



RUSS 347 Late and Post-Soviet Russian Culture — Fall Term 2024

Prof. Laura Beraha

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Office hours

Tuesdays 10:00-11:00 am

Wednesdays 11:30 am-1:00 pm

Or by appointment (set up 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. Equivalent 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 20th and early 21st 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 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.

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.

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

- RUSS 347 Late and Post-Soviet Russian Culture (course pack)
- Viktor Pelevin, *Homo Zapiens*, trans. Andrew Bromfield. New York: Penguin, 2000.
- Sasha Sokolov, *School for Fools*, trans. Alexander Boguslawski. New York: New York Review of Books, 2015.
- Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic: A New Translation*, trans. Olena Bormashenko. Chicago, ILL: Chicago Review Press, 2012.
- Boris Akunin, *The Winter Queen*, trans. Andrew Bromfield. Lymington, Great Britain: Orion Books, 2003.

**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, three short novels) and longer ‘page-turner’ work.

Audio-Visual Materials (available on the MyCourses site for this course)

- Andrei Zvyagintsev, *The Return* (film, 2003). Watch by or before class on 03 October.
- Andrei Tarkovsky, *Stalker* (film, 1979). DVD Watch by or before class on 14 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.

Evaluation scheme (see descriptions by category below)

Participation / contributions (throughout the term)	10%
Short papers (2 x 1250 words) due 01 October and 19 November	40%
Reading Responses: (2 x 350-400 words) by 19 September and 31 October	20%
Summary exercise (in class) 03 December	05%

Take-home exam, requested for 19 December at 2:00pm; pending University approval.	25%
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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%.

Attendance and participation: Regular attendance and timely submission of assignments are essential not only to your success in this course, but to our group dynamic as a whole. After the drop/add period, unexcused absences (without a doctor's note or letter explaining a family emergency, for example), will count against you: half a grade point will be deducted for every two unexcused absences within the attendance and participation category. Out of courtesy to your fellow students (and to me!) late arrivals cannot be tolerated. Extensions on assignments will not be granted unless my written permission is requested in advance. Your participation will also be evaluated on the basis of your thoughtful and well-prepared contributions to class discussions. You can earn bonus points in this area by offering brief but substantive responses to your fellow students' Reading Response postings on the Discussion board of our MyCourses site, initiating your own postings not subject to grading (web discoveries, informal reflections on or comparisons with the texts discussed in class).

Short papers:

(2 x 1250 words, 5 pages),* due 01 October and 19 November, to be submitted online via the Assignments function on our MyCourses site no later than 11:59 pm. 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:

(2 at 350-400 words apiece), to be posted on the Discussion Board, in two separate forums, closing dates 19 September and 31 October, 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 heartily encouraged to suggest topics 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.

Summary and review

For our last class on Tuesday 03 December you are asked to post your suggestions/requests for which core concepts or trends we should focus on by 8:00 p on Sunday 01 December. There will be a dedicated forum on the Discussion Board for this purpose. Indicate in your post why your chosen concept or trend is important to your understanding of our work over the term; invite feedback from the class. Our in-class discussion will be based on your suggestions, which I will curate to allow for time limitations.

Final paper (Take-home exam): (requested for Thursday 19 November by 2:00pm, pending approval by the University exam scheduling office; 7 pages / 1750 words).* Your chance to critically review the term's work –

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

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/).
- **GPT Disclosure Agreement:** This class maintains a policy that you may use AI writing tools to assist you in the writing process but that all artificially generated text needs to be explicitly labeled. In handing in your assignment, you agree to disclose the extent to which you used #chatGPT or other AI writing tools in your assignment. All text written by AI must be quoted with the source of the model in parentheses (chatGPT). At the end of your paper please include the following statement. Failure to adequately disclose your AI use will result in a 0 for the assignment. "This paper used (did not use) AI for the following components of the writing process:" Choose none to three of the following: brainstorming, editing, sentence generation.

Reference Texts: available on Reserve, at the Humanities and Social Sciences Library; see the Reserves function in the top navigation bar on MyCourses. 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 discussion postings and written assignments.

- E.A. Dobrenko and M.N. Lipovetsky, *Russian Literature Since 1991*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2015.
- E.A. Dobrenko and Marina Balina, *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2011. PG3017 C36 2011.
- Boris Noordenbos, *Post-Soviet Literature and the Search for a Russian Identity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

TARGET TERM SCHEDULE

This schedule has been designated as a *target* term schedule. Adjustments may well be made, depending on class size and the pace we set for our group as a whole. Assignment dates will not change.

Unless otherwise indicated, all readings will be available in their relevant modules on MyCourses. A full list of all course materials has been posted in the General Course Information module.

Date	Module / Readings	Assignment and other deadlines
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Th 29.08	<u>Introduction</u> Overview of our course (powerpoint preview) Viktor Erofeev, “In Memoriam” (after class)	
T 03.09	<u>Aksyonov and the stiliagi (~beatniks)</u> Aksyonov, “Victory” (short story) Kustanovich on Aksyonov (biography and context) “Victory” – reading guide and powerpoint preview	
Th 05.09 T 10.09	<u>Prigov and sots art/conceptualism</u> Introduction to sots art – powerpoint preview Fitzpatrick, “Becoming Post Soviet” Yelshevskaya, “Conceptualism and Sots Art” Prigov, Selected Poems Dobrenko on Prigov (biography and context) Prigov – reading guide and powerpoint preview	Return questionnaire Reading Response №1 opens 10 September
Th 12.09 T 17.09 Th 19.09	<u>Pelevin and the pop/high culture divide</u> Pelevin, <i>Homo Zapiens</i> (under separate cover) McCausland on Pelevin (biography and context) <i>Homo Zapiens</i> – reading guide and powerpoint preview	Reading Response №1 closes 19 September
T 24.09	<u>Dovlatov and the simulacrum</u> Dovlatov, “The Performance” (short story) Young on Dovlatov (biography and context) Baudrillard, “Simulacrum” (excerpt) “Performance” – reading guide and powerpoint preview	Short paper topics posted 24 September
Th 26.09 T 01.10 Th 03.10	<u>Sokolov, Zvagintsev and lyrical angst</u> Emerson, “Coming to Terms” Brodsky on Sokolov (biography and context) Sokolov, <i>School for Fools</i> (under separate cover) <i>School for Fools</i> – reading guide and powerpoint preview Zvagintsev, <i>The Return</i> (on Reserve) <i>The Return</i> – screening guide and powerpoint preview	Submit short paper № 1 outline (optional) by 01 October Watch <i>Return</i> for 03 October
T 08.10 Th 10.10	<u>Okudzhava, Vysotsky and bard poetry</u> Selected poems and video clips Rosneck on Okudzhava (biography and context) Rosneck on Vysotsky (biography and context) Bard poetry – reading guide and powerpoint preview	Submit short paper № 1 – 10 October
T 15.10 Th 17.10	Fall Reading Break – No classes	
T 22.10	<u>Tolstaya and alternative prose</u> Tolstaia, “Fakir” (short story) Goscilo on Tolstaia (biography and context) “Fakir” – reading guide and powerpoint preview	Reading Response Forum № 2 opens 22 October
Th 24.10 T 29.10	<u>Petrushevskaya – from chernukha to the fractured fairy tale</u> Petrushevskaya, “Our Crowd” (short story) Goscilo on Petrushevskaya (biography and context) “Our Crowd” – reading guide and powerpoint preview Petrushevskaya, “Cabbage-Patch Mother” and “Marilena’s Secret” (short stories) Fractured Fairy tales – reading guide and powerpoint preview	

* Uploaded to the Introduction module on myCourses.

Th 31.10	<u>Sinyavsky, Bitov and the phantasmagoric</u> Sinyavsky, “Pkhentz” (short story) Nepomnyashchy on Sinyavsky (biography and context) “Pkhentz” – reading guide and powerpoint preview	Reading Response № 2 closes 31 October
T 05.11	<u>Makanin and the legacy of Empire</u> Makanin, “Prisoner from the Caucasus” (short story) Lindsey on Makanin (biography and context) “Prisoner” – reading guide and powerpoint preview	Short paper № 2 topics posted 05 November
Th 07.11 T 12.11 Th 14.11	<u>The Strugatskys, Tarkovsky and the limits of sci-fi</u> The Strugatskys, <i>Road-Side Picnic</i> (under separate cover) Smith on The Strugatskys (biography and context) Tarkovsky, <i>Stalker</i> (on myCourses)	Watch <i>Stalker</i> for class on 14 November
T 19.11	<u>Viktor Erofeev, Sorokin and the theatre of cruelty</u> Erofeev, “Parakeet” Rudova and Spektor on Viktor Erofeev (background and context) Sorokin, “Petrusha” and “Passing Through” Kustanovich on Sorokin (background and context)	Submit short paper № 2 – 19 November
Th 21.11 T 26.11 Th 28.11	Akunin, <i>Winter Queen</i> , ch. 1-5 <i>Winter Queen</i> , ch. 6-12 <i>Winter Queen</i> , ch. 13-final chapter	Post suggestions/requests for the summary and review exercise by Sunday 01 December at 7:00 pm
T 03.12	Recap and review	Summary exercise in class
Th 19.12	Take-Home deadline requested for 2:00 pm on this date, pending approval by the Timetable Office.	

Here’s wishing you an enjoyable and productive term! ☺