

Slavic 148  
Fall, 2013  
Tues. / Thurs., 11-12

Stephanie Sandler  
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Barker 321; Tues. 2-3:30 & by appt.

Friday – section meetings

TFs: Daniel Green, dlgreen@fas  
Barker 339: Mon. 1-2, Thurs. 3-4  
Philip Redko, redko@fas  
Barker 339: Mon. 2-3, Wed. 4-5

### STRANGE RUSSIAN WRITERS

Russia is broader and more diverse, stranger and more contradictory, than any idea of it. It resists all theories about what makes it tick, confounds all the paths to its possible transformation. One can describe and explain Russia in a thousand ways, but as soon as the theorist and dreamer lays down his pen, satisfied at last with his description, diabolical laughter will sound from the emptiness behind him, and the undried ink will evaporate, leaving not a trace on the white page.

--Tatyana Tolstaya, 1992

Our course studies Russia's rebels, deviants, martyrs, loners, and losers as emblems of national identity. We ask how Russian culture has explored ideas of strangeness and how its cultural identity has been formed with a sense of contrast and comparison to other cultures. We read mostly fictional texts, with some films, poems, and images that project Russia's distinctive obsessions – with history and religion – and its supposed discomfort with the physicality of the body. In considering how estranged persons, animals, and objects become the center of narrative, visual, or poetic attention, we will ask why Russian cultural identity maps itself onto these bizarre subjects. Includes works by Babel, Gogol, Kharms, Leskov, Nabokov, Petrushevskaya, Platonov, Prigov, Pushkin, Shalamov, and Shvarts. Films by Askoldov, Tarkovsky, Sokurov, and Uchitel.

Logistics:

\*\*Writing for the course will include four very short response papers (1-3 pp.), with two medium-length assigned papers (5 pp.); and a final take-home, consisting of three essays (total length 12 pp.), in lieu of a final exam. Most papers will be due on Tuesdays, and can be handed in to your TF as paper copies at class, or as e-mails before class begins. The final / take-home exam will be due Tuesday, December 10, 2013 at 11:00 a.m.

\*\*Grading is based on the papers (40%), the take-home final (40%), and class participation, including in sections (20%).

\*\*Attendance and active participation are required in class and section

\*\*Our class meets Tuesdays and Thursdays 11-12, with section meetings most likely on Fridays (with one for students wishing to study materials in the original Russian, all others entirely in translation). We will establish sections during the second week of classes, and section meetings will begin in week 3.

\*\*We will miss class on Thurs., 9/5, and to make that up, we will have a choice of three sessions from which you will need to add one. This will be a strange form of make-up class, we know, but it should give you some good options to pursue special interests. Details below, in the course schedule (you'll see them as OPTION #1, #2, #3 – choose one).

\*\*Books are available for purchase in the Coop, and may be bought elsewhere (a list of books ordered is at the end of the syllabus). These books are also on reserve in Lamont.

\*\*Readings marked with an asterisk (\*) are on the course web site and may be downloaded, printed, and read in hard copy (if possible, please don't read on screen!). Use of laptops and iPads in class and section is strongly discouraged, so please bring printed copies of texts or extensive notes to class and to section for discussions.

\*\*Films will be streamed through the Language Resource Center in Lamont. To watch films, go to the special LRC computer terminals on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Lamont or to the special computers on the fourth floor of SOCH in the Quad. Or, when the LRC is closed (midnight to 9 AM), you can also use 12 specially marked computers in the Reference Room on level B of Lamont. A copy of each required film is also on reserve in Lamont, and can be checked out. As a last option: many of our films are available through NetFlix or on Youtube. There are lots of ways to watch the movies – and consider watching them in groups.

### Introduction: Russia's Differences

Just how strange is Russia? How strange is writing? And what do we mean by "strange"? What do we mean by "Russian"?

- 9/3 Elena Shvarts, "Kindergarten: Thirty Years On" (\*)  
 "A Symposium on the Strange, the Weird, and the Uncanny" (\*)  
 Kirill Medvedev, "holy lonely creatures" (\*) and in Medvedev, *It's No Good*, pp. 55-57.  
 Dmitrii Prigov, artwork (\*)
- 9/5 **Rosh Hashana – no class, and good sweet New Year to you all!**
- 9/10 Virginia Woolf, "The Russian Point of View" (\*)  
 Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, excerpt (\*)  
 Dovid Bergelson, "Among Refugees" (\*)
- 9/12 Vladimir Nabokov, "Russian Spoken Here" (\*)  
 Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique" (\*)  
 Yuri Buida, "Sindbad the Sailor" in *Russian Short Stories from Pushkin to Buida*, pp. 375-378  
 Dmitrii Prigov, "Forty-Ninth Alphabet Poem," "Screaming Cantata (Who Killed

Stalin?)” (\*)

### The Strangeness of the Past / Russia’s Religious Differences

- 9/17 Alexander Pushkin, “The Bronze Horseman” (\*) (\*) – TWO translations!  
 William Mills Todd III, “Pushkin, Aleksandr Sergeevich” (\*)  
 Mikhail Yampolsky, “In the Shadow of Monuments: Notes on Iconoclasm and Time” (\*)  
 RESPONSE PAPER #1 DUE
- 9/19 film: Alexander Sokurov, *The Russian Ark* (2002)  
 Tim Harte, “A Visit to the Museum: Alexander Sokurov’s ‘Russian Ark’ and the Framing of the Eternal” (\*)
- 9/20 First section meetings
- 9/24 Film: Andrei Tarkovsky, *Andrei Rublev*, 1966  
 Note: a chronology of the film is in the “Readings” section of the course website (\*)  
 Robert Bird, “From Rublev to ‘Rublev,” in Bird, *Andrei Rublev* (\*)  
 Nikolai Leskov, “The Sealed Angel” (1873) (\*) – plus TWO sets of notes about the story  
 Hugh McLean, “Leskov, Nikolai Semyonovich” (\*)  
 Hugh McLean, “The Sealed Angel” (excerpt) (\*)
- 9/26 Nikolai Leskov, “Singlemind” (1879) (\*)  
 Nikolai Leskov, “The Spirit of Madame de Genlis” (1881) (\*)
- 10/1 film: Aleksandr Askoldov, *The Commissar*, 1967  
 RESPONSE PAPER #2 DUE
- 10/3 Isaac Babel, “My First Goose,” “The Death of Dolgushov,” “Salt,” in *Russian Short Stories from Pushkin to Buida*, pp. 236-246  
 Andrey Sinyavsky, “Isaac Babel” (1964) (\*)  
 Boris Khersonskii, poems, tr. Ruth Kreuzer and Dale Hobson,  
<http://www.dalehobson.org/khersonsky/borintro.html>

### Psychologies of the Bizarre / Strange Lives, Stranger Deaths

- 10/8 Leo Tolstoy, “Father Sergius” (\*)  
 Caryl Emerson, “Tolstoy’s Aesthetics” (\*)  
 Laura Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom: A Russian Folktale* 1999 (\*)  
 MEDIUM-LENGTH PAPER #1 DUE
- 10/10 Andrei Platonov, “The River Potudan” (\*)  
 Andrei Platonov, “The Third Son,” “The Return,” in *Russian Short Stories from Pushkin to Buida*, pp. 268-296  
 Tom Seifrid, “Platonov and Dissidence” (2013) (\*)

- 10/15 Alexander Pushkin, "The Queen of Spades" in *Russian Short Stories from Pushkin to Buida*, pp. 5-27.
- 10/17 Nikolai Gogol, "Diary of a Madman," "The Nose," in *Diary of a Madman*, pp.17-70  
 Watch William Hickey perform "Diary of a Madman," from 1964,  
<http://hollisweb.harvard.edu/?itemid=|library/m/aleph|013149503>  
 Simon Karlinsky, *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol*, excerpt (\*)  
 Joseph Brodsky, "From nowhere with love the enth of Marchember sir" (1975-76) (\*)
- 10/22 Fyodor Dostoevsky, "Bobok" (1873) in *Russian Short Stories from Pushkin to Buida*, pp. 81-97  
 Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotosque*, excerpt (\*)  
 Ilya Vinitsky, "Where Bobok is Buried: The Theosophical Roots of Dostoevskii's 'Fantastic Realism'" (2006) (\*)  
 RESPONSE PAPER #3 DUE
- 10/24 Fyodor Dostoevsky, "Dream of a Ridiculous Man" (1877) (\*)
- 10/28 OPTIONAL CLASS #1, on Dostoevsky, "Notes from Underground," 4:00 p.m. (taught by Daniel Green)
- 10/29 Vladimir Nabokov, *Despair*  
 Sergei Davydov, "Dostoevsky and Nabokov: The Morality of Structure in *Crime and Punishment* and *Despair*" (1982) <http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/DS/03/157.shtml>
- 10/31 Continue discussion of *Despair*  
 Optional addition: weekend screening of the film *Despair* (dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1977)
- 11/5 film: Andrei Tarkovsky, *Stalker*, 1979  
 Maya Turovskaya, "The Soul's Landscape, After Confession (*Stalker*)" (\*)  
 MEDIUM-LENGTH PAPER #2 DUE
- 11/7 [please note: this is a class we may have to re-schedule]  
 Liudmila Petrushevskaya, *Time: Night*  
 Helena Goscilo, "Mother as Mothra: Totalizing Narrative and Nurture in Petrushevskaya" (\*)  
 Liudmila Ulitskaya, "The Queen of Spades" (1998) (\*)

### Weird Plots, for Ordinary Reasons

- 11/12 Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, "Quadraturin" (1926) in *Russian Short Stories from Pushkin to Buida*, pp. 208-216  
 Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, "The Runaway Fingers" (1922) (\*)  
 Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, "Red Snow" (1930) (\*)  
 Joanne Turnbull, "Introduction" [on Krzhizhanovsky] (\*)

11/14 Daniil Kharmis, "The Old Woman," in *Russian Short Stories from Pushkin to Buida*, pp. 297-319

Daniil Kharmis, "Thing," "Notnow," "The World," "Before Coming to See You" (\*)

Daniil Kharmis, "The Blue Notebook" (\*)

Matvei Yankelevich, "Introduction: The Real Kharmis" (\*)

Aleksandr Vvedensky, "A Certain Quantity of Conversations" (\*)

Eugene Ostashevsky, "Alexander Vvedensky, An Invitation for Us to Think" (\*)

11/18 OPTIONAL CLASS #2: On Kharmis / Vvedensky (taught by Philip Redko), 4:00 p.m.

11/19 film: Aleksandr Sokurov, *The Second Circle*, 1990

RESPONSE PAPER #4 DUE

11/21 Varlam Shalamov, "Through the Snow," "Berries," "The Snake-Charmer," "Duck" in *Russian Short Stories from Pushkin to Buida*, pp. 320-332

Varlam Shalamov, "Lend Lease" (\*), "Prosthetic Appliances" (\*), "Cherry Brandy" (\*)

Svetlana Boym, "'Banality of Evil,' Mimicry, and the Soviet Subject: Varlam Shalamov and Hannah Arendt" (2008) (\*)

### Strangeness NOW

11/26 film: Aleksei Uchitel, *The Stroll* (2003)

Zakhar Prilepin, "The Killer and His Little Friend" (2008) (\*)

Olga Zondberg, "Have Mercy, Your Majesty Fish" (2007) (\*)

### THANKSGIVING BREAK

12/2 Elena Fanailova, "Again they're off to their Afghanistan" and "Lena, or the Poet and the People" <http://jacketmagazine.com/36/rus-fanailova-trb-sandler-turovskaya.shtml>

Elena Fanailova, "Lena and Lena," <https://jacket2.org/article/lena-and-lena>

Kirill Medvedev, *It's No Good*, selections

12/4 OPTIONAL CLASS #3, on Medvedev and Fanailova, 11:00 a.m. (taught by Stephanie Sandler)

### Books ordered at the Coop:

*Russian Short Stories from Pushkin to Buida*, ed. Robert Chandler, 978-0140448467

Nikolai Gogol, *The Diary of a Madman, the Government Inspector, and Selected Stories* (Ronald Wilks, tr.), 978-0140449075

Liudmila Petrushevskaya, *Time: Night*, tr. Sally Laird, Northwestern Univ. Press, 978-0810118003

Kirill Medvedev, *It's No Good*, Ugly Duckling Presse, 978-1933254944

Vladimir Nabokov, *Despair*, 978-0679723431