

# THE SLAVIC BAZAAR

13th Undergraduate Research Conference of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures

## Paper Abstracts

### **10:15–11:15. 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Russian Literature: From Pushkin's Reflexive Narration to Tolstoy's Moral Teaching**

#### ***Katherine Senter, "Narrating Narration: Pushkin on the Purpose of Fiction"***

Comparative analysis of first person narration in three of Alexander Pushkin's major works—the 1831 *Tales of Belkin*, 1825-1832 *Eugene Onegin*, and 1836 *The Captain's Daughter*—reveals Pushkin's reflexive narrative technique that intersperses plot developments with personal reflection and social commentary. In these three works, Pushkin interweaves a parallel plot about the writing of each story. His narrators and frame stories overlap with his own identity to fuse reality and fiction. These narrators note similarities between themselves and other principal characters to validate their authority as storytellers. The narrator also connects with the reader, often via second person "you," to explore the narrator, character, and reader's mutual identity in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian society. By inextricably connecting the reader to the story, this narrative dialogue justifies the existence of the novel as a means of reflection. In a literary search for self, Pushkin simulates the elucidating power of fiction by finding his identity as poet-protagonist in *Onegin* and, likewise, calling the reader to action to become his own protagonist. Instead of mocking the ignorance of his Russian audience as in his contemporary Lermontov's *Hero of Our Time*, or ending with a simplistic display of cause and effect as in his predecessor Karamzin's "Poor Liza," Pushkin's reflexive narration empowers the reader to interpret both fictional character and Russian society alike.

#### ***Laura Christians, "Moral Teaching and Teaching Morality: Divergent Perspectives on the Role of Educators in Moral Reform in Late Imperial Russia"***

The Great Reforms of 1855 to 1881 implemented under Tsar Alexander II came as a response to the overwhelming need for Russia to develop and restructure. These reforms were preceded by a period of rich intellectual debate over how best to address the ills of an empire denounced by contemporary social critic Mikhail Pogodin, as "rotting and stinking both physically and morally." A particularly stimulating topic of debate was the role of education in social reform and the development of Russia. In addition to arguing over specific situations, such as whether, and how, education could be a means of pursuing social justice for the peasant population, they explored more far-reaching topics, such as seeking to determine the role of educators in bringing about moral reform. Two particular intellectuals, Konstantin Ushinski, an educator and pedagogical theorist, and Lev Tolstoy, a writer who was involved in peasant education on his estate, proposed answers to the question of whether there was an onus on teachers to meet the moral needs of the empire. This paper seeks to explore their writings and views on the moral mission of teachers in the reform era of the 1850s and 1860s from a literary, historical and cultural perspective. While the lenses through which they approach the topic - pedagogy and educational theory for Ushinski and the didactic nature of Russian literary culture for Tolstoy - steer them to divergent conclusions on the purpose and process of education, they concur on the significance of teachers' moral mission in relation to education as an end in itself and to Russia's hopes for reforms. I conclude with a brief analysis of the impact that Ushinski and Tolstoy's works continue to have on moral education in Russia today.

### **11:30-12:30. 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Russian Literature: The Soviet Experience**

#### ***Syra Ortiz-Blanes, "Identity and the Village Eccentrics in Vasily Shukshin's Short Stories"***

Vasily Shukshin is considered to be one of the most prominent and prolific writers of the late-Soviet movement known as "Village Prose." This, in part, is due to his unique insight to countryside life because of his status as both urban and rural dweller. Yet this was also the source of the author's personal, biographical challenges. Shukshin struggled to find his own place, for he straddled two worlds without a sense of complete belonging to either: the complex Soviet village and the cosmopolitan Russian city. The author, both physically and mentally, oscillated between these two universes. These experiences created a profound disjunction in his identity – a duality also evident in the eccentric characters of his short stories.

This paper close reads two of Shukshin's stories, *Alyosha-at-Large* and *Cutting Them Down to Size*, analyzing their protagonists, Kostya Valkov and Gleb Kapustin, respectively. It concludes that there is a direct parallel between the recurring village oddball in Shukshinian short stories and the author's own identity. The writer is ultimately using these characters (both of whom are "oddballs") to describe his own perpetual state of transition between rural and urban life. The paper examines the characters' vocabularies and speech, their relationship with their environment and other characters, and their behavioral and cognitive processes.

#### ***Jeremy Golant, "The Gulag: Solzhenitsyn and My Dedushka Isaak"***

In 1949, my great-grandfather Isaak Lvovich Lyudmirskiy was committed to a five-year term in a Soviet labor camp on the grounds of alleged Trotskyist sympathies. The decision to write about the gulag was strongly influenced by my discovery of Dedushka Isaak's rehabilitation documents, which my grandmother left behind after she passed away in 2015. This paper, written for Professor Kevin Platt's course on Soviet Society, examines the work of Varlam Shalamov, Sergei Dovlatov, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, attempting to map them onto Hannah Arendt's well-known schema of totalitarianism. In so doing, I identify elements of each of the three texts that successfully comport with Arendt's three strata of oppression vis-à-vis the concentration camp. I then examine the status of dissent in each of the three works, and formulate a case against Arendt's rigid, theoretical framework. The paper concludes on an optimistic note, invoking Solzhenitsyn's appeal for future generations to "[write their] own commentaries to go with [his] book" in order to prevent the zeks' oppression from becoming silenced. Composing this paper was a uniquely personal process, as I discovered elements of my great-grandfather's story that resonated strongly with the narratives of both Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn. And surprisingly, I learned of a connection between the émigré Dovlatov and my parents, who came to the United States in 1992. I submit that these narratives intertwine – and I write to ensure that they live on.

## **1:15–2:00. Keynote Lecture: *Jessica Ferro* (Graduate Fellow, University of St. Thomas, Penn alumna)**

### **“O Cursed Night: Smerdyakov’s Nativity and Lizaveta’s *Hortus Conclusus* Gone Awry”**

The history of mankind began in a garden, a garden from which life first emerged and from which death sprang. Interestingly, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the place of the garden is at the heart of the narrative, birth and death, love and revenge are all enacted within this enclosed space. In subtle ways Dostoevsky has weaved in literary structures that mirror biblical narratives and language. Rowan Williams cites Bakhtin when he calls Dostoevsky an essentially “polyphonic” writer. Dostoevsky dangles and fuses together seemingly dichotomous ideas, presenting “profoundly diverse voices...a constant and unfinished interplay of perspectives.” But more than that, Dostoevsky writes a “novel about the word in all senses...it seems to have swallowed a small library...full of quotations, imitations, allusions,” mixing the serious with the humorous, the cynicism of “The Grand Inquisitor” with the beautiful biblical cadence and language of Father Zosima.

One biblical trope in particular that has had a profound impact on the artistic tradition is that of the *hortus conclusus*, or enclosed garden. This motif has manifested itself in literature and poetry, and perhaps most profoundly in the visual arts, inspiring an array of artists from icon painters to Fra Angelico, Da Vinci, and even Klimt. This paper will present the tradition of the *hortus conclusus*, and its development, and specifically use this to put forth a particular reading of Dostoevsky’s masterful novel. The paper will argue that the *hortus conclusus* motif emerges in this text and provides a fascinating lens by which to read the story of Stinking Lizaveta, her son Smerdyakov, and his foster parents, as characters who partake in an inverted distortion of the biblical narrative that their lives mirror.

## **2:10–3:40. East Central European Politics and Economies**

### ***Richard Wess*, “From Government Social Agency to Private Enterprise: How Restructuring and Privatizing Naftogaz Can Save the Ukrainian State”**

Today the State of Ukraine is facing a struggle for its very existence. I argue that there are three crises that have been warping Ukraine’s development since independence and especially since the global financial crisis: one economic, one political, and one energy. The first crisis relates to the insolvency of the State and across the board macroeconomic weakness, the second to Ukraine’s endemic corruption and consequently dysfunctional governmental system, and the third to the structural weaknesses and needs of the national energy sector. The current reform expounded by the government and the IMF does not adequately address these interlocking crises, but does allow for the opportunity for further reform. Namely, this thesis contends that the restructuring and privatization of the state-owned energy giant, Naftogaz, would be a real positive step towards solving Ukraine’s problems.

I advocate for a privatization of Naftogaz that prioritizes swift removal of direct control of the company from the government, while giving economic ownership to the people. Through a quick voucher privatization program I encourage Ukrainians to be given an equal share in a new Naftogaz holding company that becomes involved exclusively in its midstream business lines. By focusing there and allowing the upstream and downstream spaces to be opened up for competition, I believe foreign investment and competition can emerge and unleash the market forces that Ukraine needs in energy prices to balance the economy, reduce corruption, and stimulate modernization of the sector. Finally, to ensure equity for the poor who would face a real risk of fuel poverty from rising prices, I believe that expected cash flows modeled in this thesis would be able to be disbursed to voucher holders to compensate for welfare lost. In this way, key factors in Ukraine’s economic, political, and energy crises would be addressed, while taking care to ensure popular support for reform and avoid entrenched interests.

### ***Edgar Palomino*, “Coming of Age-Polish Foreign Policy since 1990”**

With recent Russian aggression, and the shift in US foreign policy emphasizing multilateral efforts, Poland is a more important ally than ever. It is therefore useful to understand how Poland built up its power on the Continent, and to revisit the foreign policy goals it pursues with that power. Utilizing sources from the Polish government, recent news articles, and the works of several scholars, these two topics are discussed at length. Through various maneuvers, especially a zeal for spreading democracy, Poland has focused on increasing its clout within the EU, in Central Europe, and in Belarus. Special attention is afforded to Belarus and Poland, reflecting the potential flashpoint that border represents. Internal Polish politics are not neglected, and reflections on the recent election of Law and Justice to power, in regards to Polish clout and foreign policy, conclude the piece.

### ***Hannah Kereszturi*, “Democracy in Danger: Studying Hungary’s democratic reversal through the lens of EU accession”**

Since the right wing, populist Fidesz party was elected in Hungary in 2010, it has been steadily eroding the checks and balances of Hungarian democracy, creating an illiberal regime. Democratic reversal in the European Union has until now been unprecedented, and is a huge concern for academics and policymakers alike. Although important research has been done on the topic, it is largely from a comparative politics angle, analyzing the nature of Hungarian domestic politics.

This thesis aims to explore Hungary’s democratic U-turn from an international relations angle. Specifically, it explores how the Europeanization of Hungary, through both economic and social means, could be correlated with its democratic deterioration. I ask two research questions. The first is: Is there a relationship between problems caused by market liberalization and the quality of democracy? I conduct statistical analysis on income inequality, unemployment and employment on the Visegrad countries (Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland) to answer this question. I find no conclusive evidence to support that high unemployment, high inequality, and low employment cause democratic deterioration.

The second question I ask is: Is there a relationship between the social penetration of European values (such as practices of pluralism and a preference for democracy) and the quality of itself democracy? I examine the strength of civil society and public attitudes towards the European Union to operationalize these variables. I find that a weak civil sector and greater disappointment with EU accession is more likely to result in the emergence of an illiberal regime.