

**“The Will to Terror in Shakhnazarov’s *The Rider Named Death*”**

Vadim Shkolnikov, University of Illinois at Chicago

[vadim.shkolnikov@gmail.com](mailto:vadim.shkolnikov@gmail.com)

Karen Shakhnazarov’s *The Rider Named Death* (2004), a cinematic adaptation of Boris Savinkov’s autobiographical novel *The Pale Horse* (1909)—written by the leader of the combat organization of the Socialist Revolutionaries Party—takes on particular significance as a retrospective commentary on the legacy of Russian revolutionary terrorism, both in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and in light of the recent evolution of global Islamist terrorism. When it first appeared, *The Pale Horse* shattered the ideal of the virtuous terrorist, passionately devoted to the cause of justice, and replaced it with the image of a cynical, cold-blooded, nihilistic killer. Yet in *The Rider Named Death* the protagonist’s persistence in terrorist violence that is motivated only by a quasi-Nietzschean notion of “will” necessarily takes on a different meaning. Thus, by closely analyzing the ways in which the film reshapes the plot of Savinkov’s novel (also drawing from Savinkov’s memoirs and developing themes that had already been explored in *Assassin of the Tsar*, 1991), this paper will attempt to outline a fundamental shift in the understanding of terrorism, that is signaled in Shakhnazarov’s work.