

IN MEMORIAM

SIDNEY MONAS

Sidney Monas, Professor Emeritus of History and Slavic and Eurasian Studies, died in Los Angeles on March 29, 2019, at the age of ninety-four. From his arrival at The University of Texas at Austin in 1969 until his retirement in the mid-1990s, Sid was a beloved teacher and colleague, a truly interdisciplinary and multi-talented scholar, as well as a brilliant conversationalist and a wonderful host. For decades, his home in West Lake was the site of lively gatherings of friends, students, and visiting colleagues from around the world.

Sid was born on September 14, 1924, the only child of David and Eva Monas, who had immigrated to New York from Ukraine during the Russian Revolution and Civil War. His father remained a committed socialist and successful union activist in New York and then in Bangor, Pennsylvania, where he was posted by the Shirtworkers' Union. David had also always harbored a desire to be a farmer, so Sid became "a city boy growing up on a farm," and attended elementary school in a one-room schoolhouse in Bangor. At Bangor High School, Sid found teachers who encouraged his intellectual gifts, and he became the first graduate of Bangor High ever to be accepted to Princeton.

Sid's first year at Princeton was interrupted by World War II, which sent him to Europe, where he was captured at the Battle of the Bulge near the end of the war and was taken to a POW camp. "It was a bad experience at the time, but when I think back on it, perhaps I was very fortunate," he wrote, with characteristic good cheer. "Being a prisoner, I had a glimpse at what a hard time might be like, but I was lucky to get out of it in five months. Looking back on my life, I don't think I had very hard times."

Resuming his academic studies in 1945, Sid threw himself into the study of history, as well as literature and poetry. At Princeton, he became lifelong friends with William Arrowsmith, who later taught in the Department of Classics at UT Austin, and with his roommate, W.S. Merwin, a Poet Laureate of the United States, who died two weeks before Sid. A classmate introduced Sid to his future wife, Carolyn Munro, the daughter of a Princeton professor, and the two were married in 1948; they had three children between 1949 and 1954. Although he found scholarly success at Princeton, he confessed that he never felt at home at the segregated, elitist university with its Jewish quota: "My father was a labor organizer, and I was proud of it." Graduating magna cum laude with a B.A. in public and international affairs in 1948, Sid went on to study Russian history at Harvard where he earned his Ph.D. in 1955.

In 1956, Sid was one of the first Americans to receive a travel grant to visit the Soviet Union. During that trip he fell in love with St. Petersburg (then called Leningrad) and also spent time in Odessa, Kiev, and Moscow, where he managed to track down surviving relatives. Sid's academic career made it possible for him to continue his passion for travel. In successive sabbaticals, he took his family for extended stays to Rome (1959-60), Jerusalem (1966-67), St. Petersburg (1974), and Canberra (1977). He made numerous shorter trips to the Soviet Union, after his first trip in 1956, and continuing through the 1980s and 1990s, to Israel again in 1992, and to England, France, Italy, China, and Iran on the side. In the summer of 1971, he took his then seventeen-year old son Steve to the village of Roth, now on the Belgian side of the Ardennes forest, where Sid had been stationed some twenty-seven years earlier. Sid had a raucous and heartfelt reunion with the retired Burgermeister of the town, who likely had pointed the German troops to the barn where Sid and his fellow Americans were subsequently captured. This experience was emblematic of Sid's remarkable feelings for Germany, for the Soviet Union, and for the people he

encountered throughout his travels: he had a deep, abiding and personal relationship with individuals, with art, and with literature that transcended the machinations of the states that claimed to own them. He felt an unwavering kinship with the tramp of *Modern Times*, who, clobbered by history (like Sid), always stood up, dusted himself off, and waltzed on down the road.

Sidney began his distinguished academic career at Amherst College (1955-57) and at Smith College (1957-62), and as Professor of history and comparative literature at the University of Rochester (1962-69). At Rochester, Sidney formed strong and life-long bonds with his colleagues Norman O. Brown and Hayden White, both of whom had a profound effect on his intellectual and philosophical development. Like Brown, he was “floored” by the works of James Joyce and of the seventeenth-century sage Giambattista Vico, and, like White, he was fascinated by historiography and the ambiguous relationship between history and fiction.

In 1969, John Silber recruited him to The University of Texas at Austin. Shortly after his arrival, Sid played an influential role in the expansion of the comparative literature program. Together with other distinguished scholars, he helped to create a new curriculum for the program that broke with the older Eurocentric model for comparative literary studies previously adopted at Harvard and Yale Universities. The new program at UT Austin included classical and modern languages such as Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and Persian. In History and in Slavic studies, Sid taught classes at the undergraduate and graduate levels in Russian intellectual history—a novel concept at the time—exploring the influence of social, historical, and philosophical ideas in the public sphere, and featuring and stoking his unique ability to synthesize concepts from diverse disciplines. Sid also taught a popular Russian literature course entitled “Tolstoyevsky,” as well as courses on Marxist hermeneutics (at

a time when virtually no other courses at the University offered even basic readings in Karl Marx), historiography, and a Department of English class on Shakespeare and Dostoevsky.

In the 1970-80s, Sid was an active member of a lively group of scholars studying Russian culture at UT Austin, centered both in the Slavic department and at “The Institute of Modern Russian Culture at Blue Lagoon,” founded by the art historian John E. Bowlt, the poet Konstantin Kuzminsky, the architect Emma Podberezkina, and the literary historian Ilya Levin (then a graduate student at UT Austin). He was also a dedicated participant in the British Studies Seminar, founded by Sid’s good friend Roger Louis, which he saw as a model interdisciplinary program. In the 1980s, Sid helped found the “Benghazi Balalaika Society” for the Russian and Slavic scholars scattered around Texas to meet annually for an informal conference.

Among his many accomplishments, Sid was an avid translator and essayist. His published translations from Russian include *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky; *Journey to Armenia and Selected Essays* by Osip Mandelstam; *Scenes from the Bathhouse* by Mikhail Zoshchenko; *Images of Space: St. Petersburg in the Visual and Verbal Arts* by Grigory Kaganov; and *The Diaries of Nikolay Punin*. His introductions and commentaries are included in Vladimir Shklovsky’s *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs, 1917-1922*; *Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?* by Andrei Amalrik. Monas’ influential book on the secret police in Tsarist Russia, *The Third Section: Police and Society in Russia Under Nicholas I*, was published by Harvard University Press in 1961. He edited the *Slavic Review*, the premiere journal in the field, from 1985 to 1991. In 2006, his autobiographical account “My Life and Not So Hard Times” was published in *Burnt Orange Britannia: Adventures in History and the Arts*, edited by Roger Louis.

In 1985, Sidney’s wife, Carol, died of pulmonary fibrosis. After a brief and unhappy bachelorhood, in 1987, Sid married Claire Anderson, a Ph.D. candidate in the UT Austin

Department of History, who brought him back into an active social and intellectual life and into a loving family with her then eleven-year old daughter Rose. Claire accompanied Sid to Israel in 1992, where her sympathies and background as a student of Egyptian history shaped his perspective on the plight of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

Some time after his retirement from active teaching in the mid-1990s, Sidney settled down to work on his *magnum opus*, an intellectual history of St. Petersburg, which he hoped would pull together a lifetime of learning. What he didn't know at the time was that his brain was beginning even then to show the early signs of the dementia that would ultimately incapacitate him and end his life some twenty-four years later. The hours, days, and weeks that he spent at his computer resulted in multiple chapters of great erudition, but he did not succeed in finishing the book.

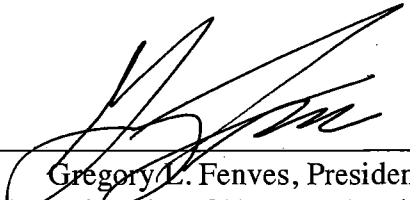
In 2012, Sidney moved in with his son, Steve, and daughter-in-law, Maggie Megaw, in Los Angeles. In 2014, Sid was separated from Claire. He began the tedious and sometimes painful process of donating his extensive and eclectic library to various universities, including The University of Texas at Austin, which also houses his collection of papers at the Briscoe Center for American History. Sidney continued to have an active and vigorous life, regularly attending the Los Angeles Symphony, ballet, and theater in Los Angeles, working out with a personal trainer three times a week, and contrasting the joys of Disney animation with the more problematic offerings of arthouse cinema. In his last months, he enjoyed the constant company of his caregivers, Shineen Requena and Mayola Pinelo, and Shineen's three-year old daughter Adelyn.

Professor Wayne Rebhorn, former Chair of the Comparative Literature Program, stated, "Sid was a translator of distinction as well as a scholar," and added, "I think the highest praise I personally can bestow on him was that he was the intellectual's intellectual: always engaged, well read, very knowledgeable." Professor Hannah Wojciehowski called him "The University of Sid"

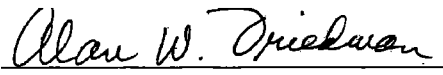
because of his extraordinary erudition in numerous fields. Professor Lito Elio Porto, his last graduate student, stated, “In Sidney I found the scale, complexity, subtlety, intensity, and levity of intellectual/mensch that I had always dreamed of finding. His friendship was a gift of the most sacred order. He taught me so much, not least of which was the importance of cultivating personal resilience and of keeping the body active that the mind might follow.” He is remembered with great fondness by many of his students and colleagues who went on to become this country’s leading Russian translators and scholars. Rochelle Goldberg Ruthchild wrote that he was “so vibrant, so intelligent, a great teacher and mentor.” Eugene Avrutin remembers “his course on Postmodernism to this day, the very first history course I took at UT. He just talked—without lecture notes—and it was wonderful. Probably the main reason I wound up going to graduate school.” Sid’s humor, generosity, warmth, compassion, and curiosity—as well as his intellectual brilliance—positively influenced the lives of a large number of colleagues, students, friends and admirers at UT and around the world.

Sid is predeceased by his daughter, Erica, and grandson, Michael, and is survived by his two children, Deborah and Stephen, his six grandchildren Noah, Grace, Ben, Hannah, Anna, and Rachel, and his five great-grandchildren Wiley, Eric, Elise, Antonella, and Peter. He is also survived by Claire Anderson and her daughter Rose. In addition, Sid is survived by his Russian relatives whom he helped to emigrate in 1988: his first cousin, Shelya Linetskaya, who was born in Kiev three months before Sid was born in New York; her daughter, Valeria Druzhnikov; her grandson, Ilya Druzhnikov; and her great-granddaughter, Nico, all residents of California.

Sid Monas treasured the gift of life and did not waste a minute of it.



Gregory L. Fenves, President
The University of Texas at Austin



Alan W. Friedman, Secretary
The General Faculty

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Joan Neuberger (Chair), Linda Henderson, and Hannah Wojciehowski.