Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on February 24 and the ongoing war have been a stark shock for our department, as I am sure, for many of you as well. We are watching with horror as thousands of people, including women and children, are being killed and wounded, millions of people are having to leave their homes, and this beautiful country is being destroyed by brutal force. While the end of the tragedy is not yet in sight, it is clear that this war will profoundly impact Eastern Europe and will have long-lasting repercussions for the entire world. How will we teach our classes, which books and films will we discuss with our students, what kind of questions will we address in our research? These and other issues will be discussed in our department and among our colleagues in the field of Slavic Studies. Another important challenge for us is to help our colleagues who have been affected by the war, and more practically, to support those who have been displaced and are trying to leave their homes, and we are planning to expand our Ukrainian program next year. The College has approved a Graduate Student Instructor position to teach the first-year Ukrainian language, which will help us train the new generation of teachers of Ukrainian language and culture.

We were able to return to in-person teaching in August 2021, and, to the great relief and satisfaction of our students and teachers, we have been able to keep this format during the whole academic year. The culmination of the academic year was the graduation ceremony which we conducted in-person and remote formats. After nearly two years of postponement due to COVID-19, we were able to present our students with their academic degrees. This year combined in-person and remote presentations by Michael Makin and featuring Mikhail Krutikov and featuring Marko and Jason Wagner, we presented their work and moderated the panels. These included Azhar Dyussekenova, Chris Fort, Grace Mahoney, Michael Martin, Alex McConnell, and Dylan Ogden. We extend to follow with a collected volume under our editorship, Companion to Victor Pelevin (Academic Studies Press, 2022). The conference brought together prominent scholars of Russian literature from the United States, Europe, and Israel, who delivered thought-provoking papers on this significant and highly popular contemporary Russian writer, as well as the most extensively translated one into the English language. Debates around Pelevin’s prolific output have been heated in Russian cultural circles. Despite his gleeful play, he is a challenging author because of all the tricks he deploys in his texts, the complexity of his narratives, and the elusiveness of their meaning. The conference aimed to illuminate the nuances and ambiguities of his oeuvre. Conference participants looked at Pelevin’s oeuvre from his groundbreaking writings of the 1990s to the present, articulating the continuities and transformations of his work and fleshing out its importance. We discussed the ways we can enrich our readings of Pelevin classics written in the heyday of postmodernism and during the turbulent period after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the current state of Pelevinian, and what one might look for in the future. We examined not only his place in contemporary Russia but also the ways his work opens up to a wider problem of contemporary global politics and culture. Among other approaches, conference presenters engaged Pelevin in dialogue with science fiction, gender criticism, posthumanism, alternative history, right-wing political discourses East and West, conspiracy theories, and philosophical prose in world literature. The objective was to illuminate Pelevin’s contributions to ongoing cultural and political debates within and outside post-Soviet space. The event was comprised of seven panels: “Early Science Fiction and Gender,” “Reception,” “Political Contexts,” “Conspiracies and Ideological Games,” “Companion to Victor Pelevin,” “Literature and Philosophy,” and “Pelevin and Unfreedom: Poetics, Politics, Meta Physics.” Two of the panels spotlighted scholarly studies of Pelevin. Companion to Victor Pelevin, written by a team of young scholars, provided a resource to scholars, teachers, and students, outlining the major debates and central issues in Pelevin’s oeuvre. The second book panel, moderated by Mikhail Krutikov and featuring presentations by Michael Makin and myself, discussed Pelevin and Unfreedom: Poetics, Politics, Meta Physics, the only comprehensive scholarly monograph devoted to Pelevin’s work to date. A number of present and past graduate students from the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, Comparative Literature, and History presented their work and moderated the panels. These included Azhar Dyussekenova, Chris Fort, Grace Mahoney, Michael Martin, Alex McConnell, and Dylan Ogden. We intend to follow with a collected volume and aim to initiate productive inquiry into Pelevin’s oeuvre that will extend beyond this event.

Dear friends,

Sincerely,

Mikhail Krutikov
Professor and Chair,
Department of Slavic Languages & Literatures
Yevgeniy Fiks Event Flyer

In February, as part of the university’s annual Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Symposium, the department hosted the New York-based, post-Soviet artist, Yevgeniy Fiks. Yevgeniy was born in Moscow in 1972 and has lived and worked in New York since 1994. As a post-Soviet artist, his works build on research into Cold War narratives to explore the history of the American Left, including that experience in the context of the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the histories of the American Left, one hand, and the repression of space over the last decade, on the other. In addition to The Wayland Rudd Collection: Exploring Racial Imaginaries in Soviet Visual Culture, other books include Lenin For Your Library?; Communist Guide to New York City, Moscow, Soviet Moscow’s Yiddish-Gay Dictionary, and Monument to Cold War Victory.

During his talk, Yevgeniy showed several photographs from his work Communist Guide to New York City, a collection of dozens of photographs of buildings, public places, and sites in New York City, that are connected to the history of the Communist Party USA, including sites where Communist-organized strikes and demonstrations took place, and courthouses where American Communist leaders were tried. Yevgeniy grew up and was educated in the Soviet Union in the 1980s, and his work is about coming to terms with the Soviet experience. Having lived in New York since 1994, he’s fascinated by the history of the American Communist movement and the way it manifests itself in the present-day United States. Yevgeniy focused on his new book, The Wayland Rudd Collection: Exploring Racial Imaginaries in Soviet Visual Culture (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2021). Yeveygini presented his archive of Soviet media images of Africans and African Americans, from postage stamps, mainly related to African liberation movements and civil rights struggles. The project is named after Wayland Rudd (1900-1952), a Black American actor who moved to the Soviet Union in 1932 and appeared in many Soviet films and theatrical performances. Bringing together post-colonial and post-Soviet perspectives, Yevgeniy spoke about the complicated and often contradictory intersection of race and Communism in the Soviet context, exposing the interweaving of internationalism, solidarity, humanism, and Communist ideals with practices of othering and exoticization.

Yevgeniy’s book includes meditations, reflections, and research-based essays by scholars, poets, and artists that address the complicated intersection of race and Communist internationalism, focusing on the Soviet Union’s critique of systemic racism in the U.S. It was an engaging and interesting hour-long seminar.

Yevgeniy’s work has been shown at the Biennale of Contemporary Art, and Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art and has received reviews in The New York Times, ARTFORUM, and other periodicals.

Welcome Vedran Catovic!

The Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures hired Vedran Catovic as a Lecturer I for the 2022-23 academic year. Vedran received his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of Michigan in 2021. His dissertation was titled Narrative Satire in Context: The Journey and Wisdom in West and East Europe. He joins us with a wide range of teaching undergraduate courses at the University of Michigan, from first-year college writing to advanced-level language and cultural studies. He is an expert in teaching and teaching comparative literature for 18 years, which allows him to bring a generalist perspective and contribute to the Slavic field as a transcultural and transnational scholar. Vedran is a native speaker of Bosnian but has a long study of the Russian language, which allows him to teach and conduct research on Russian literature, history, and culture. In the next year, he’ll teach courses on Russian literature and Arts & Culture in Central Europe.

He is excited to continue his teaching endeavors and combine his scholarly interest in literature in the globalized, transnational and multicultural context with his passion for educating curious young minds.
Speaking of Language: Ukrainian in the context of War

The etymological roots of the newly developed geographical names in Ukrainian. They are curious about learning the proper pronunciation of difficult words, which lately have become a weapon of resistance for Ukrainians.

During our daylong Pysanka workshop in March, many students of Ukrainian, Polish, Russian, and Czech joined the gathering. The conversation was no longer about Pysanka and Easter traditions – it was more about showing concern and solidarity, trying to understand the media coverage students heard and saw about the war. The highlight of this event was a surprise visit from our first- and second-year Russian language students who came to the workshop and sang the Ukrainian anthem in Ukrainian.

During many discussions and conversations with U-M students in the last two months, I have realized that the rhetoric has changed to the answer to the commonly asked question, “Why study Ukrainian language?” Our students want to learn and speak Ukrainian because they honor the culture, freedom, and the extraordinary courage of Ukrainian people. The same people who have stood up to fight their own defenses in the face of the indescribable and unprovoked brutality of Putin’s war.

There are 12-15 students learning Ukrainian language each academic year at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. For more than fifty years the demography of the students learning Ukrainian at U-M has not changed: half of them are of Ukrainian heritage and the other half are interested in international relationships and research on Ukraine. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine, as an independent state, has occupied an important strategic position with respect to the security and stability of all of Europe. This theme has always been emphasized in our content courses: Cultures of Ukraine, Ukrainian Poetry, and in our Ukrainian language program. Our language courses incorporate a strong cultural component as well, which in my opinion, one cannot teach language without teaching its culture.

As the brutal Putin’s war continues in Ukraine, the exposure to videos, photos, and articles from the scenes of combat has increased tremendously. So has students’ interests to be able to understand and interpret them. Additionally, our language students are interested in learning the proper pronunciation of difficult geographical names in Ukrainian. They are curious about the etymological roots of the newly developed war lexicon and are interested in understanding Ukrainian swear words, which lately have become a weapon of resistance for Ukrainians.

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LSA senior Rachael Merritt was recently awarded the Rhodes Scholarship, becoming the University of Michigan’s 30th recipient of the oldest and most prestigious international scholarship. Merritt, alongside 31 other American Rhodes Scholars, will study at the University of Oxford with all expenses funded by the scholarship program for the next two to three years. At Oxford, Merritt plans to obtain master’s degrees in Russian and Eastern European studies and Social Science of the Internet. In an interview with The Michigan Daily, Merritt said she is most interested in the intersection between the two topics, namely cybersecurity within the scope of Russia and Eastern Europe.

“I’m specifically interested in authoritarian practices in digital spaces and how those really don’t have borders anymore,” Merritt said. “There’s a real need to come up with new metrics and strategies to govern the internet internationally...”
I landed in Kyiv on May 10, 2021, to start as Director of Fulbright Ukraine. It happened to be Victory Day, which coincided with Mother’s Day; I took this as an auspicious sign and I still do.

That fall, October 2021, I worked with the local staff to plan a local celebration to mark the 75th Anniversary of Fulbright worldwide. We managed to skillfully navigate the pandemic to have an in-person event featuring live jazz music composed for the event and performed for the first time by a quartet led by one of the Ukrainian Fulbright Alumni, Yakiv Tsytovetskyi. We held the event at “Schakoldaniy budynok,” a 19th c. structure built by Kyiv’s Jewish labor union that was never bombed in WWII. I opened the evening with a short excerpt from the diary of John Steinbeck’s travels through the Kyiv region in 1947, just after the war, at the same time Fulbright was founded, and who would later become a Fulbright Scholar in the 1960s. In his journal from 1947, he wrote: “Ukrainians are not a sad people, they are filled with laughter, and despite all the ruins of the war there is rebuilding.”

We published a booklet featuring photos from the history of our office, and letters from all five directors that have served the program agreed to this plan, as they are a commission country and totally separate from our office—we needed to ask their permission (they are comprised of the Polish government and U.S. government bilateral commission). While in Warsaw I took full responsibility for those I had relocated, including regular meetings virtual and in-person. Many of them continued to teach virtually to their host institutions in Ukraine, but others could not logistically do so and chose to volunteer full time with their peers in various initiatives in the city to respond to the influx of 3.6 million refugees over a period of seventy days. Our U.S. Fulbrighters were first responders, translating and doing other tasks at the Warsaw Central train station and at the border before another 40 international organizations or volunteers arrived.

Martial law was instituted in Ukraine a week after the bombing started on February 24, 2022, which means men 18-60 of age of Ukrainian citizenship cannot leave the country. There is a law on the table to allow exceptions for male scientists and other specialists to go on international exchanges.

This past December, in our Kyiv office, I convened and led panels of experts in which we conducted a total of 100 individual interviews combined across our student and scholar programs. The level of talent exhibited in the application pool was impressive, all of these semi-final applicants passed through our external peer-review process. You can see that our final “acceptance rate” is extremely competitive. Our panelists are always challenged in how to make final decisions as we compare such stellar individuals at the final stage. Our candidates come from all spheres, and some have prior experience at high levels in Ukraine’s institutions and government— including invaluable expertise in cybersecurity, for example, or legal and constitutional expertise. Given Ukraine’s recent post-revolutionary paradigm, evolving library that features big bookshelves for this purpose --- when we return, I hope to add more titles currently being penned by our Fulbrighters. We also are working within the wider alumni communities to collect texts, images, testimonial witness, and other documents related to the atrocities of the war, as well as the experience of it as articulated by scholars’ viewpoints at various places on the globe, and in different relations to Ukraine that we will archive, exhibit, and publish for future generations to try to understand this war and ensure a permanent end to the atrocities.

Fulbright is a frontrunner and it is a privilege to serve as the Director of Fulbright Ukraine at this critical moment in history. As the director, I have experienced profound challenges in how to make final decisions as we compare such stellar individuals at the final stage. Our candidates come from all spheres, and some have prior experience at high levels in Ukraine’s institutions and government— including invaluable expertise in cybersecurity, for example, or legal and constitutional expertise. Given Ukraine’s recent post-revolutionary paradigm, ongoing war (since 2014), and proximity to Russian disinformation, the emergence of different types of expertise in this context has global value.

Moreover, Fulbright is about individuals. And many of these individuals are not afraid to speak openly about what they want to change, as well as the defense of their country and the definition of the future they want to build for themselves, in dialogue with other countries. There are also respected community leaders who apply, for example, Ukraine’s numerous veterans of what once was referred to as the Donbas war. What this diversity of candidates and their overall strength indicates about Ukraine is the very high cultural and social significance that education has in Ukraine. On May 23, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with the presidents of members of the Association of American Universities. When asked what institutions could do to help, he stressed that universities abroad should “set up programs in which they provide expertise, not just cash” (Inside Higher Ed). This further evidences education as a core value and the desire to cultivate and return international skills and talent to Ukraine. I also read this comment as part of a broader way of unthinking the war by articulating what can be built that is immaterial and sustainable. “Swords into ploughshares” was the phrase at the origin of Fulbright in 1946. At our Kyiv office, since becoming director, I re-organized the space into an evolving library that features books donated to us from their authors among our U.S. and Ukrainian alumni. We sorted and installed big bookshelves for this purpose --- when we return, I hope to add more titles currently being penned by our Fulbrighters. We also are working within the wider alumni communities to collect texts, images, testimonial witness, and other documents related to the atrocities of the war, as well as the experience of it as articulated by scholars’ viewpoints at various places on the globe, and in different relations to Ukraine that we will archive, exhibit, and publish for future generations to try to understand this war and ensure a permanent end to the atrocities.

“I am a woman, I have no country . . . For a long time some people believed that if the horror of war could be made vivid enough, most people would finally take in the outrageousness, the insanity of war.” — Regarding the Pain of Others, 2003
Congratulations to our Graduates

McKenna Marko successfully defended her dissertation, *Spatial Mediations of Holocaust Memory in Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Art*, in May 2022. She plans to live in Budapest to continue her research.

Jason Wagner successfully defended his dissertation in July 2022, titled *Yiddish Ruthenias: Home Landscapes in the Modernist Poetry of Moyshe Kulbak and Dovid Hofshteyn in the Age of Revolutions and National Revivals in Eastern Europe*. Jason was offered a post-doc teaching position at the University of Florida.

Samantha Farmer

Samantha holds a B.A. in History and Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies, as well as an M.A. in Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies from the University of Texas at Austin, where they also were a host and producer of the podcast The Slavic Connexion. Their disciplinary and research interests include performance studies, comparative Yugoslav, East European, and American film and literature, cultural studies, literary translation, queer and feminist theories, sociology of literature, critical pedagogy, and theories of place and memory; they are also pursuing a graduate certificate in LGBTQ Studies in the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies. Their translations can be found in *TROIKA*, *Asymptote* (Winter 2022), and *Zenithism (1921-1927): A Yugoslav Avant-Garde Anthology* (forthcoming 2022 from Academic Studies Press). Samantha considers collective work an underutilized element of scholarship (and the world at large) and welcomes various forms of collaboration.

Emma Lerman

Emma received her B.A. from Hampshire College in 2016, where she majored in Russian language and literature and minored in theatre. She went on to receive her M.A. in Slavic Studies from Brown University in 2017. In 2021, Emma received her M.A. in International and Regional Studies with a specialization in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Eurasia from the University of Michigan. Her current research interests involve traumatic language/verse in literature, 20th-century Russian and Ukrainian poetry, memory studies, and translation.

Welcome

Welcome to our new graduate students — Fall 2021!


Polish Majors: Paulina Bachta, Not pictured: Joseph Blattert**

Polish Minors: Margaret Dumitraș, Sarah Gondek, Ewelina Papiez, Kari Ziolkowski


Polish Minors: Margaret Dominic, Sarah Gondek, Ewelina Papiez, Kami Ziolkowski

Bosnian Minors: William Lee

Not pictured: Bridget Grothowiak

Czech Minor: Madylin Eberstein

BEST PAPER IN A STUDENT’S NATIVE LANGUAGE
Emma Singleton, (Herbert Eagle, Slavic 312)
"Gender Consciousness: Rebellion and Conformity as a Reflections of Communist Patriarchal Ideology, Culture, and Reality in Eastern Europe"

BEST WRITTEN WORK IN A LANGUAGE STUDIED IN THE SLAVIC DEPARTMENT
Laurel Baker, (Alina Makin, RC Lang 323)
"Definition of the Russian voice: Synthetic and comparative analysis of identity and transcontinental singing in the Altai folk song ‘Kai kozhong’ and the Russian folk song ‘Pod rakiyot’"

BEST SPECIAL PROJECT
Natalie Oliver, (Elena Fort, Russian 102) Video assignment / phone call — "A Call from Mother*"

* Denotes Fall 2021 Graduates
** Denotes Summer 2022 Graduates
Dr. Vera Andrushkiw passed away on March 18, 2022. She was a civic activist, pedagogue, and active member of the Ukrainian National Women’s League of America. She headed the Detroit Committee for the Defense of the Persecuted in Ukraine (1972-1976), was the director of Ukrainian studies summer schools at Harvard University (1997-1999), taught at Wayne State University (Detroit) and the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) (1985-1999), and since 1999 was the Director of the Partnership of Communities Program of the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation in Washington.

It’s a heartbreaking loss to Vera’s family and the Michigan Ukrainian community. She was a great inspiration for many people in the USA and Ukraine because of her intelligence and love for Ukraine. She will always stay in our hearts.

Sad news reached us several months ago—Dr. Zdenka Brodská, our former lecturer in Czech, passed away after a long illness. She was an active and much-loved member of our department since the early 1990s. Together with her husband, Karel Čulík, who became faculty in the Department of Computer Science at Wayne State, came from Czechoslovakia to join the cultural activities of the American Czech community. Among her initial major accomplishments was her editorial work for the Czech American cultural quarterly Proměny/Variations on which she collaborated with our faculty member, Professor Ladislav Matějka. After joining our department, she taught numerous courses in Czech, giving the Czech program in the department a distinct prestige and importance. She was also a prominent translator from Czech, for which the departmental environment gave her an excellent base. Among other Czech works, she translated together with Kelly Miller a collection of poetic texts by the Czech poet Bohuslav Reynek (Michigan Slavic Publications, 2001). Over the years, she taught dozens of students, both graduate and undergraduate. When she retired in 2005 after sixteen years of service, she was presented with an entire folder of letters from her students, who valued her both as a model and a unique personality. She will be remembered dearly.

In Memoriam:

Dr. Vera Andrushkiw
Svitlana Rogovyk, Lecturer

Dr. Zdenka Brodská
Jindrich Toman, Professor

Please consider these gift funds opened to support students from war-torn nations

LSA Priorities: https://leadersandbest.umich.edu/find/#!/scu/lsta/priority
The specific gift fund basket: https://leadersandbest.umich.edu/find/#!/give/basket/fund/339539