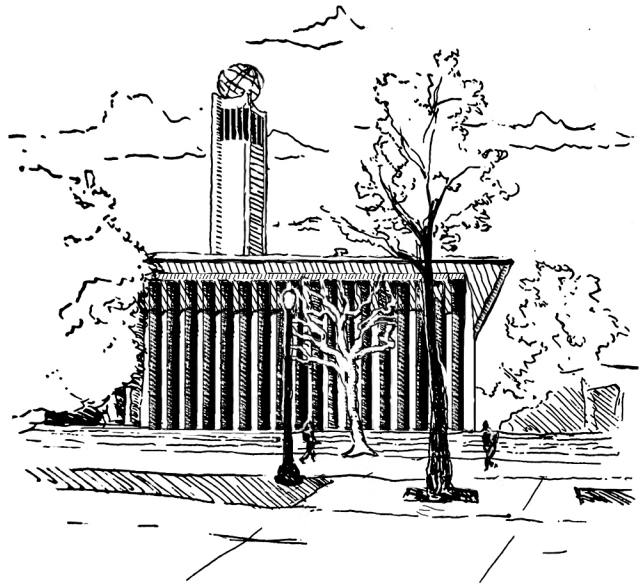


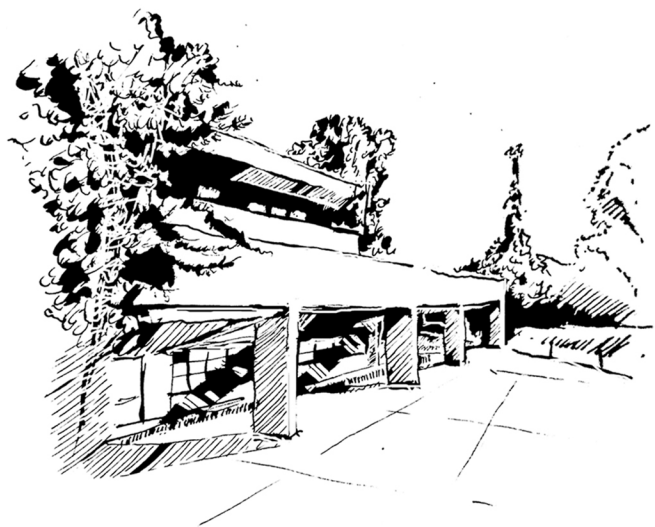
# 2022

## CALIFORNIA SLAVIC COLLOQUIUM



The Department of  
Slavic Languages  
and Literatures  
**WELCOMES YOU**

**Saturday, April 9**  
**via Zoom**  
**9:00am – 5:00pm**



**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**

# CALIFORNIA GRADUATE STUDENT SLAVIC COLLOQUIUM

Saturday, April 9 (via Zoom; 9:00am–5:00pm)

9:00-9:10     **Introduction** by the USC hosts

9:10-10:40     **SESSION 1. Narrative and Its Discontents**

**Chair: Gabriella Safran (Stanford)**

9:10-9:30     **David Miller (UCLA)**

*Legal Principles in Pushkin's "The Captain's Daughter"*

9:30-9:50     **Eric Kim (Stanford)**

*Straight into the Horse's Ear (Chekhov's "Toska")*

9:50-10:00     **Minibreak**

10:00-10:20     **Hank Miller (Berkeley)**

*"Хотя бы однажды": "Кладбище в Козине" and Jewish Elegies*

10:20-10:40     **Q&A**

10:40-11:00     **Coffee break**

11:00-12:30     **SESSION 2. No Resistance to Theory**

**Chair: Thomas Seifrid (USC)**

11:00-11:20     **Elizaveta Dvortsova (USC)**

*Iconicity: Portraying "Beginnings" and "Ends"*

11:20-11:40     **Polina Varfolomeeva (UCLA)**

*The Fate of the Russian Fairy Tale in the Age of Realism:*

*The Case of Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin*

11:40-11:50     **Minibreak**

11:50-12:10     **Semyon Leonenko (Berkeley)**

*Mikhail Zoshchenko's "Birzha Truda" and the Work of Skaz*

12:10-12:30     **Q&A**

12:30-1:30     **Lunch Break**

- 1:30-3:00      SESSION 3. Poetics and Politics**  
**Chair: Polina Barskova (UCB)**
- 1:30-1:50      Elena Petrova (USC)**  
*"Among the Czarinas of Pushkin's Heart Was Some Jewess":  
 About the Influence of Imperial Russian Antisemitism on "Gabrieliad"*
- 1:50-2:10      Georgii Korotkov (Stanford)**  
*The Social Role of Inostrannaia Literatura in Cultural Diplomacy  
 between the USSR and the USA in the late 1970s*
- 2:10-2:20      Minibreak**
- 2:20-2:40      Olga Lazitski (UCSD)**  
*Alternative Professional Journalism in the Post-Crimean Russia:  
 Resistance to the Kremlin Disinformation Efforts*
- 2:40-3:00      Q&A**
- 3:00-3:20      Tea Break**
- 3:20-4:50      SESSION 4. The Visual Dominant**  
**Chair: Colleen McQuillen (USC)**
- 3:20-3:40      Filip Sestan (Berkeley)**  
*Realism or Skepticism: Anxieties of Reception in Thaw Film*
- 3:40-4:00      Samuel Page (Stanford)**  
*Teaching to Interpret in El Lissitzky's Children's Books  
 from Kyiv & Vitebsk*
- 4:00-4:10      Minibreak**
- 4:10-4:30      Margarita Delcheva (UCSB)**  
*The Mail Art Suit and Ghosts of Presence: Performance and  
 Reenactment in the Work of Pawel Petasz*
- 4:30-4:50      Q&A**
- 4:50-5:00      Final Remarks**

# CALIFORNIA GRADUATE STUDENT SLAVIC COLLOQUIUM

## SESSION 1

**Narrative and Its Discontents (9:10am-10:40am)**

**Chair: Gabriella Safran (Stanford)**

**David Miller (UCLA)**

*Legal Principles in Pushkin's "The Captain's Daughter"*

In Pushkin's historical novella "The Captain's Daughter," laws and legal principles are prominently featured. These legal issues are based in actual records that Pushkin uncovered in secret government archives while researching The History of the Pugachev Rebellion; there were noblemen that supported the rebellion as well as merciful pardons that came directly from Catherine the Great. Most of the novella is structured around Pyotr Grinev's bildungsroman, where Pushkin uses laws and legal structures as narrative obstacles to explore Grinev's maturation and growth during his military service. For example, Grinev is the defendant in two trials, first before Pugachev and then before a Russian military tribunal. Both authorities explicitly question Grinev's allegiance, which inspires Grinev to recommit to the Russian state's principles of fidelity and honor, thus marking the end of his coming-of-age story. The novella, however, continues with Masha Mironova's dramatic intervention into Grinev's legal predicament. A shift of narration from first-person to third-person identifies Masha's intervention as a distinct story-within-a-story. After a chance encounter with Masha, the Empress extends mercy to Grinev with dramatic simplicity. Masha's court experience is in great contrast to the emphasis on evidence and eyewitnesses in Grinev's bildungsroman. In the present work, I explore the parallels between the legal affairs of the Russian state and of Pugachev within Grinev's story. I also analyze how the legal questions in Grinev's story and Masha's story require different narrative approaches.

*David Miller is interested in the intersection of law and literature, particularly in Russian literature. His background is in legal practice, and he is completing his second year at UCLA where he finally realized that both law and literature invoke the reader's interpretation rather than relying exclusively upon the author's intent.*

## Eric Kim (Stanford)

### *Straight into the Horse's Ear (Chekhov's "Toska")*

Chekhov's "Toska" refracts a very familiar topos of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian literature, the scene of an abused horse. However, instead of witnessing the abuse of an equid, Chekhov's readers experience the suffering of a different animal, the human cabdriver Iona. By displacing suffering from equine to human body, Chekhov intimately links two beings, which ultimately share the burden of melancholy through the interconnected actions of speaking and listening. The "nag," *loshadyonka*, in the story serves as the other half of a protagonist whose primary action of narration cannot transpire without an interlocutor. In this way, the listening horse not only allows Iona to act as a human but also permits the text to function as a story. When Chekhov establishes these empathic relations between horse and human, he exposes how humans can lose or may have lost access to their humanity.

However, the story does not end with mere exposure of lost identity, existential or species. In fact, the *siuzhet* extends indefinitely with the conclusive ellipsis, "Iona was delighted and told her everything..." As the storytelling shifts from the story's narrator to Iona's narrative, the multiplication of *siuzhets* allows for the entry of another plot. Thus one can further read an unboundedness of *fabula*, which continues not only with the past of the cabdriver but also into the future of their companionship. Through the narration of Iona's melancholy to his equine companion, Chekhov implements story and plot, and the very notions of narratology multiply. These narrational practices occur through the relatively shifting species distances, whose movement ultimately facilitates a reclamation of humanity.

Considering the relational de- and re-familiarization of equine-human existence, I propose the term *sostranenie* as a potential model for understanding how Chekhov's horse operates. Derived from the root *stran*, which in Old Church Slavonic can be adjectivized into *stranъnъ*, meaning "strange" or "compatriot," *sostranenie* also relies on the *so-* prefix, *co-* in Romance derivatives, to emphasize communication, cooperation, and co-being. While Shklovsky and his followers effectively and extensively develop this first "strange" root in *ostranenie*, my neologism suggests a rapprochement of beings as witnessed through an approximate kinship among fellow bodies, at once alien but still related. Thus, the horse becomes necessary for an initial defamiliarization followed by an existential reconciliation facilitated by the co-being of species. By labeling this whole process as *sostranenie*, I hope to identify a model of subject formation in the prose of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian prose. While recognizing the potential redundancy to and confusion surrounding this new term, I am attempting to incorporate another shade of nuance into Shklovsky's theory. Instead of radically deconstructing the automatic modes of perception that guide our reading, I hope to reconstruct an understanding of this era's

horses and humans through what I aim to argue is a shared topos of the subjectivized horse. Because the horse existed in such a privileged cultural position both in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the Russian Empire, I argue that the horse represents a productive node through which to access Chekhov's milieu.

*Eric Kim is a third-year graduate student at Stanford University. In addition to horses, his research focuses on encounters and exchanges between groups, defined both by themselves and by others, and across borders, imagined but still real, particularly in the context of Imperial Russia.*

## **Hank Miller (Berkeley)**

*"Хотя бы однажды": "Кладбище в Козине" and Jewish Elegies*

Babel's story cycle "Конармия" is cut into more or less equal halves by a remarkable miniature, "Кладбище в Козине." It is less than a page long and is markedly distinct from any other entry in "Конармия." Elusive in terms of genre, it is a moment of sepulchral stillness amidst the chaos of war, as well as the strongest intrusion of the elegiac, lyric mode into the collection; the story might be better termed a prose poem. Its central placement and sui generis style raise the question—if so much sets it apart, then what connects it to the other stories, in thematic and generic terms, and what role does it play in the larger poetics of "Конармия"? This paper argues that "Кладбище в Козине" should be read within the comparative framework of a Jewish tradition of lamentation—the kinnot. Furthermore, this reading transforms our understanding of the broader elements of elegy within "Конармия." This Jewish tradition of lamentation and litany complicates Liutov's, and indeed Babel's, position as elegist and historical witness. This hybrid kinnotic-elegaic subject mourns not personal loss but the past, present, and future suffering of a religious and cultural collective.

One might read "Кладбище в Козине," or indeed "Конармия" in its entirety, as a new entry in a canon of historically-occasioned kinnot. I argue "Кладбище в Козине" compels us to do just that. In so doing, it demonstrates the formal tendency of story cycles to invite attempts to impose an 'ordering' of individual stories, even as "Конармия" in particular works to frustrate this impulse through the very proliferation of its structural logics. Spatial metaphors abound in the secondary literature; each reading becomes something of a map through the cycle. It is little surprise that the centrally-located "Кладбище," as a triumph of setting over action and the nominal over the verbal, has attracted attention in this context. This paper argues that the distinctly kinnotic cyclical temporality of "Кладбище в Козине" inflects the formal structure of "Конармия." The conceptual metaphor at the heart of the notion of a story 'cycle' is instantiated as kinnotic temporality 'takes form.'



A subsidiary aim of this paper is to historicize an aspect of the “Кладбище” which has garnered no small amount of scholarly interest: its recourse to a phantasmagoric orient, and particularly to ancient Assyria. This mystification becomes less mystifying when placed in dialogue with the kinnotic canon and situated in a historical context of renewed interest (Jewish and otherwise) in Levantine antiquity. The paper begins with a brief overview of the Jewish models I engage with, situating them in dialogue with the canonical Graeco-Roman elegy and associated critical paradigms of mourning. It proceeds to a close reading of “Кладбище в Козине” itself, examining how these textual traditions clash within a single text, while paying particular attention to elegiac questioning. Finally, the paper will broaden its scope to include thematically relevant and architectonically significant stories which also develop the cycle’s elegiac-kinnotic current.

*Hank Miller received his B.A. in Russian from Oberlin College in 2017. The next year, he served as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant at Northeastern Federal University in Yakutsk. He is currently in his fourth year in the Berkeley PhD program, preparing for his exams to advance to candidacy. His interests, unsurprisingly, include war writing and Jewish Studies.*

## SESSION 2

No Resistance to Theory (11:00am-12:30pm)

Chair: Thomas Seifrid (USC)

**Elizaveta Dvortsova (USC)**

*Iconicity: Portraying 'Beginnings' and 'Ends'*

In an iconic image the signifier and the signified are equal. In other words, form resembles content. Charles Pierce's "icons," Roman Jakobson's "shifters," John Austin's "performatives," and John Searle's "speech acts" all contribute to an understanding of iconicity, but do not offer a comprehensive theoretical frame for it. I follow Alexander Zholkovsky and Yurii Shcheglov's method for identifying and describing the iconic effects deployed in literary texts. Building on their analyses, I propose a broader list of themes that get transformed into iconic images when paired with certain devices. I focus on the iconic portrayal of openings/endings in Russian literature, primarily, poetry. I rely in part on the study of endings in poetry by Barbara Smith, who has described some structural techniques that iconize endings (although without labeling them as "iconic"). Based on examples from Lermontov, Fet, Akhmatova, Zabolotsky, Gandlevsky and some other authors, I outline a classification of motifs that create an iconic effect when placed at the opening/ending of a text.

Within the category of iconic opening/ending there are smaller units of various levels of complexity. First, there are words that explicitly name 'beginning' and 'end.' When placed in a certain position, they create a simple iconic effect: thus, the archetypal line "В начале было слово" in the *Gospel According to John* directly names the sense of 'beginning.' A more subtle technique is the use of grammatical forms, for example, inceptive verbs (*запел*) for the 'beginning' as opposed to perfective forms that evoke the 'end' (*отговорила*). A still more complicated artistic effect is achieved by using specific images and motifs that are associated with the beginning and end, such as: 'entrance' and 'exit'; 'birth' and 'death'; 'sunrise' and 'sunset,' 'morning' and 'evening'; 'turning a light on' and 'off', 'starting' or 'putting out a fire' etc.

Another class of words that can iconize opening/ending are numerals naming firsts and lasts. Among cardinal numbers, for example, "one" can be iconically placed at the opening/ending. Other numbers create iconic effects in certain positions too, but then they can also convey different themes (such as 'counting').

Themes that lend themselves to an iconic representation are diverse. These are mostly abstract categories, such as symmetry or continuity, often embodied in concrete



devices and specific techniques like chiasm and repetition. ‘The beginning’ and ‘the ending’ form the largest entry of the “dictionary” of iconically represented themes. Moreover, as a binary, they often appear together (iconic opening + iconic ending). Naturally, these two themes take iconic shape when mentioned in the first or the last part of the text. For a lyric poem, it should be the first and last line, or, better still, the first and the last word, while in larger narrative genres, such a frame is usually expanded to the size of a sentence, or even to a paragraph. By creating this classification, I hope to make a first step toward a more comprehensive theory of iconicity.

*Elizaveta Dvortsova is a doctoral student at the University of Southern California. She is broadly interested in theoretical poetics. Elizaveta focuses on the relationship between form and content — their interactions and quasi-contradictions. Her secondary interest is Soviet literary criticism of the 1960s and polemics between magazines during the Thaw.*

### **Polina Varfolomeeva (UCLA)**

*The Fate of the Russian Fairy Tale in the Age of Realism:  
The Case of Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin*

Although the role of Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin within the literary processes (including canon formation) as well as the connection of the ideas expressed in his works with philosophy has drawn the attention of the scholars, his legacy – the *poetics* of his works – still has not been well studied.

I suggest looking at his fairy tales – hardly a predominant part of his legacy. However, for an exploration of his writing method, these tales are a significant part of his work.

I aim to examine the poetics of Shchedrin’s fairy tales, on the one hand; and to provide insight into the fate of this genre in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, on the other. Why and how did writers with different writing styles address this genre in the age of Realism? Is it possible to discern any typological and genetic patterns? etc.

I suggest the following method of analysis. Firstly, I am going to apply the generative approach to see whether/how Shchedrin’s fairy tales resemble folktales. It is important to define the hypothesized innate typological structure within his works and to understand which features of the folktales were typical for them. For this I am going to analyze Shchedrin’s fairy tales in the framework of the analysis of narrative structure suggested by Vladimir Propp.<sup>1</sup> In particular, I aim to determine the *actants* in Shchedrin’s texts.

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<sup>1</sup> Propp, Vladimir. *Morfologiya Skazki*. 2nd ed., Moscow, Nauka, 1969.

Secondly, I would like to address the method applied by Aleksander Zholkovsky and Iurii Shcheglov in *Ex ungue leonem: Detskie rasskazy L. Tolstogo i poetika vyrazitelnosti*.<sup>2</sup> The starting point of my analysis is the idea of the constant property of a text (invariant) as a significant structural element. It is important for defining the structure of a particular text as well as a unifying element of the legacy of a writer as it spreads over his works – from one to another. The constancy of structural elements in different texts of the writer allows us to consider his works in different genres from the point of view of their structural and motive connections. Zholkovsky and Shcheglov analyze Tolstoi's short stories (children's stories) considering their "poetic world" as a system of invariants. They aim to define the thematic invariants in these texts and to show their connection with the "bigger" texts of Tolstoi (his novels). The scholars examine the environment of the constant properties describing the poetical features – Tolstoy's technique, writing devices which he used in these texts – and the way they interact with each other and with Tolstoi's legacy in general.

Applying the approaches mentioned above, I aim to examine Saltykov-Shchedrin's poetics and to define structural elements in his fairy tales, the deeper connections which are responsible for the constancy of his poetics.

*Polina Varfolomeeva is a graduate student in the Department of Slavic, East European & Eurasian Languages & Cultures at UCLA. She received her BA and MA degrees from the National Research University, Higher School of Economics, in Moscow in 2018 and 2020 respectively with a major in Comparative Literature and Slavic Studies.*

## **Semyon Leonenko (Berkeley)**

*Mikhail Zoshchenko's "Birzha Truda" and the Work of Skaz*

In my paper, I will try to demonstrate that Mikhail Zoshchenko's literary works mainly examine the proletariat *not* at work and to reflect on the formal and political implications of such an approach. Zoshchenko lingers on the gaps in the labor process, which may explain why his stories tend to take place in public transit and communal apartments (as a rule, no work happens there). To be sure, Zoshchenko's characters do not seem to value their jobs and often openly neglect them: a diligent professional is a rare find in his corpus. Almost any work which takes place in Zoshchenko is of ambivalent or simply suspicious quality and virtually never earns the workers their wage.

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<sup>2</sup> Zholkovsky, Alexander, and Iurii Shcheglov. *Ex Ungue Leonem: Detskie Rasskazy L. Tolstogo i Poetika Vyrzitelnosti*. Moscow, Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2016.

At the same time, a striking number of characters in his NEP-era stories are simply unable to secure a paying job and to earn their living due to ubiquitous unemployment. “Безработный” effectively becomes a full-fledged profession. What is more, Zoshchenko constantly supplies his readers with the images of labor (or lack thereof) as an overtly metaliterary endeavor. Zoshchenko’s narrators seem to take the notion of social demand (‘социальный заказ’) at face value: the society employs one to represent itself, hence one may easily be sacked. Fictional texts make possible to act out this scenario through hijacking the authority to hire and fire. Moreover, increasing contingency of the Soviet literary market brings about the profoundly ambiguous status of the writerly authority.

Zoshchenko’s fictions of contingency also provide a perfect breeding ground for the gimmick. I borrow the notion of the gimmick from Sianne Ngai’s recent monograph and venture to apply it to the completely different historical and economic context of NEP. *Theory of the Gimmick* explores an “aesthetically suspicious” object, a “contrivance”, “an unsold commodity whose value cannot be realized.” Some of Ngai’s insights into the aesthetic responses to late, crisis-prone capitalism, I argue, may be applied to the NEP era Soviet Russia with its reintroduced, albeit only short-term and in a limited manner, market capitalism.

My project seeks to consider Zoshchenko’s skaz as a self-consciously imperfect labor technique, a subpar craft used merely as a temporary measure (in good keeping with the transitory nature of NEP), a narrative gimmick which is both acutely modernist and harkens back to the dawn of Russian Realism. I envision skaz as a labor technique which constantly thematizes its own inferiority and ambiguity. It is the labor which is ostensibly dissatisfying even to the laborer (but they cling to it nonetheless). Through close reading of two miniatures from the mid-1920s—“Крестьянский самородок” (1925) and “Мелкое происшествие” (1927)—I will show how Zoshchenko’s *skaz* narrators tackle the questions of labor, value, and time.

*Semyon Leonenko received his B. Phil in Russian Language and Literature and M. Phil in Literary Theory from St. Petersburg State University, followed by an MA in Slavic Languages and Literatures from the University of California, Berkeley. His dissertation seeks to reexamine the Russian Formalist notion of skaz as labor technique.*

## SESSION 3

### Poetics and Politics (1:30pm-3:00pm)

Chair: Polina Barskova (UCB)

**Elena Petrova (USC)**

*"Among the Czarinas of Pushkin's Heart Was Some Jewess":*

*About the Influence of Imperial Russian Antisemitism on "Gabrieliad"*

Aleksandr Pushkin wrote "Gabrieliad" in 1821, during his Southern exile in Kishinev. For almost a century, the poem, which parodies the sacred scene of annunciation, could not overcome the restrictions of censorship to be published in a full version in Imperial Russia. Pushkin's scandalous poem was issued for the first time without censorship reductions in 1918 (accompanied by the introductory article and commentary by Valerii Briusov). After the Bolshevik Revolution, when the Marxist slogan "Religion ist das Opium des Volks" became fundamental for the communist agenda, it became possible to publish the travestied version of the sacred myth.

Briusov assumed in the introduction note to "Gabrieliad" that, during the period when he was working on the poem, "among the czarinas of Pushkin's heart was some Jewess." The claim that the poet, whose figure at the time was already revered, could have been in love with a Jewish woman was no less blasphemous in 1918 than the sexualized imagery of Mother Mary in 1821. This paper examines how the years of Imperial Russia's governmental antisemitic policies, combined with Russian society's established stereotypical view Jews as carriers of demonic sexuality, affected the perception of Pushkin's "Gabrieliad" in 1918 as scandalous.

The "Jewish question" in Russia has its roots in the eighteenth century: in December 1742, Elizaveta Petrovna signed the edict for the Expulsion of Jews from Russia; after the First and Second Partitions of Poland, when the members of the Polish Jewish community became inhabitants of the Russian Empire, Catherine the Great's *ukaz* (manifesto) in 1791 declared the creation of the Pale of Settlement. The governmental antisemitic policies made it almost impossible for the Jewish minority to live in the central parts of Russia (merchants were allowed to stay in the cities temporarily), and especially in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Consequently, when Pushkin was exiled in Kishinev he saw the life of the Jewish community for the first time. (In 1815 he referred to the dramatist Lev Nevakhovich, who was baptized in 1806, as "evrei moi," so it is not possible to say that before the exile he had never seen Jewish people). Pushkin's Kishinev poetry, joyful, erotic and full of comic descriptions of the members of the city's Jewish community,

unlike “Gabrieliad,” prompted fewer arguments on the matter of authorship than the “Gabrieliad.” For instance, “Khristos voskres, moia Revveka!” and “Razzevavshis’ ot obedni,” written in 1821, follow the same narratives as those presented in the aforementioned scandalous poem, although they described ordinary Jewish women and, as Witold Kowalczyk would claim in his survey “A. S. Pushkin i Evrei: Iz Opyta Issledovaniia Literaturnykh Stereotipov v Russkoi Literature,” follow the antisemitic patterns of Russian culture at the times of Pushkin. This paper will describe the ways antisemitic stereotypes, which were depicted in the texts from the Kishinev period, were used as the source for mockery in the “Gabrieliad.”

*Elena Petrova is a PhD student in the Slavic Department at USC. She received her undergraduate degree from Moscow State University in 2020. Her research interests include studying the Shandean narratives in Pushkin’s oeuvre and the “Jewish question” in Russian literature.*

## **Georgii Korotkov (Stanford)**

*The Social Role of Inostrannaia Literatura in Cultural Diplomacy between the USSR and the USA in the late 1970s*

The presentation is about the Soviet monthly *Inostrannaia Literatura* journal and its role in cultural diplomacy during the late 1970s. Among the thick journals in the USSR with translated texts, *Inostrannaia Literatura* was one of the key actors on the literary scene and a source of information about the West. Thanks to its amassing circulation, it became one of the main conveyers of Western cultural concepts. I will discuss journal activities in conjunction with the first Soviet-American writers’ meeting in Moscow in 1977. Despite the formal agenda, each of the parties pursued its own goals. Americans sought to get in direct contact with dissidents and the USSR wanted to increase the export of Soviet texts. I will go through the documents preserved in *RGALI* on the seminar organization. Two types of documents will be discussed:

- 1) Correspondence between *Inostrannaia Literatura* editorial board and foreign literary, cultural and political agencies.
- 2) Internal editorial documents that provide prominent description of the inner processes behind the outward ones.

In discussing the second part I hope to shed some light on the history of *Inostrannaia Literatura* and its role in the Soviet political life and how it changed with the advent of the All- Union Copyright Agency (VAAP) in 1973. This part will relate to the professional backgrounds of the editorial board members and how the journal was run by ex-diplomats and ex-KGB officers.

In the final part I will elaborate on the outcomes of the first Soviet-American

writers meeting, concentrating on the ambiguous role of *Inostrannaia Literatura* as an instrument of soft power. Its simultaneous interaction with “ideological enemies” and its duty to report to the heads of various political structures, along with the ability to travel abroad (among several other privileges), put the journal activities beyond the binary opposition of Soviet and Anti-Soviet.

Zooming in on the role played by the journal in international relations in the framework of cultural diplomacy and in the intersection of political, economic and literary contexts allows me to plan future research, which might address the unanswered questions of this paper synchronically and diachronically. Documents in the Hoover archive would provide another point of view on the first Soviet-American writers meeting. And it would be important to consider the rest of the meetings, which were held until the program was terminated by the US due to the start of the Soviet-Afghan war in 1979.

*Georgii Korotkov received his M.A. in Comparative Studies: Russian Literature in Cross-Cultural Perspective and graduated from the Higher School of Economics, Moscow, in 2015. He is a Ph.D. student in Slavic Languages and Literatures at Stanford University. His research interests include Soviet periodicals, cultural exchange during the Cold War, literary theory, Digital Humanities, Data Visualization, and Quantitative Analysis.*

## **Olga Lazitski (UCSD)**

*Alternative Professional Journalism in the Post-Crimean Russia:  
Resistance to the Kremlin Disinformation Efforts*

After 2014, a new community of journalists with a unique identity emerged in Russia. I call it alternative professional journalism (APJ), highlighting its group autonomy and potential for public mobilization and civic engagement. My data demonstrate how APJ challenges the state’s propaganda and disinformation efforts and provides the Russian public with the counter-narrative to the official discourse.

Alternative professional journalists challenge the state’s propaganda efforts by their dedication to truth-telling practices that in the era of late Putinism is considered oppositional. Post-truth politics of the regime and its post-truth propaganda efforts assault reality by creating multiple coexisting and contradicting narratives, when “nothing is true, and everything is possible.”<sup>3</sup> In this context, alternative professional journalists have taken on a role of reality defenders explaining that they must be the chroniclers of the present for the future accurate historical accounts.

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<sup>3</sup> Pomerantsev, P. (2014). *Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia*.



APJ revealed positive dynamics within the Russian public spheres, such as an existing demand for the truthful reporting and a growing journalistic solidarity within the professional community. In June 2019, Ivan Golunov—an investigative journalist working for the APJ outlet *Meduza*—got arrested on false charges. His colleagues from *Meduza* and other APJ outlets launched massive online and offline campaigns and organized street protests that promptly moved well beyond the community of journalists and beyond Russia. Eventually, a Moscow court dropped all charges against Golunov. His release became a first victory over the state for the journalistic community in Putin's Russia. What makes this victory even more important is the insight that revealed the role of APJ in the Russian society: its growing influence within the Russian public spheres, potential for public mobilization and civic engagement, and the unprecedented support of the audiences that came as a surprise for the journalists themselves and for the Kremlin.

APJ's growing influence has caused a new round of attacks by the regime. It designated journalists and their media outlets "undesirable organizations" and "foreign agents" – the terms that have strong negative connotations, meaning "enemies of the people," "traitors," and "spies." Russia's 2012 law on foreign agents originally singled out NGOs receiving grants from abroad. In 2020, Putin amended the legislation to target not only NGOs, but also media organizations, individual journalists, YouTube bloggers and practically anyone else who receives money from abroad and voices a political opinion. Following the imprisonment of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, the Kremlin started using the law to go after journalists and news organizations that are critical of the regime. Upon receiving the designation, "the agents" are required to label anything they publish - even social media posts - as the work of a foreign agent. Besides that, "foreign agents" must submit quarterly financial reports to the Justice Ministry. Bookkeeping mistakes and failure to comply can result in fines and even imprisonment. But what's even more damaging is how the designation influenced relationships with the sources and advertisers.

During the 2022 Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin has amended a so-called "fake-news" law that could put journalists in prison for 15 years for what the state considers spread of "fake news." One of the examples of such fake news is calling the Russian invasion "a war" instead of "a special military operation." My paper explores APJ practices and examines the ongoing confrontation between APJ and the Putin regime.

*Olga Lazitski is a PhD candidate at the UCSD Communication department. Her academic work encompasses issues of propaganda and populism within the contexts of the post-truth era, production of national subjects and nationalist sentiments, public resistance to the hegemonic discourses and oppressive regimes, practices of alternative professional journalism and its role in the public spheres.*

## SESSION 4

**The Visual Dominant (3:20pm-4:50pm)**

**Chair: Colleen McQuillen (USC)**

**Filip Sestan** (Berkeley)

*Realism or Skepticism: Anxieties of Reception in Thaw Film*

Marlen Khutsiev's *Il'ich's Guard* remains perhaps the most infamous of the Thaw's cinematic "events." The term "event"—used by Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd in their recent collection, *The Thaw, Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*—highlights the divergent happenings, subjective perspectives, and memories associated with the historical process of the Soviet Thaw. The cinema of the Thaw, for the first time in Soviet film history since the 1920s, turned to new trends in European films—as chiefly manifested in Italian neorealism and later the French New Wave. My paper begins with an investigation into how Soviet critics and political leaders attacked Italian neorealism, a movement heralded by the international film community as returning cinema to real life, claiming instead that such realism promulgated a skepticism that sought to undermine Soviet social reality. Marlen Khutsiev's *Il'ich's Guard* proves a rich case study for the intersection of skepticism and realism in cinema at this moment. The backbone of Khutsiev's visual style can best be understood, I argue, through the latent anxiety of (neo)realism's political efficacy for the Soviet aesthetic practice of socialist realism. After briefly surveying the Soviet reception of Italian neorealism, the first part of this paper will show how elements of the neorealist style find themselves in Khutsiev's film.

In the second part of this paper, I investigate how the historical reception and censorship of the film dovetail with the film's formal depiction of spectatorship. Nikita Khrushchev's infamous speech in 1963 single-handedly picked out Marlen Khutsiev's *Il'ich's Guard* as a film that was "wretched in content and useless in form." Following two years of re-edits, the film was re-released under the title *I am Twenty* in 1965. While the ending of Khutsiev's film substantially changed, many of the "skeptical notes" in the film persist in the censored version. Thus, it is no surprise that critics and viewers remained split on how to understand the film. Does Sergei, the film's main character, manage to reintegrate successfully into society? Or, as critic Ilya Vaysfeld suggests, does Sergei's alienation run the risk of alienating the spectator, producing feelings seemingly incompatible with the ostensibly "conflictless" social reality at the time? These questions broach the issue of the film's depiction of reality, marked by particular documentary

moments that harken back to the cinema of the Soviet avant-garde. However, *Il'ich's Guard* complicates the collective production and reception of reality, sharing the Neorealist urge to critique rather than produce collective worlds. The film stages the latent anxiety of spectatorship as increasingly privatized and isolated, a drama which Khutsiev formally substantiates through the proliferation of television screens in the film. What is truly radical about Khutsiev's film is not its ostensible rejection or acceptance of Stalinist culture, but rather its challenge to the traditional modes of production and reception in socialist realism as a cinematic practice.

*Filip Sestan is currently a graduate student in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at UC Berkeley, where he is also pursuing designated emphases in Critical Theory and Film Studies. In 2020, he received his B.A. from Yale University in Comparative Literature. His research interests include Soviet cinema, documentary aesthetics, Yugoslav New Film, the Frankfurt School, and film theory.*

### **Samuel Page (Stanford)**

#### *Teaching to Interpret in El Lissitzky's Children's Books from Kyiv & Vitebsk*

In this paper I analyze two works of illustrated children's literature by the visual artist El Lissitzky (1890-1941) with an eye to the pedagogical contexts of their production. The first book, *Had Gadya* ("One Little Goat," Kyiv 1919), is a retelling in both words and images of the (mostly) Aramaic song of the same name which is sung at the end of the Passover Seder. The second book, *Pro 2 kvadrata* ("About 2 Squares," Vitebsk 1920), is one of Lissitzky's last works produced at the Vitebsk Free Art studios as a member of the collective UNOVIS; it tells a story about two squares in six architectural Suprematist "constructions" with text. My contention is that the two works demonstrate a significant degree of continuity in Lissitzky's political interests and creative practice, rather than a sharp rejection of his earlier principles in the latter work, when situated in the cultural associations to which Lissitzky belonged and contemporary discussions about child pedagogy in the region encompassing the Ukrainian People's Republic and early Soviet Russia.

Accordingly, I consider the books as Lissitzky's contributions to future-oriented educational efforts by the Kyiv Kultur Lige and the Vitebsk UNOVIS in order to identify the pragmatic purposes each book was intended to serve. These two associations were dedicated, respectively, to Yiddishist Jewish cultural renaissance and world-building by means of "the new systems in art" (i.e., Suprematism). While himself deeply enmeshed in these revolutionary discussions, Lissitzky produced children's literature designed to strengthen the innate capacity of young readers to 'read' these new worlds without

relying on knowledge *external* to the texts and their own abilities. Lissitzky's distinctive embrace of the tension between text and visual is central to this process, facilitating and frustrating the child's work of interpretation on each page, and thus carefully crafting a capable reader. While much scholarship on these two books has sought to identify the external, allegorical references of each story, I distinguish between the allegorical and didactic functions of the books by focusing on their intended readers—children—and thus minimize the gap between the frequently opposed images of Lissitzky as Jewish cultural activist and Lissitzky as acolyte of Malevich.

*Samuel Page a first-year PhD student in the department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Stanford. His interests include East European Jewish history, theories of literary production and interpretation, and intercultural contact.*

### **Margarita Delcheva (UCSB)**

*The Mail Art Suit and Ghosts of Presence:*

*Performance and Reenactment in the Work of Pawel Petasz*

In 1982, Romanian artist Josif Király staged a performance, *Mail Art: Big Envelope*, where participants enter a giant envelope and mail themselves abroad. This figurative mailing humorously and poignantly summed up the urgency with which artists in the 'Second World' of the Eastern Bloc reached for mail art to find a responsive audience. While mail art can be considered a hybrid between an object and a performance, I hope to argue that it is through studying it as a performance that its unique time-based, repetition-based, and process-based practices and significance begin to stand out.

I will be exploring the "IS/AS"<sup>4</sup> of mail art performance, the overlapping of these two categories and the slippage between them. In the traditional sense, when something IS considered performance, it is an instance of "doing" rather than the finished products of such a process.<sup>5</sup> Mail art is performative, even when it doesn't involve a live performance, in the sense that it emphasizes or privileges 'doing' over the creation of objects. Therefore, mail art combines performance ('doing') with an archivable object ('done').

With Diana Taylor, I refer to mail art as a *networked ritual*, defined as participation and "doing as belonging" (Taylor 19). Such belonging had a special significance in Eastern Europe where the relative isolation of mail artists in the Eastern Bloc further emphasized the need for connection and an experience of doing things *together*. The mail art work involves a complex series of acts by multiple people involved in the production, contextualization, and transportation of a package. It also engages a play of the

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<sup>4</sup> This dichotomy is developed by Richard Schechner and clarified by Diana Taylor (Taylor 27).

<sup>5</sup> Diana Taylor discusses "doing" as one of the most basic definitions of performance (13).

appearance and disappearance of its ephemera as it is engulfed by the postal box and appears in another box, elsewhere.

For the project *The Intellectual Benefits of Art* (1980), the Polish artist Pawel Petasz wore a suit, assembled from the fabric scraps he received from other artists. The Suit has become an iconic representation and performance of collaboration in the network and an example of where mail art meets the body. Its 'constructed' look further reminds of Alexander Rodchenko's avant-garde theater costumes and the Dada assemblages of Kurt Schwitters.

In addition, in a series of intermedia and genre-bending works, Petasz reenacted mail art works as 'ghosts,' drawing attention to their ephemerality and attempting to performatively remedy them. In the artbook object series *Ghost of your Masterpiece* (1978-79), Petasz returned photo-reproductions of mail art works back to the original mail artist, adding a humorous flair to them. Through the 'ghosting,' the new work becomes singular because the reproduction often pictures only parts of the original. Petasz is remedying another artist's work's ephemerality through its unexpected spectral appearance. The ghost is preserved in a booklet, a documentation of an unrepeatable event.

*Margarita Delcheva is a poet, performer, and PhD candidate at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she teaches at the College of Creative Studies and the Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies. Her research interests include unofficial Eastern European art and performance, Minimalism in literature and art, re-enactment theory, and the legacy of postmodern choreographers. Margarita is a founding editor at Paperbag, an online poetry and art journal, created in 2009. Her poetry book The Eight-Finger Concerto was published in Bulgaria in 2010.*

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