



the
slavic scene

volume 31, fall 2019

Photo by Ashley Bigham

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letter from the chair



Herbert J. Eagle

Dear friends,

Our fall term in the Slavic Department is off to an excellent start. We welcomed five new graduate students, the largest cohort of entering students in over a decade. We have endeavored to enrich the curriculum for them with two new mini-courses on literary theory—Professor Tatjana Aleksic's on post-structuralism and Professor Benjamin Paloff's on Bakhtin. Professor Michael Makin also added a new graduate course on Russian poetry of the past half century, a common interest of all five of the entering students. We will continue to survey our graduate students annually about the courses they need and would like to see in the subsequent academic year and make every effort to accommodate their desires for the curriculum.

We also had the largest number of undergraduate students beginning the study of Slavic languages in several years, a testament to the innovative, committed work of our language-teaching faculty. Especially gratifying was the number of students who began Intensive Russian; twenty-one students enrolled for this course which we offer together with the Residential College. It meets two hours a day with the intention of covering two years' work and bringing students to a functional level of proficiency in all four skill areas. For the first time in decades, we currently have two sections of the course, taught by Alina Makin and Elena Fort. We also had very healthy enrollments in Polish, Ukrainian, and Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, with a few students electing Czech.

We are working to expand our project for a Summer School of Russian Culture, which Professors Mikhail Krutikov and Olga Maiorova have launched together with colleagues from the Moscow School of Social and Economic Science (MSEES) and the European University at St. Petersburg (EUSP). The aim of the program is to familiarize American graduate students in the earliest stages

of their careers with the most innovative trends in the study of Russian culture and facilitate their contacts with Russian scholars and teachers. It is designed for MA and Ph.D. students who already have a high proficiency in the Russian language. This past spring, four of our graduate students participated in a one-week pilot of the project and we hope, this coming spring and summer, to increase that number and to expand it to several weeks, with time split between Moscow and St. Petersburg. The Moscow portion would be devoted to current literary culture (major trends, literary groups, new digital formats, the role of libraries, bookshops, and literary cafes), contemporary visual art (new media and practices and their legitimation as art, the role of traditional museums and experimental galleries), theater and performance art (dealing with current social and political issues and the work of theaters like *Teatr.doc*, *Gogol Center* and *Electrotheater*) and the anthropology of the city (urban folklore and legends, appropriation of spaces by residents). The St. Petersburg segment will trace the role of the city from the time of Peter the Great to the present: the high imperial

culture of the 18th century, the development of the so-called "Petersburg text" in literary works, the rise of capitalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the October Revolution in Petrograd, and the informal growth of youth culture in Soviet Leningrad in the 1970s and 1980s. All of the program's modules will involve morning classes and seminars; afternoon visits to the relevant historical, social, and political sites; discussions with the Russian artists and academics who are engaged in current creation of art and new research methodologies on it; and evening attendance at literary gatherings, theatrical productions, and other cultural events. Later this month, Professor Maria Neklyudova, Chair of the Department of Cultural Studies and Social Communication at MSEES, and Professor Natalia Mazur, Provost and Professor at EUSP, will be coming to Ann Arbor to discuss the evolving program with our faculty and graduate students.

Sincerely,

highlights

Slavic Department Welcomes Two Illustrious Russian Scholars

By Mikhail Krutikov, Professor of Judaic Studies & Slavic Languages and Literatures

The week before Thanksgiving, two leading Russian humanities scholars will make a stop in Ann Arbor on their way to the annual ASEES Convention in San Francisco. They will present their current research and discuss different career paths of their graduate students at the symposium *Publics, Humanities, and Public Humanities*.

Professor Maria Neklyudova, Chair of the Department of Cultural Studies and Social Communication at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration is a specialist in early Modern European culture. Her current research explores the circulation of styles and manners among different cultures. She explains: "Books on good manners and proper etiquette easily travel through time and space and during the last decades managed to adapt to digital reality much better than other types of writing. Although the origins of this phenomenon can be traced to the Renaissance (and beyond), the real flourishing

of courtesy treatises started in the 18th century, partially due to the spread of French language and manners throughout European courts. For example, many books of Abbé de Bellegarde, a prolific distributor of advice, were rendered into English, German, Portuguese, Polish and Russian. When we compare these translations with the originals (the "originality" of the originals is another problem to be dealt with), it becomes obvious that not all advice was "translatable" either because of political implications or because of linguistic difficulties."

Professor Natalia Mazur, the Provost of the European University at St. Petersburg, is an art historian specializing in the history of visibility and emotions. Her presentation addresses the intriguing question of an emotional state which is known under different names in different cultures: spleen in English, *l'ennui* in French, *khandra* in Russian. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, she argues, "Many European philosophers, theologians,

physicians and writers agreed that boredom was the main malady of their time. However, the nature and the causes of boredom were explained differently in different countries. The English considered spleen, or the 'English malady,' a serious disease often leading to suicide: people afflicted by spleen looked for medical help. The French saw the roots of *l'ennui* in human psychology or in the structure of the society: one could escape *l'ennui* through religion or revolution. The protagonists of the best Russian novels — from Pushkin's Eugene Onegin to Goncharov's Ilya Oblomov — were looking for a remedy against boredom. What has happened to boredom in the last two centuries, what do we call it today, and how can the history of emotions help us escape it?"

In Russia, like everywhere, graduate students are not free from anxiety about their future career. Did I make the right choice by investing years into studying an obscure subject that few

people are interested in? Am I really good at it? Will I get an academic job? And what else can you do with a Ph.D. in the humanities today? And if I get an academic job, will it pay enough for me to survive — and if not, how can I complement my income using my skills and knowledge?

Our Russian visitors tell us about exciting careers and opportunities that their graduate students have created for themselves. They include creating archive collections, developing web-based education projects, starting theater and ballet companies, advising city administration, and many other endeavors.

The Slavic department is developing close collaborative ties with these two Russian schools. In Summer 2020, we are planning to send our first-year cohort of Ph. D. students to Moscow and St. Petersburg for a Graduate Summer School of Russian Culture which has been planned in collaboration with Professors Neklyudova and Mazur.



PUBLICS, HUMANITIES,
& PUBLIC HUMANITIES

staying connected

Turn, Turn, Turn

By Vlad Beronja, Assistant Professor, University of Texas at Austin



I left Michigan in the summer of 2016. It was the beginning of August and my friend Justine and I packed my recently purchased blue beater Honda Civic to the brim with books, hitched my bike to it, and headed south. After four days on the road, I arrived to my new life in Austin, Texas.

That same spring I had been informed—over the phone (disbelief, mad joy)—that I landed a job as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Slavic and Eurasian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. In other words, I was driving down to meet my dream. My life had suddenly taken all the contours of a quintessentially American “feel good” literary genre: a success story. *Chicken Soup for the Slavic Soul?* This was, after all, the culmination of my career as a graduate student.

Shortly after arriving in Austin, like a hero of a fairy tale, I excitedly went to the Key Office on campus and acquired my magical object: a set of keys to my new life. When I unlocked the door to my new office, I soon realized that I was not standing at a destination but at yet another threshold.

“My life had suddenly taken all the contours of a quintessentially American ‘feel good’ literary genre: a success story.”

Slavic literature is full of threshold symbolism. These are liminal spaces, neither inside nor outside, complicating our relation to the binary while simultaneously calling attention to it. They are curiously enchanted, frequently ominous, and imbued with morbid taboos, like the superstition about shaking hands over a threshold. But thresholds can also be spaces of potential transformation and—in a more religious register—resurrection. And, indeed, that summer I was in my Jesus years.

To bring it down to the secular, more disenchanting realm, a tenure track job is full of challenges and demands, but also of enormous

potentials for personal and professional growth. Luckily, the faculty and staff at UT have all been very welcoming and supportive. The department has that special coziness specific to Slavic departments the world over—and also that sense of belonging to an odd club the purpose of which is completely inscrutable to those who aren’t its members. The students are fantastic, too. During my time here, I’ve had the opportunity to design several new courses, such as the seminar on Balkan Popular Music; a freshmen seminar on nostalgia and popular culture in East Central Europe; and a course on comics and contemporary war. It has been especially rewarding to collaborate on digital and public scholarship projects with my students on some of these topics and to experience their enthusiasm and growth as writers, researchers, and global citizens. My own research has also been developing and evolving. I am currently finalizing my book manuscript, titled *Unacknowledged Losses: Cultural Memory and Counter-Archive in Post-Yugoslav Literature*, which is a significant expansion of my dissertation about cultural memory in the works of Dubravka Ugrešić, Daša Drndić and Aleksandar

Zograf. Alongside this, I am conducting research for a new book on comics in the Balkans/former Yugoslavia, an area that hasn’t received academic attention despite the recent boom in comics studies.

Other than that, I’ve tried to kick my noxious cigarette habit by replacing it—more or less successfully—with green health smoothies, an Austin trademark that is as expensive as a pack of Marlboros. When another Michigan alumna and close friend, Meghan Forbes, was here for a year teaching Czech and all things avant-garde, we got to know all the swimming holes around central Texas, a saving grace in the broiling summer heat (I miss her). The fall in Texas is especially long in coming and less resplendent than in Michigan. But I’m not nostalgic. Just feeling the threshold and glad that the seasons are changing, as they should.

“This was, after all, the culmination of my career as a graduate student.”

faculty focus

Along the Road to Publishing, Benjamin Paloff

By Mackenzie Hubbard, Office Assistant

The *Michigan Quarterly Review* launched its fall special issue this October, which was guest edited by Associate Professor Benjamin Paloff. The issue, titled, "What Does Europe Want Now," features essays, poems, fiction pieces, and translations discussing how to grapple with that question in a post-Berlin Wall Europe.

Professor Paloff wrote the forward of the issue, which dives into the complex ideologies and concepts explored throughout the issue. He writes about how politics world-wide are becoming more divisive, but it goes deeper than conservatism or liberalism. He explains that the issue focuses on the challenges

and triumphs perpetuated by ideas of multiculturalism, multinationalism, and international cooperation, amongst other similar ideologies. He also emphasizes the importance for writers to continue to discuss these topics because they continue to add nuance to these subjects that are too often seen as black and white.

The issue features works from Jeremiah Chamberlain, Sergei Sokolovsky, Jenny Erpenbeck, and many others. Select pieces can be read on the *Michigan Quarterly Review's* website, and a subscription to the journal can be purchased online or through the University of Michigan.



This October, Associate Professor Benjamin Paloff's translation of Dorota Masłowska's book, *Honey, I Killed the Cats*, was published. The book follows two young women who are attempting to navigate a world defined by consumerism and examines the ways in which people try to find meaning in their existence in spite of this.

Dorota Masłowska is a best-selling author in Poland and is regarded as a Polish literary sensation. She has written three books as well as several plays. Her books have

been translated into many languages including French, German, Dutch, Russian, and English.

Professor Paloff has written two collections of poetry and translated several works from Central and Eastern European literatures. Masłowska's first book, *Snow White and Russian Red*, was translated by him as well as her most recent release, *Honey, I Killed the Cats*.

The English translation can be purchased anywhere books are sold.

Ania Aizman, at Home at U-M

By Herbert J. Eagle, Chair & Associate Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures



This fall, Slavic Department Assistant Professor Ania Aizman, who is also a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Michigan Society of Fellows, presented a draft of the prospectus for her book project, *From Tolstoy to Pussy Riot: Anarchist Currents in Russian Culture*, to the Russian History Workshop at U-M. Aizman's project responds to the question of what happened to one of the most popular and vibrant philosophical discourses in 19th century Russia — anarchism. Aizman writes that it did not merely disappear in the Soviet period, with the censorship of anarchist journals and works by Kropotkin and Bakunin, with the sanitizing of Tolstoy for Soviet audiences, and the persecution of anarchist organizations. In fact, she claims, anarchist thought continued to evolve throughout the Soviet period in the arts, only to reemerge in the post-Soviet political

realm. Tracing encounters with anarchist thought, she finds anarchist aesthetics in the works of the proletarian writer Andrei Platonov and in the performances and texts of the OBERIU, the 1960s conceptualist artists, and in post-Soviet Russian philosophy and performance art. The workshop participants were impressed by the depth of her research, both in archives and in studying contemporary performances, and by the insights into the development of anarchist theory and practice that she presented. A very lively discussion, and some strategic suggestions for the book proposal itself, ensued. Aizman has already published, in the journal *The Russian Review* (January 2019), an article ("The Poor Rhymes of Hooligans: The Anarchist Aesthetics of OBERIU and Pussy Riot") based on one of the book's chapters. Her erudition, perceptive analysis, and engaging writing style already suggest how widely-read and influential her book is likely to be.

Aizman is also at work on a second book, *A World of Many Worlds: Russian Theater and Social Justice*. At the intersection of cultural anthropology and literary studies, the book explores the philanthropic and activist impulses of the contemporary Russian theater. The theater

is the most persecuted community in the Russian cultural sector, and its fight for free speech and artistic independence also drives its popularity among Russia's youth. In a lecture at our departmental colloquium last year, she presented her research on this theater and performance art. She discussed her observations and hypotheses, and also showed us photographs of some of the artists and their performances. Her presentation set an example for our graduate students of a rich research agenda about a subject of great present-day import.

"Her students highlighted her open-minded and supportive teaching style, appreciating especially how her lectures brought history to life..."

In the course that she is teaching this semester, "Art and Anarchism," she uses primary sources (manifestos, memoirs, photographs), as well as visits to archives and presentations by Michigan writers and musicians working in the anarchist tradition to help students understand the relationships between the ideas of earlier

thinkers and activists (like Bakunin and Emma Goldman) and recent manifestations of that approach to transforming society in the United States (such as the anti-globalization protests of 1999 and the Occupy Wall Street movement). Her generous and thoughtful teaching, which won her awards at Harvard, is already in ample evidence here. In a recent independent evaluation of her class by the Center for Research on Teaching and Learning, her students highlighted her open-minded and supportive teaching style, appreciating especially how her lectures brought history to life and how her discussion questions connected the historical material to their own experiences. She has also mentored graduate and undergraduate students through dissertation advising, independent study, and through the University's Undergraduate Research Program (UROP). In all respects, she has become a vital part of our departmental community.

graduate focus

Congratulations, Graduates!



Christopher Fort

successfully defended his dissertation on *Provincializing Socialist Realism: Soviet Literature from the Edge of Empire* in July 2019. Fort will teach for the University of Michigan in winter 2020.



Alena Aniskiewicz

successfully defended her dissertation on *Cultural Remix: Polish Hip-Hop and the Sampling of Heritage* in June 2019. Aniskiewicz accepted a position as a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Michigan Institute for the Humanities (2019-20).

Welcome to our New Graduate Students



Azhar Dyussekenova

Azhar graduated from Nazarbayev University (Astana) with a BA in World Languages, Literature and Culture. Her research interests are contemporary Russian and Russophone literatures, with a particular focus on gender and sexuality, national identity, and Post-Soviet culture. She likes to compose and perform music in her free time.

Ryan Hoaglund

Ryan holds a BA from Stanford University, where he majored in Slavic Languages and Literatures. His current research interests include Russian and Yiddish literature and Eastern European literary theories. In his spare time, he enjoys walking in the arboretum and watching movies with his cat.

Alexandra Tkacheva

Alexandra graduated from Nazarbayev University (Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan) with a BA in World Languages, Literatures, and Culture in 2019. Her research interests include modern and contemporary periods in Russian literature and culture. As a graduate student, Alexandra applies feminist critique to the works of canonical as well as contemporary Russian authors. When not deconstructing patriarchy, she rides her bike, learns about the human mind, or wanders through local coffee shops.

Kristian Tonnessen

Kristian graduated with a BA in Creative Writing, and Russian Literature and Culture, from Columbia University. His interests include the translation and reception of American writers in Russia, especially the early Soviet era, as well as 20th century Polish and Russian poetry. When not retranslating translations, he's usually reading something unrelated to Slavic studies, hiking, birdwatching, writing poetry, or planning a road trip.

Carina Zhur

Carina graduated from the University of California, Santa Cruz in 2017 with a BA in Modern Literary Studies and a BA in Film and Media. Her research interests are primarily in the Soviet Union's culture, literature, and films. Carina is especially interested in Soviet films from the 60's and 70's. When Carina is not studying or reading, she enjoys watching films and drinking good coffee.

Intern at the Mikhail Bulgakov Literary-Memorial Museum

By Grace Mahoney, Ph.D. Student

From late February through May this year, I served as an intern at the Mikhail Bulgakov Literary-Memorial Museum in Kyiv, Ukraine. The internship was part of my certificate requirements in the Museum Studies Program. I chose the Bulgakov museum as my internship site, not only because it is an interesting and unique museum, but it also relates to my dissertation research on literary-memorial museums in Ukraine and Russia.

Established in the early 1990's after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Bulgakov museum is located in the author's childhood home on the historic Andrew's Descent. The main exhibition recreates the author's life in the house layered with elements of his 1924 novel, *The White Guard*. In the novel, the protagonists are members of the Turbin family who live in the same house (the street renamed Alexey's Descent). The museum thus tells the story of Bulgakov's life in Kyiv and also presents to visitors Bulgakov's

fictional representation of Kyiv in 1918—a year of revolution and war.

My main task as an intern was to digitize the museum's collection and find an online host for it. The result is a long-term collaboration between the museum and the University of Michigan, as Digital Collections of U-M Libraries is hosting the collection. Although most of my days were spent scanning documents and recording metadata, I did enjoy participating in the

weekly Monday morning staff meetings, which usually ended with a small or large celebration in honor of a birthday or anniversary. The museum also recently organized audioguides as part of the options available to visitors. I was recorded for the English-language version, so if you ever pay a visit, you can listen to me guide you through Bulgakov's former home.



The museum cat. Referred to by various names, but most universally “nasha krasavetsa.” Of course, visitors think she is Begemot.



At a birthday party for one of the museum's co-creators, Kira Pitoeva. From left to right: Grace Mahoney, Iryna Svirely (Researcher and Head of the museum's Charity Fund), Olga Savitskaia (Researcher), and Lyudmila Gubianuri (Director)



Grace Mahoney reading for the museum's English-language audioguide.

in the classroom



Guest Lecturer, Lisandri Kola

Lisandri Kola is a guest lecturer of Albanian Literature from the University of Tirana in Albania teaching a one-credit undergraduate course for the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Michigan during the fall term. This mini-course titled, "Albanian Literatures of Exile," focuses on the nature and the function of exile in literature. Since 1944, when the political situation in Albania changed, many writers escaped from the country. That year was the prelude of Hoxha's regime, one of the cruelest dictatorships in Eastern Europe and in the world, too. Exile in that case was not only a social phenomenon but also an intellectual state, a literary movement, and a sign of freedom. Students taking this course will learn about the symptoms of the regime, the political status of language, subversion of cultural tradition and the flourishing of an artificial language (i. e. official language established in 1972), which was contested by several scientists. During the Albanian communist system, like in every similar system, the literature changed, converting it into an ideological status. So, Albania produced the so-called 'socialist realism' or 'soc-realism'. This is one side of Albanian Literature, but the other side developed out of the borders of geographic Albania. The instruments of propaganda were in all cultural levels: literature, painting, theater, cinema, etc. During the course, students study and understand these forced types of mutations in an autocratic society.



Visiting Professor, Marek Nekula

We welcomed Marek Nekula from the University of Regensburg to the University of Michigan and the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures. He was a visiting professor teaching a one-credit graduate seminar early in the fall term titled, "Performing Memory: Cultures of Memory in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989." The first class seminar was a public lecture on "Franz Kafka in Central European Cultures of Memory". The seminar and the lecture reconstructed the main strains of the reception of Franz Kafka within the historiography of literature in Central Europe and traced them to Central European cultures of memory.

Nekula is a Professor for Czech and Western Slavic Studies at the Institute of Slavic Languages and Literatures and the head of the Center for Czech Studies at the University of Regensburg.

undergraduate student focus

By William Lee, Bachelor of Business Administration 2022



My name is William Lee and I am a sophomore in the Ross School of Business with an intended minor in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian Language, Literature, and Culture. I am proud, humbled, and extremely grateful to be a 2019-2020 Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) academic year fellow for Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian.

I grew up in Anchorage, Alaska, graduating from one of the first K-12 Russian Immersion programs in the United States. Learning the Russian language and culture left a tremendous impact on my life and perspective and continues to open doors for me to this day. Starting a new chapter of my life in college, I wanted to learn and discover a new language and culture. I chose to study Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian for two primary reasons: the classes allowed me to connect with

my heritage and studying a second language within the Slavic language group has deepened my understanding of Eastern Europe as a whole. My mother's family immigrated to the United States from Croatia close to 100 years ago, and I am the first person in my family to now speak and interact with the language once more.

I am honored to be a recipient of a FLAS Fellowship because it allows me to support my studies, my passions, and my career ambitions. This fellowship helps me afford tuition and housing, enabling me to channel my time and energy into studying for classes and participating with multiple student organizations on campus, including the Slavic Student Association. Through majoring in Business Administration with an emphasis in accounting and

finance, I intend to work professionally in international tax services. I strongly believe in the power of positive business and working with multinational companies to strategize and offer new goods and services into underdeveloped markets in order to increase global prosperity and trust. By studying both Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian and Russian, I hope to work with local businesses from Eastern Europe, allowing them to prosper and navigate the global landscape.

Living in a global society, language allows us to make connections, explore new places, and better understand the perspectives and lives of people living around the world. As reported by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* earlier this year, over 650 foreign language offerings were eliminated

across the country between 2013 and 2016. In addition to the widely reported cognitive and psychological benefits of learning foreign languages, each individual elimination of programs and course offerings is a missed opportunity to interact and connect with global peoples and unique cultural heritages. In this context, the FLAS fellowships supporting underrepresented languages and area studies like Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian are especially important. I would like to say thank you to all teachers and administrative supporters across our campus for supporting and encouraging language study and acquisition, in particular my language professor Marija Rosic. I am happy to be a part of the Slavic department, and hope to continue learning new languages and expanding my global perspective for the rest of my life.

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