password.
- read this article on [getting started](#). If the link does not work, go to: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362033-Getting-Started-on-Windows-and-Mac>
- you can also check out the McGill-specific tips and guidelines at <https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources/learning-zoom>,
- please note: if for technical reasons (insufficient bandwidth, lack of a microphone or built-in camera) you cannot participate in an online discussion on Zoom, you can always use the chat function to raise a question during our online meetings. Please let me know if you have any concerns in this area.
- the above applies as well to those of you who have privacy concerns

### **Zoom etiquette:**

- use only your official McGill Zoom with your full name.
- if you so choose, you do not need to use your camera over Zoom.
- please mute your microphone off when you are not speaking.
- please use the wave hand signal or the chat to alert me that you have a question or want to make a comment. I will call on you.
- if you do not have a microphone, you can use the chat function to engage with the Zoom conversation. I will happily include chats into the broader discussion.

### **Polling**

We'll be using in-class polling to jump start discussions, compare opinions, gather feedback – in a word, to keep things truly interactive. For on-campus classes you'll need to bring your personal devices (smartphone, tablet or laptop) and make sure they are charged. To participate in polling sessions, you *must* first register for an account by clicking on Register Your Account at [www.mcgill.ca/polling](http://www.mcgill.ca/polling) and log in with your McGill username and password. Follow the prompts to agree to the terms of use and create your account.

For more information, please visit the Getting Started for Students section at [www.mcgill.ca/polling](http://www.mcgill.ca/polling). For any technical problems contact the IT Service Desk: <http://www.mcgill.ca/it/get-started-it/need-help>. If you do not have a phone, tablet, or laptop to use to respond to polling questions, please contact me immediately in order for appropriate arrangements to be made.

To maintain a safe and respectful classroom environment, please ensure that any polling responses you submit are appropriate and relevant to the question asked. Please note that unless the poll is labelled as anonymous, your responses are identifiable to the instructor. Please see the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#).

**Required Texts:** order online at [lejames.ca](http://lejames.ca) using RUSS 347 001 as your search term; pick up at the McGill Bookstore, “Le James,” 680 Sherbrooke West

- Viktor Pelevin, *Omon Ra*, trans. Andrew Bromfield. New York: New Directions, 1998  
<https://lejames.ca/omon-ra>
- Sasha Sokolov, *School for Fools*, trans. Alexander Boguslawski. New York: New York Review of Books, 2015. <https://lejames.ca/school-for-fools>
- Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic: A New Translation*, trans. Olena Bormashenko. Chicago, ILL: Chicago Review Press, 2012. <https://lejames.ca/roadside-picnic>
- Boris Akunin, *The Winter Queen*, trans. Andrew Bromfield. (publication data to follow)

\*\*Please use these editions. We will be aiming for lively and wide-ranging but *informed* discussions of texts, anchored in close readings and *specific* references. To do this we all need to be, literally, on the same page.

All other required texts – this category includes visual works such as paintings and film – have been made available on the MyCourses site for RUSS 347. They range in length from quite short (poems, songs and miniature stories) to medium (regular stories and three novels). The one longer novel (247 pages), *The Winter Queen*, a work of detective fiction, will be exempt from the close reading approach we will be developing all term.

### **Audio-Visual Materials**

- Andrei Zvyagintsev, *The Return* (film, 2003). DVD on Reserve.<sup>1</sup> Watch by or before class on 07 October.
- Andrei Tarkovsky, *Stalker* (film, 1979). Evideo on Reserve. Also available at <https://mcgill.kanopy.com/video/stalker-0>: Watch by or before class on 11 November
- Viktor Ginzburg, *Generation P* (film, 2011 based on Pelevin’s novel of the same title, 1999) DVD on Reserve. Also available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpAdOj1Vo5s>: Watch by or before class on 30 November.

### **Class structure and etiquette:**

Required readings for each class are given in the Target Term Schedule. For each author or text, a Reading Guide will be posted in the relevant Content Units section of our MyCourses site. Questions on the Reading Guides are intended to serve as discussion prompts, to provide food for thought and stimulate class discussion; you should choose one question (the one that most piques your interest or sparks your protest) or devise one of your own choosing and prepare a brief oral response to share, if called upon, in class. In order to promote the habit of close reading, your response (or your question) should be supported by a specific passage and/or motif, plot detail or twist.

Class time will alternate between my presentation of background and literary structures, my modelling for you close readings of specific passages, your questions/responses as described above, and, time permitting, small group discussions on pre-announced topics. You are more than welcome to interrupt with questions and comments of your own, but please allow me the option to either answer on the spot or invite you for further discussion outside of class.

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<sup>1</sup> A DVD has been put on Reserve for this course. I have put in an order for extra copies for you to buy at the LeJames Bookstore, but as this Course Outline was being prepared, have still not had news if they can process a DVD request. If this attempt fails, then the film will be downgraded from a required to an optional text.

**Evaluation scheme (see descriptions by category below)**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Participation / contributions (throughout the term)                               | 10% |
| Short paper (1250 words) due 26 October   | 20% |
| Team presentation and written follow-up (20 min./1750 words) 16 or 18 November    | 30% |
| Reading Responses: (3 x300-350 words) 05 October, 28 October and 25 November)     | 15% |
| Take-home exam, requested for 16 December by 2:00pm; pending University approval. | 25% |

| Grade | Percentages |
|-------|-------------|
| A     | 100% - 85%  |
| A-    | 84% - 80%   |
| B+    | 79% - 75%   |
| B     | 74% - 70%   |
| B-    | 69% - 65%   |
| C+    | 65% - 60%   |
| D     | 54% - 50%   |
| F     | 49% - 0%    |

Note that I also use ‘in-between’ grades, for example A-/B+ to indicate a grade between A- (80%) and B+ (75%) which comes to 77.5%.

**Participation/contributions:** Regular and focused engagement are essential components of this course. Although I will not be taking formal attendance this term, I will be tracking it for my own reference. Instead of assessing you under the usual ‘attendance and participation,’ we will concentrate on your *robust* participation: impromptu questions you would like to raise, either in person on campus or in the Zoom chatroom for online meetings; your participation in class discussions and polling exercises.<sup>2</sup> After each Reading Response forum closes, it will re-open for you to comment on. Be sure to follow Netiquette rules, as suggested in the General Course Information module. These comments will count towards your participation/contribution mark.

There will be an open (no date restrictions) forum on the Discussion Board for your voluntary contributions, such as web discoveries (new online blogs or sites relevant to our course), parallels with other cultures or other approaches in other disciplines (cultural studies, history, etc.)

Note as well that your contributions to the summary and review exercise scheduled for our last class meeting on Tuesday 02 December will also count in your favour. See below for details.

**Short paper:**

(1250 words, 5 pages),\* due 26 October, to be submitted online via the Assignments function on our MyCourses site no later than 11:30pm. Suggested topics will include the analysis of a selected passage, concept, or period theme. You are warmly encouraged to propose a topic of your own choosing, but must get my written approval in advance—my aim here is to ensure that your topic fits the word limits and parameters of our course.

**Reading Responses:**

(3 at 300-350 words apiece), to be posted on the Discussion Board, in three separate forums, closing dates 05 October, 28 October and 25 November, respectively. The posts will be moderated – i.e. subject to my editing and approval before being released for the class as a whole to access. Your response to or reflection on an aspect of a chosen text that has sparked your interest. A strong response will point to a passage or aspect of the text that strikes you challenging, paradoxical or simply overlooked in class discussions; it will explain why the issue or passage seems significant to the development of the broad concepts discussed in class to date and will offer a possible solution or approach to resolving the issue. You may base these responses on the reading or screening guides supplied for each author or text, on issues or aspects suggested by class discussions; you’re also more than welcome to suggest topics

<sup>2</sup>Transcripts from the chatroom will be posted on MyCourses after each class where a substantive exchange occurs. Polls will invite either anonymous or named responses.

\* Based on the standard count of 250 words per page, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font.

of your own. If you are unfamiliar with this kind of assignment and would like to discuss your ideas with me in advance, please do so *at least* one week before your chosen posting date.

**Team presentation and follow-up:** (20 minutes) in-class 16 November and 18 November. Written follow-ups (1750 words\*) to be submitted within 1 week of receipt of my feedback. Sign-up opening and closing dates indicated on the Target Term Schedule. Time and page limits to be confirmed after the end of the add/drop period. To be presented with a partner or partners. Suggested topics will be posted in advance; they will include building on a period theme or concept discussed in class, suggesting parallel texts from works by writers/artists on our reading list, other texts in contemporary Russian or other cultures, other periods in Russian culture. Deadlines for submitting outlines (09 November) and group consultations (10 November) are listed on the Target Term Schedule. You are more than welcome to propose a topic of your own choosing, but you must consult me *in advance* to make sure your topic fits in with the course parameters and the required word count. Evaluation criteria will be indicated on the topics menu and guidelines.

### **Summary and review**

For our last class on Tuesday 02 December you are asked to post your suggestions/requests for which core concepts or trends we should focus on by 8:00 p on Monday 01 December. There will be a dedicated forum on the Discussion Board for this purpose. Participating in this exercise will favourably impact your mark in the participation/contributions category, especially if you indicate in your post why your chosen concept or trend is important to your understanding of our work over the term.

**Final paper (Take-home exam):** (requested for 16 December by 2:00pm, pending approval by the University exam scheduling office; 7 pages Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced, 1750 words).\* Your chance to critically review the term's work – readings, class discussions and, where relevant, presentations and postings by your fellow classmates. Suggested topics, to be posted in advance, will be based on our course's core texts and concepts.

### **Administrative notes:**

- In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.
- In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.
- Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue)
- McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offenses under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures. For more information, see <http://mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest>.
- L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)).
- Since polling records may be used to compute a portion of course grades, **responding as someone other than yourself is considered an academic offense**. During class, possession of more than one response device or

using the credentials of another student will be interpreted as intent to commit an academic offense. Please refer to McGill's policy on Academic Integrity and Code of Conduct.

<http://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/plagiarism>

<http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest>

- Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of [copyright](#) can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.”

**Reference Texts:** available on Reserve, at the Humanities and Social Sciences Library; see the Reserves function in the top navigation bar on MyCourses. Short passages from these reference texts may be assigned on the Reading Guides to be posted in each unit. Otherwise, these texts, or searchable passages from them, are intended to provide you with overviews of the period, as well as a common reference points for presentations and discussion postings.

- Deming Brown, *The Last Years of Soviet Russian Literature: Prose Fiction, 1975-1991*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1993. PG 3098.4 B76 1993
- Boris Noordenbos, *Post-Soviet Literature and the Search for a Russian Identity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- M.N. Lipovetskii, *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos* (Armonk, NY: 1999). PG3098.4 L475 1999.
- Robert Porter, *Russia's Alternative Prose*. Oxford/Providence: Berg 1994. PG 3098.4 P66 1994
- N.N. Schniedman, *Russian Literature 1988-1994: The End of an Era*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1995. PG 3098.4 S47 1995 eBook available at [www.mcgill.ca/library](http://www.mcgill.ca/library)
- N.N. Schniedman, *Russian Literature 1995-2002: On the Threshold of the New Millennium*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2004. eBook available at [www.mcgill.ca/library](http://www.mcgill.ca/library)