### THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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### MAYAKOVSKY DISCOVERS NEW YORK CITY

YUGOSLAV MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE QUEERING THE RUSSIAN NOVEL

#### COLUMBIA | HARRIMAN INSTITUTE Russian, Eurasian, and East European Studies

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Cover image: Vladimir Mayakovsky (Paris, 1925). Photograph by P. I. Shumov.

Image on this page: Drawing from the graphic novel *Macedonia: What Does It Take to Stop a War*? by Harvey Pekar and Heather Roberson. Illustrated by Ed Piskor.



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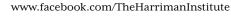
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Opposite page: Alexander Cooley (Photograph by Jeffrey Schifman)



Some refer to the current tensions between Russia and the United States as a "new Cold War." Regardless of how you frame it, an examination of our history is always enlightening. In this issue of *Harriman Magazine*, one of our postdoctoral research scholars, historian Markian Dobczansky, takes us back to the 1960s, a pre-internet era when Russian and U.S. influence campaigns used newspaper articles and symbols to get their messages across. Dobczansky tells the story of a transnational controversy over the legacy of 19th-century Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, an episode that, Dobczansky argues, illuminates the broader fate of Ukrainian culture in the Soviet Union.

Reflecting on the Cold War reminds us of the challenges academics face when studying and teaching about a perceived adversary. In her essay about teaching Russian literature in the current political climate, Columbia alumna and former Harriman junior fellow Ani Kokobobo discusses the contemporary manifestations of this particular challenge and strategies for overcoming it. Kokobobo uses literary texts to show her students the nuances and richness of Russian culture and to expand their perceptions beyond what they see in the media.

There is much more to the issue: the story of Russian Futurist poet, playwright, and artist Vladimir Mayakovsky's 1925 visit to New York, featuring photos from our fall exhibition "Through the Brooklyn Bridge"; an interview with the architectural historian who curated MoMA's recent exhibit on Yugoslav modernist architecture; a profile of alumna Heather Roberson Gaston and her quest to understand the Republic of North Macedonia; and an excerpt from writer and Harriman faculty member Keith Gessen's novel *A Terrible Country*.

As always, we'd love to hear your feedback and ideas for the future.

Alexander Cooley Director, Harriman Institute



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Mayakovsky Discovers New York City By Ronald Meyer

The year 2018 marked the 125th anniversary of the birth of Russian Futurist poet, playwright, and artist Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930). To celebrate the occasion, the Harriman Institute—in collaboration with the Russian State Vladimir Mayakovsky Museum (Moscow)—mounted an exhibition about the poet's visit to New York City in 1925.

The exhibition included photographs of the poet and his New York milieu, and the poet's notebooks and letters, as well as drawings by Diego Rivera, David Burliuk, and the poet himself. The exhibition ended with the story of Mayakovsky's love affair with Elly Jones, a young Russian émigré, whose identity became public only when her daughter, Professor Patricia Thompson of Lehman College, revealed her secret in the 1990s.



Vladimir Kulić: What's Not to Like about Modernism?

By Daniel Petrick

The Museum of Modern Art recently devoted an exhibit to Yugoslav architecture from 1948 to 1980. Learn more about Vladimir Kulić, the architectural historian behind the project, and why he decided to study Yugoslav modernist architecture.

What Does It Take to Stop a War? Heather Roberson and the Case of Macedonia By Masha Udensiva-Brenner

Harriman alumna Heather Roberson Gaston idealized the Republic of North Macedonia as a model for war prevention. When she got to know the place, she discovered a much more complicated story.







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Reclaiming Russian Cultural Tradition during the Rise of the Right—or Queering the Russian Realist Novel By Ani Kokobobo

Alumna Ani Kokobobo retools her teaching of the Russian classics to construct an inclusive, safe classroom, using her source materials to provide rich, plural perspectives for politically tumultuous times and alternatives to the Kremlin. While it is absurd to rely on these novels for guiding policy or explaining Russia's actions as a political agent, they remain relevant in that they show different, often more inclusive, Russias outside the Kremlin's grip and ideology.



Dueling Shevchenkos: An Episode in the Transnational Ukrainian Cold War By Markian Dobczansky

Postdoctoral Fellow Markian Dobczansky's research into the dueling Shevchenko monuments in Moscow and Washington, D.C., offers new ways of understanding how the Cold War penetrated American society and how a disagreement over Shevchenko's legacy was influenced by international political contexts.

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I Try to Find a Hockey Game By Keith Gessen

An excerpt from Harriman faculty member Keith Gessen's second novel. *A Terrible Country* captures the plight of Andrei, a newly minted Slavic Studies Ph.D., who in the midst of the 2008 economic crisis has left New York for Moscow. He lives with his grandmother, whose dementia worsens by the day, supports himself teaching a distance learning survey of Russian literature, and is looking for a pickup hockey game. Francine Prose called *A Terrible Country* a "smart, enjoyable, modern take . . . on 'the Russian novel.'"





## VLADIMIR KULIĆ: WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE About Modernism?

#### BY DANIEL PETRICK

eople were puzzled when Vladimir Kulić started studying Yugoslav Modernist architecture in the early 2000s. "I got the question more than once; why in the world am I working on this? Who would even want to know about this?" he recalled, "Even from architects from the region."

He is unlikely to face such questions again following the critically acclaimed exhibition, "Toward a Concrete Utopia:

Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948– 1980," at New York City's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), which ran from mid-July 2018 through January 13, 2019.

The exhibition, which Kulić co-curated alongside MoMA's Chief Curator of Architecture and Design, Martino Stierli, justified Kulić's academic choices and made an argument for Yugoslav Modernism's place in the architectural canon. Kulić trained as an architect in Belgrade during the 1990s but his interests shifted to architectural history just as Yugoslav architecture was itself relegated to history.

"What was happening in front of me with the city was far more inter-

esting than what I originally wanted to study," said Kulić. As the transition period went on, he saw that "suddenly Modernist architecture was completely changing meaning, changing ownership, changing purpose."

Some of it, suddenly, was no more. The radical changes made to the architectural fabric of the country due to wartime and post-Socialist neglect "made it very obvious that this was something that required attention," he said.





Above: Monument to the Revolution of the people of Moslavina, designed by Dušan Džamonja. Photograph by Plamen at Serbian Wikipedia.

*Left*: Tjentište memorial in Sutjeska National Park, Bosnia and Herzegovina, designed by Miodrag Živković and Ranko Radović. Photograph by Daniel Petrick. Kulić went on to get his Ph.D. at the University of Texas where he studied Yugoslav Modernist architecture and co-authored *Modernism In-Between: The Mediatory Architectures of Socialist Yugoslavia.* This book made him the obvious person to call when MoMA started considering a Yugoslav architectural exhibition in early 2015. At first, MoMA wanted to know whether it would even be possible to host such an event. Were there enough archival materials and enough interesting buildings to stage a show?

The curatorial team met in Skopje, Macedonia, in November 2015 where they made their case. Having convinced MoMA that the Yugoslav project deserved to be more widely known, they focused on how to introduce this little-known material to the world and make the case for the material's significance. One of the biggest challenges was the sheer size of the endeavor.

Kulić said he and his team asked themselves "whether it is even possible to insert anything new into the canon retroactively, now 40, 50, 70 years later. When there are these small interventions in the canon, these rediscoveries ... it's usually a single architect or a single building. We have an entire country, so the scale was scary."

A further challenge was making an argument for "Yugoslav architecture," something that had been questioned before. Some argued that the distinctive national schools of architecture and design in places like Ljubljana, Belgrade, and Sarajevo, along with the decentralized nature of architectural decision-making in the country, meant that nothing truly unified the country and thus there was no "Yugoslav architecture," but only "architecture in Yugoslavia."

Kulić and his team disagreed. Where others have seen a lack of a nationally unified architecture, the exhibition presented a picture of a social, political, and economic system that created a shared space by encouraging experimentation and local initiative. "One of the most interesting



Stone Flower Monument devoted to the victims of the Jasenovac concentration camp, Croatia, designed by Bogdan Bogdanović. Photograph by Bobonajbolji via Wikimedia Commons. aspects of 'Yugoslav architecture' is this dynamic between the overall framework of Yugoslav unity and its particular identities within," said Kulić. "What this dynamic produced ... is a rather unusual density of architectural experimentation and movements—very diverse kinds of architecture were produced under this umbrella of Yugoslavia."

Because Americans and other outsiders now largely associate the former Yugoslavia with the wars of the 1990s, and because the architectural material was so little known even among architectural historians, many visitors have left the show surprised and enthusiastic, having seen a Yugoslavia they never knew existed. Kulić is delighted that "that's also the impression that a lot of people who grew up in the region had. When you put together this great amount of architecture in a single place it does end up being shocking. In everyday life these pinnacles of architecture are diluted by most of the urban fabric, which is sort of mundane and mediocre. But then when you condense all of that into one place and see all of it together, it does speak with a kind of force that is not obvious in real life."

The exhibition was made possible in large part due to the efforts of members of the curatorial team, based in Skopje, to preserve architectural plans from the postwar period that state archives have simply thrown in the trash. This "experimental preservation," as Kulić called it, is especially important in Skopje, where not only the archives but buildings themselves have been destroyed or changed beyond repair as part of the "Skopje 2014" project to give the city a makeover.

Some of these architectural renderings, effectively snatched out of the trash bins, were put to good use in the exhibition, where an entire room was devoted to the utopian plans to rebuild Skopje in the aftermath of the devastating 1963 earthquake. For those who appreciate Yugoslav Modernism, it is painful to see the destruction and neglect of these unique structures, and particularly painful when it is the state, whose responsibility it is to preserve cultural heritage, actively destroying it. Kulić hopes the exhibition convinced people of its significance and value before it is destroyed.

Kulić had hopeful realizations while preparing the exhibition. "From the material we had to cut we could have made another exhibition of the same size, which is really incredible and tells you that there was an enormous amount of really interesting, valuable architecture produced at the time," he said. He wishes they could have included the work of Bosnian architect Živorad Janković, who pioneered a new building type combining sports facilities, commercial space, and business centers, the best-known example of which is the Skenderija complex in Sarajevo. He also designed similar complexes in Novi Sad, Split, and Priština.

Kulić laments that these buildings are also under threat, particularly in Sarajevo and Novi Sad, where local authorities are trying to demolish the buildings to capitalize on valuable real estate close to the city centers, rather than investing in what Kulić considers outstanding pieces of architecture. Whereas in some places market forces are threatening this architectural heritage, in other cases the market has validated Yugoslav Modernism. Kulić noted the Hotel Lone in Rovinj, Croatia, built in 2011. The hotel is a work of aesthetic homage to the Yugoslav coastal resorts of the 1970s, which the MoMA show presented in detail. While these resorts were built for the working classes to relax in a shared egalitarian space along with foreign tourists, Hotel Lone is so expensive that MoMA refused to pay for Kulić and his team to stay there during their research trip in the region. Hotel Lone is an act of aesthetic homage, but it clearly wasn't built for the same social purpose as the Yugoslav resorts.

The social role that architecture was called on to serve in Yugoslavia is what stood out in the exhibition. Visitors saw architectural renderings and photos of kindergartens, gas stations, mosques, mass housing projects, and workers' universities designed by premier architects.

"In everyday life these pinnacles of architecture are diluted by the urban fabric." Today, by contrast, shopping malls and luxury apartments are the premier architectural projects being built in the former Yugoslav countries.

Vladimir Kulić, Mejrema Zatrić (curatorial advisor), and Martino Stierli (co-curator, and MoMA's Chief Curator of Architecture and Design) at the top of a mosque in Visoko, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Photograph by Jasmin Sirčo, courtesy of Vladimir Kulić.



Kulić noted New Belgrade as another surprising place where the market has validated Yugoslav urban planners. Although the development was vilified in the 1970s and 1980s, Kulić remarks, "you can drive downtown in ten minutes, there's ample parking, you are surrounded by greenery, the quality of the housing stock is rather high ... you have access to the river and to the parks, you know ultimately, what's not to like?"

A realization that New Belgrade isn't so bad and that Modernist 1970s-style beach resorts are hip has gone along with a broader re-engagement with brutalist architecture across the world. Kulić is pleased by this new appreciation for his old passion. "If the exhibition pushes it even further, I'd be quite happy," he said.

Editor's note: This is a slightly edited version of an article that appeared in *Balkan Insight* and is reprinted here with permission.

Daniel Petrick is a graduate student in the Harriman Institute's MARS-REERS program.



## What Does It Take to Stop a War?

Heather Roberson and the Case of Macedonia

#### BY MASHA UDENSIVA-BRENNER



eather Roberson Gaston (GSAS/ Harriman Certificate '13) was an undergraduate at University of

California, Berkeley, majoring in peace and conflict studies and writing her thesis on the role of women in the postconflict reconstruction of Rwanda, when a chance encounter changed her life. One day, as she sat down at a crowded cafe, an older, bespectacled gentleman asked if he could take the empty chair across from her. She obliged. He turned out to be a political science professor named Ernst Haas. Had Roberson Gaston understood that she was sitting across from the globally renowned theorist who founded neofunctionalism, she might have handled herself differently. But, at the time, the name didn't mean anything to her. When Haas declared war

inevitable and her major "ridiculous," Roberson Gaston did everything in her power to prove him wrong.

As she pontificated about the complexity of war and the sinister role of military contractors, she remembered the case of Macedonia (now the Republic of North Macedonia). It was 2003; the war in Kosovo had recently ended, leaving Macedonia with an influx of Albanian fighters and heightened ethnic tensions. But, contrary to media predictions, the country had avoided armed conflict.

"That war was prevented," she told the professor, reminding him that NATO had managed to ease tensions by negotiating with the Albanian fighters. Haas conceded, and Roberson Gaston who knew little about the Balkans at the time—felt vindicated. The conversation ignited her interest in the region. So much so that she switched her thesis topic to the use of law as a conflict resolution tool in Macedonia. A year later, Roberson Gaston landed in the country for the first time. The trip not only started her ongoing love affair with the Balkans; it also became the basis for a graphic novel that opens with the Haas encounter.

The Republic of Macedonia declared its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, but unlike many of its former Yugoslav neighbors, the country did not descend into interethnic strife. Though tensions simmered between the ethnic Macedonian majority and the sizable ethnic Albanian minority, Macedonia remained peaceful for 10 years after declaring independence. Then, in the wake of the war in neighboring Kosovo, Albanian fighters poured over the border, joining with local Albanian forces. After the Macedonian government passed laws restricting the use of the Albanian language and flag, the newly formed

Albanian National Liberation Army attacked the republic's security forces, prompting an armed conflict that lasted from February until August 2001.

Predictions abounded that the nation would descend into civil war, but international organizations, led by the European Union (EU) and the United States, stepped in to mediate. Knowing that Macedonia wanted to join the EU, the EU pressured Macedonia to meet Albanian demands, offering the possibility of accession. The negotiations resulted in the Ohrid Framework Agreement, guaranteeing political and cultural rights to Albanians in exchange for disarmament.

The international community pronounced the agreement a success. But, when Roberson Gaston started researching its impact, she found scant literature on the topic. "I realized I'm not going to understand what's happening in this country unless I go there," she says.

Roberson Gaston left for Macedonia in 2003 with no contacts, no place to stay, and no plan. Friends and family worried, and when she first arrived their concerns seemed warranted—she encountered neglected buildings, shuttered windows, and shady characters. But, soon enough, she fell in love with the country and its people, cultivating a network of locals, OSCE officials, and internationals working for the South East European University in the predominantly Albanian city of Tetovo.

Getting to know the place, Roberson Gaston began to see the Ohrid Framework Agreement in a new light. "I went into the region super confident of what I was going to find, excited to tell the story of war prevented," she recalls. But instead of a rosy, peaceful nation, she discovered a polarized country plagued by



"Macedonia's prospects of joining the international community seemed bleak—Greece ... blocked Macedonia's bid to join NATO."

mistrust. "There was all of this stuff happening underneath the international community's very shiny packaging, and I started to develop a lot of doubts about the international role in the Balkans," she says.

Roberson Gaston stayed in Macedonia for five weeks. When she returned to the U.S., she wrote a 150-page script about her experience and sent it to the graphic novelist Harvey Pekar, whom she'd met through her sister during the movie tour for Pekar's book American Splendor. Pekar liked the script and used it for a graphic novel. Macedonia: What Does It Take to Stop a War?, illustrated by Ed Piskor, came out in 2007; Roberson Gaston toured the book in Macedonia the following year.

The book conveys Roberson Gaston's mixed feelings about Western involvement in the Balkans. "I realized when I got there that we have a lot of power to change the face of these places, but the people might not want these changes," she says. In 2011, she enrolled at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights and the Harriman Institute, where she would try to understand the Western idea of "democratization" as it applies to the Balkans.

At the time, Macedonia's prospects of joining the international community seemed bleak-Greece, which had objected to the use of the name Macedonia since the republic's independence, claiming wrongful appropriation of its Hellenic heritage, blocked Macedonia's bid to join NATO in 2008 and vetoed its accession to the EU in 2009. Meanwhile, a right-wing political party consolidated power, peddling a version of Macedonian nationalism that could only inflame Greece and even further erode Albanian-Macedonian relations.

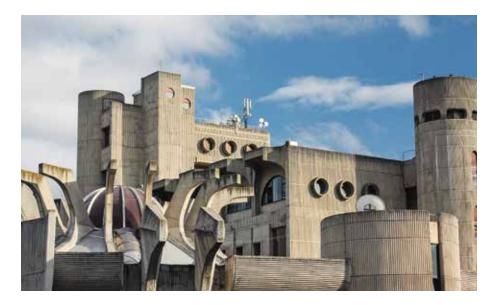
Roberson Gaston theorized that the Ohrid agreement, and its rapid expansion of minority rights, could



Statue of Philip of Macedon (father of Alexander the Great) in Skopje, Macedonia. Photograph by Adam Jones. Such statues, erected by the nationalist government of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski (2006–16), further eroded relations between Greece and Macedonia.









Skopje Central Post Office. Photograph by yeowatzup via Wikimedia Commons. Roberson Gaston has been drawn to large concrete structures since childhood—a scarcity in her Missouri hometown. When she arrived in the Balkans, the wealth of such constructions amazed her.

Heather Roberson Gaston at home in Charlottesville, Virginia.

"For anyone predisposed to Macedonian nationalism, this was a really bitter pill to swallow."

be partially responsible. "All of a sudden, the government was hiring hundreds of Albanian functionaries and Albanian police officers while simultaneously firing Macedonian officers for human rights abuses," she says. "For anyone predisposed to Macedonian nationalism, this was a really bitter pill to swallow." At the same time, EU accession, the motivating factor for signing the agreement, had become impossible.

Wanting to explore the extent to which these factors influenced the nationalist resurgence, Roberson Gaston wrote her M.A. thesis on the impact of the Ohrid minority rights regime on the rise of nationalism in Macedonia. But, after all her research, she did not feel she had the definitive answer to her question. "I don't know if I ever will," she says.

Since graduation, Roberson Gaston has continued to return to Macedonia, where she's a special adviser for the Civil Center for Freedom, a local human rights organization. She's also working on a project about Israeli-Palestinian peace movements and recently started a podcast called "Talking Human Rights" (talking humanrights.com), where she interviews human rights practitioners about conflict and peace. She plans to return to the Balkans to conduct podcast interviews later this year.

Last summer, Roberson Gaston took her three-year-old daughter,

Mira, to Macedonia for the first time. During their visit, Macedonia and Greece announced the much-anticipated Prespa Agreement: the Republic of Macedonia would change its name to the Republic of North Macedonia, and Greece would stop blocking its EU aspirations. Roberson Gaston saw the name dispute as a bullying campaign by Greece against "a country that posed no threat." She worried that nationalists might use the name change as an opportunity to reenter politics. But her colleagues in the local human rights arena had no such fears. "They were much braver, aiming to convince anyone who doubted the agreement that it was the best course of action," she says. "I found it really inspiring."

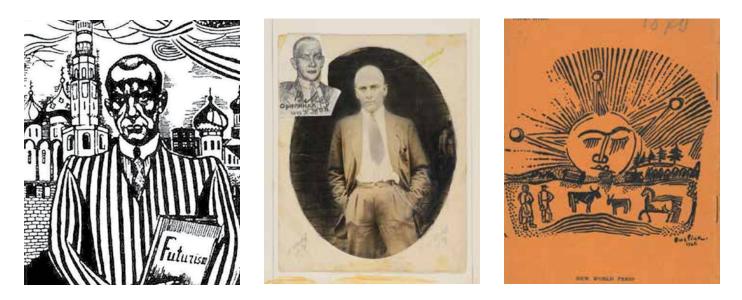
### Mayakovsky Discovers New York City BY RONALD MEYER

wo thousand eighteen marked the 125th anniversary of the birth of the Russian Futurist poet, playwright, and artist Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930). To celebrate the occasion, the Harriman Institute-in collaboration with the Russian State Vladimir Mayakovsky Museum (Moscow)-mounted an exhibition of photographs, drawings, and notebooks that told the story of the poet's visit to New York City in 1925. On January 24, 2019, Alexei Lobov, director of the Mayakovsky Museum, gave a presentation at the Harriman about the exhibition, titled "Scenes from Mayakovsky's Discovery of America." The following is a synopsis of his remarks.

Portrait of Vladimir Mayakovsky by Diego Rivera (Moscow, 1956). Rivera's inscription at the bottom of the drawing reads: "Mayakovsky as I remember him in Mexico." All photographs in this essay appear courtesy of the Russian State Vladimir Mayakovsky Museum.

Born in a small Georgian village, Mayakovsky was a professed urbanist who dreamed of traveling around the world. As he writes in his

ASI RECUERDO A MAYAKONSKY EN MEXICO



*From left*: Drawing of Mayakovsky by David Burliuk for the newspaper *Russian Voice*. Mayakovsky reading his narrative poem *Lenin* at a workers' meeting; photograph by A. Slawkoff; portrait of Mayakovsky by D. Burliuk attached to upper left corner. Back cover of *The Sun Visits Mayakovsky*, designed by D. Burliuk.

"Conversation with a Tax Inspector about Poetry" (1926), "All poetry is a journey to the unknown"; furthermore, he states that travel is the source of all his work. Fittingly, his listing of travel expenses begins with his journey of the previous year to see "the lights of Broadway."

His first attempt to visit the U.S., in 1923, does not meet with success, and he gets no further than western Europe. Two years later, while in Paris for the International Exposition, he takes advantage of an opportunity to come to the U.S. via Mexico-and sails first-class on a luxury ocean liner, stopping at Havana on the way. While waiting for his U.S. visa, Mayakovsky makes the acquaintance of the artist Diego Rivera, and the two become fast friends. In fact, Rivera would participate in the Moscow celebrations of the 10th anniversary of the 1917 Russian Revolution.

Eventually Mayakovsky makes his way to Laredo, a city on the Texas/ Mexico border, to be interviewed for his visa. The poet speaks no English, so he endeavors to answer the agent's questions in his incomprehensible French. In the end, they locate a furniture dealer who speaks Russian, with whose assistance the poet receives his visa after paying a \$500 security bond.

Mayakovsky is struck by the contrast of speeding trains and segregated railway stations: "Stone stations, divided into two: half for us whites, and the other half for the blacks, 'For Negroes,' with its own wooden seats and its own ticket office." He arrives in New York City at Grand Central Station, whose "appearance, situation in the physical landscape, and its intimations of urbanism, is one of the most sublime sights in all the world."

On his first day in New York City Mayakovsky calls on his old friend "Diego Rivera met me at the train station. So my first encounter in Mexico City was with its art." —My Discovery of America

David Burliuk, often referred to as the father of Russian Futurism, who had emigrated to America a few years earlier. The Mayakovsky Museum has particularly good holdings of Burliuk's drawings, several of which appear in the exhibition, beginning with the drawing of Mayakovsky wearing his infamous striped jacket and cradling the Futurist Manifesto (spelled out in English letters on the cover), against the background of patriarchal Moscow with its golden cupolas. Burliuk had also published an illustrated



*From left*: Brooklyn Bridge; photograph by A. E. Shaliapin. Woolworth Building; photograph by A. Slawkoff. Flatiron Building; photograph by A. Alland.

collection of Mayakovsky's poems, which he ironically titled *The Sun Visits Mayakovsky*, since only Alexander Pushkin held the status of "sun" among Russian poets, but in their manifesto the Russian Futurists had thrown him overboard from the ship of modernity.

Mayakovsky settles in one of Manhattan's most expensive neighborhoods and calls l Fifth Avenue home. The building in which Mayakovsky lived has not survived, but we do have Burliuk's sketch of it—with the Washington Square Arch in the foreground.

During his three-month stay in the United States, despite his busy schedule and public appearances in New York and five other major cities, Mayakovsky writes 22 poems, the most famous of which is undoubtedly "Brooklyn Bridge," which records the poet's awe before this great wonder of the modern world:

The Woolworth Building, the tallest building in the world from 1913 to 1930, and located on Broadway, Mayakovsky's favorite Manhattan street, provides the backdrop for the poem "The Young Lady and the Woolworth." In the poem the narrator observes a 17-year-old woman sharpen a Gillette razor and simulate a demonstration on her pristine upper lip. The poet is horrified at this outrage committed by the capitalist system and proceeds to try to persuade her, in his heavily accented English, to abandon this work; she does not understand a word and mistakes the sounds he emits and his gestures for a declaration of love.

Mayakovsky was impressed by all that New York had to offer in the way of a modern, urban center: jazz; skyscrapers; the lights of Broadway; the subway (Moscow would not open its first stations until 1933); and women driving automobiles. In fact, so impressed was he by the latter, that he saw to it that his muse, Lili Brik, would be one of the first women to drive an automobile in Moscow. But he was not uncritical of New York City—a number of passages in *My Discovery of America* are little more than anticapitalist screed.

Perhaps the best-known photo from Mayakovsky's New York trip shows him posing with the Flatiron Building in the background. Other famous photographs of Russia's fore"Stormy mornings are the best in New York not a single superfluous person. Just the workers of the great army of laborers in the city of 10 million inhabitants." —My Discovery of America

most poet capture him standing on the platform of an elevated subway, which image appears on the cover of 50 Years of Mayakovsky, 1911–1961, and the shots taken at Rockaway Beach.

In his "Lectures on the Art and Culture of Soviet Russia" in New York and elsewhere Mayakovsky would appear before audiences of 2,000 and more. Even with his lack of English he was generally well received, since his audience could appreciate the energy of his dramatic readings. Not all reviews were positive, however. Chicago's Russian Herald newspaper praised the reading of his own poetry, but deplored the event as little more than propaganda for Soviet development and the glories of Soviet life. In addition, Mayakovsky presided over a number of smaller events in upstate New York and in and around the city-a photograph survives from a meeting of the Russian literary group Hammer and Sickle.

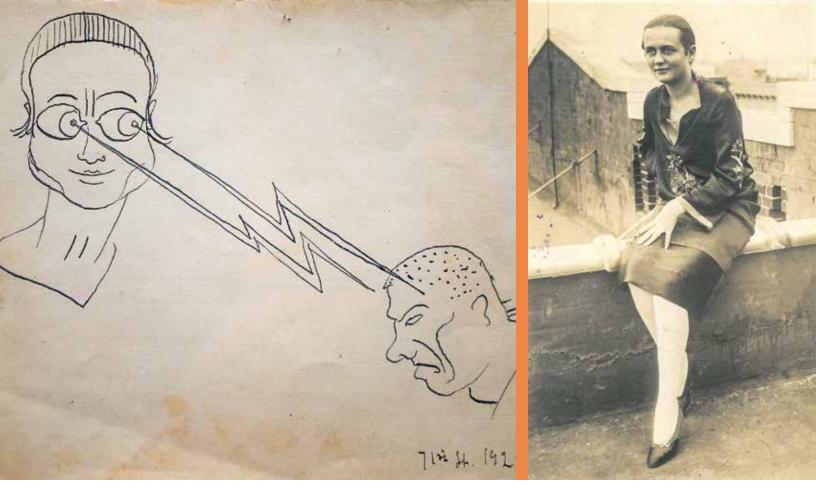
Until fairly recently this summary would have taken care of the bare outlines of Mayakovsky's American visit. Scholars have long known that the poet had a love affair in New York and that a child was born nine months later. The identity of Mayakovsky's love led to a guessing game that continued for decades, until Patricia Thompson, a.k.a. Elena Vladimirovna Mayakovskaya, professor of philosophy and women's studies at Lehman College, came forward and revealed that she was the daughter of Mayakovsky and Elly Jones, a young Russian émigré whom the poet met at a party.

Elly Jones (Elizabeth Petrovna Jones) had been born in Russian Bashkiria into a family of German Mennonites. Her father was a wealthy landowner, and the children had been well educated and brought up speaking both German and Russian. Seventeen-year-old Elly worked as a volunteer for the American Relief Administration (ARA), which was in Russia to help feed the hungry during the famine. An invitation from ARA and marriage in Moscow to a British citizen allowed Elly to leave the USSR. At the time of her meeting with Mayakovsky she was a married British citizen, working as a model in New York on a guest visa. Consequently, their affair, which ended with Mayakovsky's departure for Russia, had to be kept secret.

One photograph, from September 6, 1925, captures Elly posing on Burliuk's roof. The scene resulted in drawings by both Burliuk and Mayakovsky. Mayakovsky and Elly became inseparable from their very first meeting, and Thompson's archive holds a number of photographs from

From top: The Elevated Subway; photograph by A. Alland. Meeting with the Russian literary group Hammer and Sickle at Dilov's Restaurant; photograph by A. Slawkoff. Patricia Thompson, Mayakovsky's daughter.





From left: Mayakovsky's drawing of Elly Jones; Jones posing on David Burliuk's roof.

"I miss you terribly. I dream of coming to visit you at least for a week.... I kiss all eight of your paws. Your VI. 26.X.28"

this period. Mayakovsky sailed back to Russia from New York harbor on October 28, 1925. After seeing him off, Elly returned home to find her bed completely covered in forget-me-nots.

A few years later, in 1928, Elly and Patricia were vacationing in Nice, and Mayakovsky, who happened to be in Paris at the time, met his daughter for the first and only time. In his letter to the "two Ellies," dated October 27, 1928, Mayakovsky writes from Paris that he hopes to visit them in Nice again, for at least a week, but the trip never materialized. A photograph of the two Ellies was found in Mayakovsky's apartment on his death.

Thompson had promised to reveal her father's identity only after her mother's death and only after becoming established in her own career—so as not to be seen as riding on her famous father's coattails. In 1993 Thompson published *Mayakovsky in Manhattan: A Love Story*, based on her mother's unpublished memoirs, letters, and taped conversations. She subsequently began her collaboration with the Mayakovsky Museum in Moscow, to which she donated the bulk of her archive, allowing the museum to mount a new permanent exhibition called *Daughter*. In addition, the Mayakovsky museum issued a lavishly illustrated edition of Thompson's *Mayakovsky in Manhattan*.

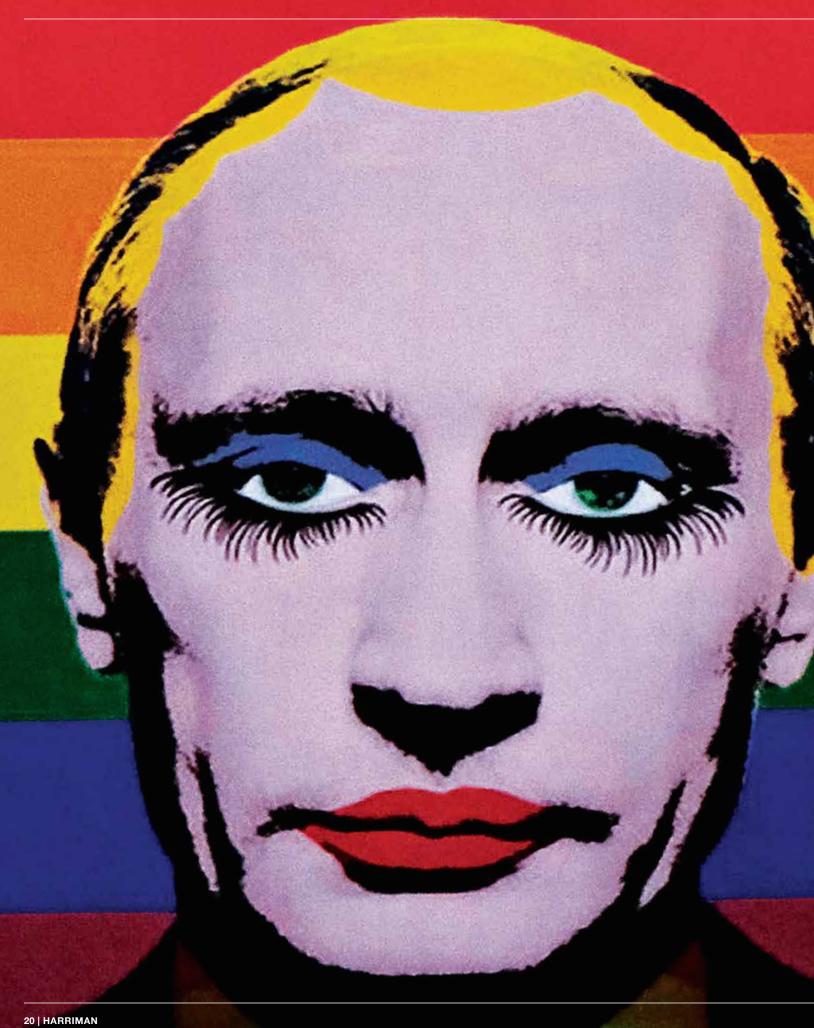
At the time of Thompson's death in 2016, the museum was planning an exhibition to celebrate her 90th birthday.

<sup>1</sup>"Brooklyn Bridge," adapted by David Lehman (with assistance from Val Vinokur), *Night Wraps the Sky: Writings by and about Mayakovsky*, edited by Michael Almereyda (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 202.

Portrait of Elly Jones by David Burliuk. © Roger Thompson.

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From a protest sign at the Christopher Street Day demonstration of support for gays and lesbians of Russia in light of the "antigay propaganda law" passed by the State Duma of the Russian Federation (Berlin, June 22, 2013).

### Reclaiming Russian Cultural Tradition during the Rise of the Right or Queering the Russian Realist Novel

#### BY ANI KOKOBOBO

lexander Pushkin, whom Russians fondly call their "everything," once declared: "Our exalting illusion is far dearer than lowly truths" ("The Hero," 1830). The poet's aphorism has a whole new lifeline in the present, with the Russia investigation dominating the news, as students come into our classrooms having absorbed buzz about hackings, Russian ties to the American right, collusion, and similar media hype. When I first introduce students to Russia nowadays, I feel a heavier sense of responsibility on my shoulders, both as a teacher and as a cultural emissary. Fault lines between the left and right are increasingly more marked in American politics, and perceptions of Russia are deeply influenced by them. Polls show that, particularly since the 2016 elections, American perceptions of Russia are shaped by where the perceiver fell on the political spectrum-more conservatives approved of Russia than liberals, though these numbers have dropped over time.<sup>1</sup> Russia is in the eye of the beholder!

Part of our challenge as 21st-century educators is to construct an inclusive, safe classroom that accounts for and responds to all these fault lines. For me, as a 19th-century scholar, since I'm not in a position to address the present head on, reclaiming Russia's cultural heritage—and using my source materials to provide rich, plural perspectives for politically tumultuous times, and, at times, alternatives to the Kremlin—is one

strategy to a more inclusive classroom. When I first introduce students to Russia these days, I start by emphasizing the fluidity of political polarities. In fact, "the right" has meant something quite different in Russia.





Patriarch Kirill and President Vladimir Putin at the commemoration of the 1,025th anniversary of the baptism of Rus' (Kyiv, June 7, 2013).

"With his ascent to power, Vladimir Putin has reinforced the long-established pattern of Russian conservatism tied to authoritarian rule. Rather than merely sustaining this Russian version of authoritarianism, he has also been building a hybrid variety of Russian conservatism."

As Richard Pipes argues in his book Russian Conservatism and Its Critics, if in the United States, conservatism usually means "less government," in Russia it has traditionally connoted "more government." In other words, conservatism has been bound up in authoritarianism and the belief that Russia needs a strong hand, unchecked by parliament. As Russian writer and historian Nikolai Karamzin put it in 1810: "Autocracy has founded and resuscitated Russia. Any change in her political constitution has led in the past and must lead in the future to her perdition."<sup>2</sup> Two years later, he convinced Alexander I to stop being a liberal, writing, among other things: "Sire ... Russia, taught by long disasters, vested [...] the power of autocracy in your ancestor. You may do everything, but you may not limit your authority by law." With these words, Karamzin was reinforcing an age-old position, held by many of Russia's luminaries, that

the country needs a strong hand. It is interesting to think about some of the ways in which this model of Russian conservatism is becoming increasingly politically relevant worldwide as fears of authoritarianism grow. On the flip side, American conservatism, with its Christian evangelical element, has gained traction in Russia. With his ascent to power, Vladimir Putin has reinforced the long-established pattern of Russian conserva-

tism tied to authoritarian rule. Yet rather than merely sustaining this Russian version of authoritarianism, which is closely tied to long-standing notions of Russian distinctiveness and messianism, beginning with his 2012 presidential campaign Putin has also been building out a hybrid variety of Russian conservatism. This recent Russian conservatism is a more nuanced right-wing, civilizational model that fits more closely with the U.S. political right.

This conservative ideology, which foregrounds Russia's distinctiveness and moral superiority to the West, is multilayered and complicated. As a scholar and teacher of the 19th-century realist novel, my focus in thinking about it has fallen on what the Kremlin defines as "traditional values" and how these relate to the bulk of my teaching material, Russian realist novels. A considerable part of the historical Russian cultural tradition, the Russian novel touts itself as distinctively Russian as a literary genre. It also delves into questions of family and normativity. From this perspective, the Russian novel can be a powerful resource for a more inclusive pedagogy, helping us show students the rich pluralism of ideas within Russian history and culture, outside the Kremlin's official positions.

What does Putin mean by "traditional values"? Back in his 2013 "State of the Nation" address, he articulated his commitment to "traditional values," which include "the values of traditional families," alongside religion and spirituality. Some of these ideas are further explained in the Russian Federation's State Family Policy, in effect until 2025, which defines marriage as a "civil voluntary union between a man and a woman [...] created with a purpose of family formation, birth and/or joint upbringing of children." Of course, if you read between the lines, this rigid definition of family as a heteronormative unit with procreative purpose also serves as a pretext for broaching the rights of the LGBTQI community in Russia. And this has happened, at both the regional and federal level, through antihomopropaganda—really, antigay—laws to prevent propagandizing nonheterosexuality and/or gender variance to minors.

These Russian developments have gained much traction among conservatives worldwide, and particularly American conservatives, who perceive a decline in moral values in the West. Pat Buchanan has lavishly praised Putin, while even more disturbing endorsements have come from right-wing organizations, like the onetime Traditionalist Worker Party, an American group aimed at preserving the privilege of whiteness. In fact, there may even be cross-cultural influences, or at least parallels, from the American right to Russia, as the Kremlin's definition of marriage and anti-LGBTQI policies mirror those advanced by a U.S. group known as the World Congress of Families (WCF). Listed by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a hate group based on its anti-LGBTQI position, the WCF is opposed to gay marriage, pornography, and abortion, and defines marriage as "the voluntary union of a man and a woman ..."<sup>3</sup> The group, with deep ties to the Russian Orthodox Church, was partly founded by two Russian sociologists and has helped organize congresses of ultraconservative groups in Russia.

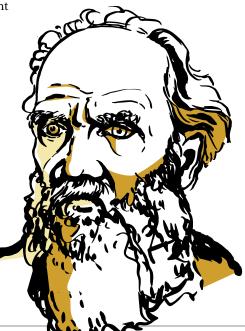
The Kremlin's social agenda and its determination to stand for the traditional, heteronormative family in a rapidly changing, diverse world presents both a problem and an opportunity for us as 21st-century educators. If a broad range of students with different backgrounds and sexual orientations even loosely associate Russia with legally sanctioned homophobia (among many other prejudices), that puts tremendous responsibility on Russianists to facilitate an inclusive classroom and conversations that allow for pushback against this corrosive alignment of ideologies. And Putin's own use of classic Russian authors, like Fyodor Dostoevsky, to make the case for his conservative turn, underscores not only the continued relevance of Russia's classics, but also the fact that our pedagogy and teaching materials can perhaps be our first line of defense in these debates.



*From left*: Hipster Dostoevsky is called on to advertise Vera Biron's film about the St. Petersburg celebration of Dostoevsky Day; the cover of *Anna Karenina for the Twenty-First Century* (2016), edited by Ani Kokobobo and Emma Lieber.

The question of what family means looms large in the Russian novel. If the Kremlin projects exclusion and only certain types of families as legitimate, then the Russian novel, with its expansive inclusiveness, provides a counterpoint for students, showing a different Russia where families vary and love stands superior to tradition. When Leo Tolstoy announces at the beginning of *Anna Karenina* that "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," he was, wittingly or unwittingly, hinting at the wide range of configurations and patterns of attachment, because the Russian novel is not a genre of traditional family happiness.

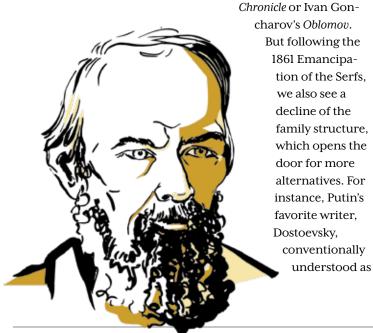
I've already taught a course in which Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment, read alongside African-American writings, helped me foster thoughtful dialogues about race, communities. and inclusiveness. Currently, I am planning a revised version of my



Russian novel course that can facilitate a broader conversation on gender, family, and identity, and help push back against binding notions of normativity being advocated by the Kremlin.

There are no overtly queer relationships in the 19th-century Russian novel proper, although there are numerous instances of homosocial bonds and hints of homoeroticism. The main way in which this genre can help us interrogate questions of family and heteronormativity is if we employ a broader queer lens. Michel Foucault writes in an essay on friendship: "I think that's what makes homosexuality 'disturbing': the homosexual mode of life, much more than the sexual act itself" (Friendship as a Way of Life). According to queer theorist Jack Halberstam, this idea "detach[es] queerness from sexual identity," leading us to "think instead about queer uses of time and space and how these develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction." Halberstam juxtaposes this "time of reproduction" to "queer temporality," which "flashes into view in the heart of a crisis"-like the AIDS epidemic for the gay community. With the threat of no future hovering, "queer temporality" breaks with linear and teleological history, to focus on "the here, the present, the now," and kinships outside the familial, generational model (In a Queer Time and Space).

These ideas can be implemented in the classroom to illustrate to students how the Russian novel exhibits multiple "ways of life." The "time of reproduction" certainly appears, and often, in pastoral countryside estates where families replicate across the generations, like Sergei Aksakov's *Family* 



a writer of crises and threshold moments, does not really show us happy, and naturally growing, families. If we get anything in the way of happy relationships in Dostoevsky, these transpire between a prostitute and a murderer in a Siberian prison, or in the bizarre, romantic friendship between a former novice monk and a paralyzed hysteric girl, who may one day get married, if they live long enough. Or, on a less happy note, we see two men alongside the body of a dead woman, their shared love interest, murdered by one of them-while Dostoevsky's Christ-like "beautiful man" is succumbing to an epileptic coma from the devastation of it all; Myshkin renounces his own future for a moment of true compassion toward Rogozhin. These are hardly the makings of traditional family happiness; they are merely moments, when individuals suffering alone, marked by deep vulnerability, come together to mitigate that suffering; moments when we see the full glory of what Dostoevsky called the "accidental family," a structure that Liza Knapp argues is forged by "chance and love," rather than genetics,<sup>4</sup> and the author's answer to the biological family. Dostoevsky's time of crisis arrests us in the moment and is therefore more akin to queer time than reproductive time-rather than birth, it stresses community, compassion, and the diminishing futures confronting all of us.

Similarly, beginning with Anna Karenina and continuing in works such as Resurrection, The Kreutzer Sonata, The Death of Ivan Ilych, Father Sergius, The Devil, and Hadji Murat, the pacifist Tolstoy treats heterosexual desire and heteronormativity as toxic and violent forces, eventually renouncing even sexual reproduction and advocating for asexual or, broadly conceptualized, queer configurations of human attachment, often in the form of Platonic relationships between men. Indeed, the relationship between the individual and his abstract and masculine divinity eventually supplants for Tolstoy-who had been orphaned at a young age- the position of his dead mother, recreated in his early fiction in all her loving fleshiness and vulnerability to mortality. The alienation from the body in the author's later works thus unfolds as an alienation from the female body, whose heterosexual fetishizing the author saw as destructive for both men and women. Instead of the mother, the wife, female characters, and the nuclear family, Tolstoy's later fiction centers on male characters and the platonic company of other men, thus reflecting the deep spiritual bond the author envisioned with his masculine God.

"Or, on a less happy note, we see two men alongside the body of a dead woman, their shared love interest, murdered by one of them—while Dostoevsky's Christ-like 'beautiful man' succumbs to an epileptic coma."

Since the end of the Cold War, exponentially fewer Russia experts have been trained in the United States, so naturally many media articles engage in silly and self-indulgent Russia coverage. I'm thinking here of a *Vanity Fair* piece called "The Secret Source of Putin's Evil," which focuses on how Henry Kissinger compared Putin to a character out of Dostoevsky; or, my favorite, from NPR, "Vladimir Putin Is Right Out of a Russian Novel."<sup>5</sup> Russia's classic novels are some of her greatest emissaries in the world—for instance, at 20 million Google hits, Tolstoy comes closest to Putin's 200 million results. While it is absurd to rely on these novels for guiding policy or explaining Russia's actions as a political agent, they remain relevant in that they show different, often more inclusive, Russias outside the Kremlin's grip and ideology.

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- <sup>2</sup>Nikolai Karamzin, "Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia," *Readings in Russian Civilization*, ed. Thomas Riha (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 281.
- <sup>3</sup>See https://www.politicalresearch.org/2013/11/04/profiles-on-the -right-world-congress-of-families/, accessed 4 March 2019.
- <sup>4</sup> *Dostoevsky's The Idiot: A Critical Companion* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 27.
- <sup>5</sup>See https://www.npr.org/sections/theprotojournalist/2014/03/29 /294807461/vladimir-putin-is-right-out-of-a-russian-novel, accessed 3 March 2019.





From top: Zakhar Komlev as Parfen Rogozhin, Yekaterina Guseva as Nastasya Filippovona, and Anton Anosov as Prince Myshkin, in a scene from the play *Idiot* at the Mossovet Theater (September 29, 2017); LGBT protest fist on a brick wall Russia flag.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Patrick Miller, oral presentation, "Russia and the Right" roundtable, University of Kansas, 26 February 2019.

### ИКОМУ КОБЗАРЮ-ОТ СЕМЬИ ВОЛЬНОЙ, НОВОЙ ія. Соғаниватесы проветарь всік Іраїн, фанавтесан КЛНАЙІЯСІІ СРІги діяс праястарларя, справногну ariana settingiri langtallar sista kisikala polateka PAPAAPAL BAPAARHAI WIND LALAA PROMABAMAN, WAXABATAA PRAC, JAMURANA MINA JEMPI, PRINCEANIES, SAMENDISCISSI BTAPARAR DARMANALI OPDIMLAPARA KAMAN MANJABATAD, PRESE EFASSES, EVEN & JULIE EXPERIMENT OF OFFICE APRAPE. N. NORIE MARKE PROLETAARLANER LITENEERS



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также крепутствующих здесь зарубежных гостей. Матике, воссидояный отпрытихо занатныха Тарасу Григ горьствоу Шерчалия, объязается атерытым. Даракие токарация
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го Слехов, на языка народна многик [ гарытик та- страк. И во возм мире набатная поз- ветной любовь к своему чароду, к овнот Шев- ани Шевченко мвет к берьбе за Мар. Украане, любовь ко всему грузованая ранете в Труд, Свобеду, Равенство. Вратство му нареду России призодни через все от дань жиї- и Счагтье всел народов земле.

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Исоримиримость и врагам и безза творчество генначаюто Койазра.

Подаги Шевчанко — ползна валисотпрый весь жнал трудности в горести народной вухониго гузаннама, «йо свободу н санча Шев- пратев са обрел свободу, получит об- ремление зосибалениет украинското 1 близним не ракование, что дало азакожность крестажиства, так же, вак и намана к. белорусы, разведнуться его заляту. Покрасова, творчество Чорнонистся о

### МИТНИГ, ПОСВЯЩЕННЫЙ ОТКРЫТИЮ ПАМЯТНИКА ТАРАСУ ГРИГОРЬЕВИЧУ ШЕВЧЕНКО



## Dueling Shevchenkos

### AN EPISODE IN THE TRANSNATIONAL UKRAINIAN COLD WAR

#### BY MARKIAN DOBCZANSKY

ifty-five years ago-long before social media, "hybrid warfare," and the internetthe United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in a Cold War across numerous dimensions, from "hard power" confrontations and proxy wars to more covert information campaigns. The sharp ideological clash between communism and capitalism has long ceased to be at the center of international politics, yet the American and Russian goals of spreading influence throughout the world remain. At a time of deep concern over social media manipulation and hacking, it's worth keeping Cold War history in mind by examining a little-known transnational moment that contains echoes of today's conflicts. Influence operations are not new. But the methods have changed: rather than troll farms, this Cold War episode used newspaper articles, symbolic politics, and statues as weapons. And

rather than a presidential election, the showdown revolved around the legacy of a poet.

The year 1964 marked the 150th anniversary of the birth of Taras Shevchenko, a 19th-century Romantic poet and artist, "the bard of Ukraine." Born a serf in 1814, he was bought out of serfdom and received an education in the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg. In 1840 he published his most famous collection of poetry, Kobzar, named after the blind minstrels who traveled the Ukrainian countryside singing epic songs. Shevchenko's poetry helped create a historical mythology for Ukrainians through its depiction of their social and national oppression. Even as his poetry became wildly popular, his activism ran afoul of tsarist authorities, and he was exiled from Ukraine and served an enforced term in the military-for the most part in what is now Kazakhstan. He died in 1861, a few years after being allowed to

return to Ukraine. After his death, he became a national hero. It was said that a Ukrainian peasant household could be expected to have two books on the shelf: the Bible and Shevchenko's *Kobzar*.

Shevchenko's centrality to the Ukrainian national project can hardly be overstated. His importance as a national poet can be compared to that of Alexander Pushkin, Adam Mickiewicz, and Walt Whitman. Historically, he was a figure that transcended political divisions among Ukrainians, uniting populists and nationalists, democrats and monarchists, socialists and communists. Although he remains an obscure figure to many Americans,

Front page of *Izvestiya*, dated June 10, 1964, with the headline "To the Great Kobzar" and details of Nikita Khrushchev's speech at the dedication ceremony.

## ВЕЛИКОМУ КОБЗАРЮ-ОТ СЕМЬИ Вольной, новой

#### DEDICATED TO ARE LIBERATION FREEDOM AND DEPENDENCE OF ALL CAPTIVE NATION

HIS MONUMENT OF TARAS SHEVCHENKO, 19TB CENTURY UKRAINIAN POET AND FIGHTER FOR THE INDEPENDENCE OF UKRAINE AND THE FREEDOM OF ALL MANKIND, WHO UNDER FOREIGN RUSSIAN IMPERIALIST TYRANNY AND COLONIAL RULE APPEALED FOR THE NEW AND RIGHTEOUS LAW OF VASHINGTON WAS UNVEILED ON JUNE 2Z 1964 VIS HISTORIC EVENT COMMEMORATED TH TH ANNIVERSARY OF SHEVCHENKOS BIP "MORIAL WAS AUTHORIZED BY THE "OF THE UNITED STATES OF "1960, AND SIGNEP"

Inscription on the Washington, D.C., Shevchenko monument: "Dedicated to the liberation, freedom, and independence of all captive nations."

a Shevchenko memorial stands in Dupont Circle, in Washington, D.C. Another Shevchenko monument stands near the Hotel Ukraine in Moscow. The two statues were unveiled within weeks of each other in June 1964, but they're linked by more than that simple fact. Both memorials are embedded in a transnational argument over Shevchenko's legacy, which in this case served as a proxy for a broader argument over the fate of Ukrainian culture under Soviet rule.

My research into these dueling statues offers new ways of understanding how the Cold War penetrated American society, the important role of the Soviet Ukrainian bureaucracy in carrying out Soviet foreign policy, and how a long-lasting disagreement over Shevchenko's legacy was influenced by the international political contexts. By understanding the dynamic opposing arguments over his legacy, we gain a fuller picture of how a singular international ideological conflict raised the stakes of what had previously been a conversation mostly of interest to Ukrainians.

American "soft power" during the Cold War was not self-evident nor was it inevitable that its appeal would resonate throughout the world. Rather, the U.S. government actively sought to cultivate, promote, and spread its culture and consumerist way of life, particularly under President Dwight Eisenhower. His strong interest in "winning hearts and minds" provided a broad strategic framework for extending American influence around the world that complemented U.S. military strength.

To achieve this, the U.S. government took advantage of the country's many immigrant communities-they could reinforce a positive vision of the American way of life to their co-ethnics around the world. For many non-Russian émigré communities with roots in communist countries, the early Cold War years were an especially propitious time when their activism fit most comfortably into U.S. foreign policy. During those years, for example, the government instituted Captive Nations Week, an annual weeklong period declaring American opposition to what it saw as the communist oppression of nations in China, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe.

Midway through Eisenhower's second term, ethnic Ukrainians in the U.S. saw a chance to make a statement about their own community, its values, and its dedication to America's

Cold War ideals. According to proponents, building a memorial to Taras Shevchenko would raise the community's profile in the U.S. and call attention to events in the homeland, which was then, of course, a union republic within the Soviet Union. The organizers traced the origins of the idea to a 1956 article by Ivan Dubrovsky in the New Jersey-based newspaper Svoboda (Freedom) that proposed building a statue in the U.S. capital. The idea gained the support of Svoboda's publisher, the Ukrainian National Association, a fraternal benefit society that traced its roots to Ukrainian workers in Pennsylvania coal country in the 19th century. The economist and activist Lev Dobriansky lobbied officials, the campaign gained momentum, and Congress passed a bill in August 1960 allocating land in Washington on which the community could build the statue at its own cost; Eisenhower signed the bill into law a few months before his term ended. Soon afterward, community activists created the Shevchenko Memorial Committee, headquartered in New York City, to coordinate efforts, raise money, and hold a design competition for the statue. Roman Smal-Stocki headed the committee, and former president Harry S. Truman was named honorary chairman.

From the very beginning, the organizers of the initiative explicitly connected their work to an anticommunist agenda. A 1960 editorial in the *Ukrainian Weekly* called the Shevchenko statue an "instrument of Cold War." The campaign also expressed a critique of Russian imperialism that stood in direct opposition to the official Soviet rhetoric about the "friendship of the peoples." Finally, the discourse around the monument sought to connect Shevchenko to U.S. history. Organizers emphasized his friendship with African-American actor and playwright Ira Aldridge, and they liberally cited a verse from his poetry in which he asked when Ukraine would find its own George Washington.

The monument would also be distinguished from other Shevchenko statues that had been erected in North America. The Shevchenko Committee rejected the precedent of a statue of Shevchenko put up in Palermo, Ontario, in 1951–a gift from the Soviet Union to Canada's Ukrainian community that was celebrated in left-wing Ukrainian-Canadian circles. The Washington statue would be built at the initiative of the Ukrainian community in the U.S. and would combine many of the newer emigration's anti-Soviet sentiments and U.S. anticommunism.

When a group of Soviet Ukrainian intellectuals (at the direction of the KGB) published an open letter in the newspaper *Literaturna Ukraïna* in November 1963, offering to participate in the statue unveiling and to bring earth from Shevchenko's grave, the Shevchenko Memorial Committee rejected the overture, concerned that it was a Soviet trick. The potential presence of Ukrainian SSR representatives at the dedication clearly concerned them, as it would dilute their anti-Soviet message. The KGB report on this incident described how the letter had successfully caught the attention of the entire diaspora and had become the subject of heated disagreement. The report drew the conclusion that the moment was right to intensify the KGB's propaganda activities.

Nevertheless, for the Ukrainian community in the U.S., the creation of the Shevchenko statue in Washington, D.C., became a cause célèbre. The statue campaign briefly united the fractious community around a common goal, even if there were sharp disagreements about the precise tactics and, in particular, the involvement of Soviet authorities. The unveiling of the statue on June 27, 1964, was a high point of unity and mobilization, with financial contributions coming from "From the very beginning, the organizers of the initiative explicitly connected their work to an anticommunist agenda."



I ARAS SHEVCHENKO 1814–1801 BARD OF DERAIND

Ornament and statue on Shevchenko monument in Washington, D.C.





Platon Stasiuk and his wife in Kaniv, the site of Shevchenko's grave.

across the country. Dozens of buses arrived at the opening with delegations from the northeastern and midwestern United States; Ukrainians from around the world joined their American counterparts. Former President Eisenhower spoke at the unveiling and said he hoped the monument would give other countries "constant encouragement to struggle forever against communist tyranny." The crowd, estimated to be around 100,000 people, opened and closed the ceremony with prayers; sang the American and non-Soviet Ukrainian national anthems as well as recited Shevchenko's poem "Testament"; and chanted, "We like Ike."

Many of the papers left behind by the Shevchenko Memorial Committee can now be found in the archives of the Shevchenko Scientific Society, U.S.A., which are located in New York City. These materials include correspondence, financial records, and photographs, all of which are accessible to researchers. The papers offer insights into the issues relevant to decision-makers fielding criticism of the initiative.

The Shevchenko statue project was initiated at the height of U.S. efforts to appeal to those living under communist rule. When the memorial was built, four years after its approval, the U.S. political environment under President Johnson had shifted to a less confrontational stance toward the Soviet Union. This meant that government officials regarded the statue more ambivalently than the project's organizers might have hoped; coupled with strong criticism of the project from newspapers like the Washington Post, Ukrainian Americans might have wondered just how committed the United States was to including Shevchenko among those world figures it honored as freedom fighters.

The Soviet Union, on the other hand, was far from ambivalent about Shevchenko. The Soviets could not allow their main geopolitical rival to outflank them and build a statue in their capital without a response. Published sources, as well as my own research in the archives of the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) in Kyiv, suggest that the leadership of the Ukrainian SSR was, in fact, deeply invested in the ideological competition over the poet's legacy for both domestic and international reasons. The Soviet Ukrainian government was keen to preserve its monopoly over Ukraine's cultural patrimony; legitimacy among Ukrainians rested on its claims to be fostering Ukraine's culture. Its observance of Shevchenko-related anniversaries and its efforts to build its own Shevchenko cult were an important aspect of this. Moreover, it feared international criticism on the Ukrainian issue from émigrés abroad who, they correctly assessed, were keen to spread their anticommunist ideas

and critiques of Soviet Russification to the Soviet Ukrainian population.

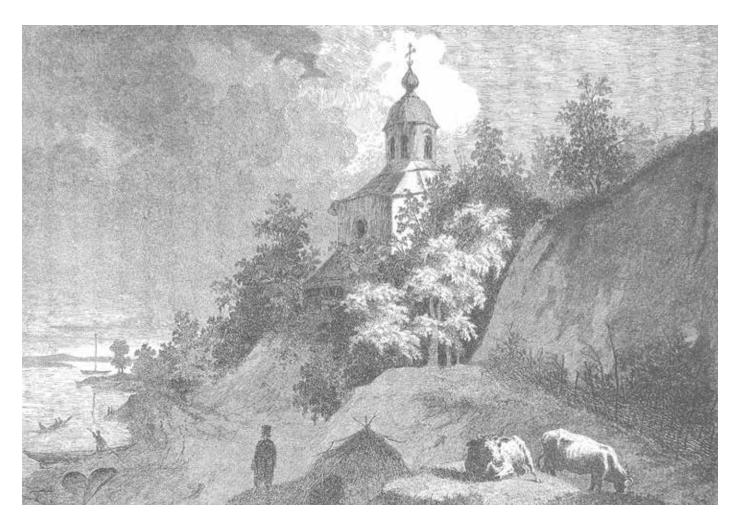
In August 1960, at around the same time that Congress adopted the bill authorizing the Shevchenko memorial in Washington, the Soviet Ukrainian government reorganized its structures for engaging the diaspora. The CPU Central Committee ordered the creation of the Association for Cultural Ties with Ukrainians Abroad, to be funded and run by the KGB. Very soon thereafter, they included this body into the broader Ukrainian Association for Cultural Ties in order to obscure the former's relationship with the KGB.

Most policy toward the émigrés ran through the committee, which sought to develop relationships with sympathetic or persuadable Ukrainians living outside the Soviet Union. The association published a newspaper called Visti z Ukraïny (News from Ukraine) and an English-language counterpart for distribution abroad. At the time, the overall strategy combined carrot-andstick approaches and was predicated on the assumption that they could drive a wedge between the "working emigrant population," which they saw as potentially open to their appeals, and the "nationalist ringleaders," whom they understood to be implacably hostile to the Soviet Union.

In order to achieve their aims, Soviet authorities exploited individual initiatives, sent collective letters, distributed

"The Soviets could not allow their main geopolitical rival to outflank them and build a statue in their capital without a response."

## МОСКВА СЛАВИТ ВЕЛИКОГО ПОЭТА



Shevchenko's drawing in pencil of Vydubetskyi Monastery (not later than October 1943).

promotional materials to friendly groups, and, once they could not successfully influence the course of the statue campaign, denounced the organizers with vitriol. Through their representatives at the United Nations, they also provided Western journalists with quotes and interviews in which they expressed the official Soviet point of view on Shevchenko.

One particularly intriguing gambit was their use of a Ukrainian American who visited Soviet Ukraine in the early 1960s. Platon Stasiuk was a prominent businessman, and the treasurer of the Shevchenko Memorial Committee, who went to Ukraine with his wife in August 1961. During the trip, he had the idea of bringing back a bit of soil from Shevchenko's grave to place under the statue in Washington. According to his published account, he happened to recognize a writer on the street who took him to the offices of the Association for Cultural Relations with Ukrainians Abroad. While Stasiuk was there, the association reacted positively to the idea and arranged for a chauffeur and photographer to accompany the couple on their way to the Shevchenko memorial and museum in Kaniv, where the poet is buried.

Once in Kaniv, his hosts at the museum ceremonially handed him the container with the earth, official photographs were taken of the handover, and Stasiuk returned to New York, expecting to be met with plaudits by the committee. The earth would be a physical symbol of the close connections between the two memorials and the unity of Ukrainians in commemorating Shevchenko. Instead, the committee rejected it as an unauthorized initiative and a Soviet ploy. A

## ПУСТЬ ВЕЧНО ЖИВЕТ ПАМЯТЬ



Taras Shevchenko, St. Petersburg, 1858, via Wikimedia Commons.

disappointed Stasiuk self-published his version of the incident, while the Soviet press printed denunciations of the committee's leaders as "bourgeois nationalists" hostile to every Soviet initiative. Following the statue's unveiling in Washington, Stasiuk returned the earth to the Soviet Union and published a second account of the incident, along with letters of support that he had received throughout the saga, in 1965.

The top leadership of the Ukrainian republic paid close attention to the fallout. A January 1964 report from the KGB to the Central Committee of the CPU noted that it would be worth reprinting Stasiuk's first account in Visti z Ukraïny alongside an editorial explaining its republication. One might be tempted to call this a "repost" or a "signal boost" that would take material generated in the diaspora and send it back into circulation with the Soviet seal of approval. In a report to his superiors about the activities of the association at the end of 1964, the writer Yuri Smolych claimed that the gambit of sending the parcel of earth from Shevchenko's

grave with Stasiuk had succeeded in sowing dissension and "compromising" the nationalist leadership in the eyes of the émigré community.

Beyond this incident, the evidence suggests that the Soviet effort to influence the Shevchenko commemorations was highly organized and coordinated. The CPU Central Committee archives reveal that there was a steady stream of reports tracking the activities of the Shevchenko Committee and other émigré organizations submitted by the Ukrainian SSR's UN delegation, the Association for Cultural Ties with Ukrainians Abroad, and the KGB. As the 1964 anniversary approached, the KGB sent the Central Committee a "top secret" planning memo in December 1963, outlining the measures it was taking in order to exert what it called "ideological influence" within the emigrant population. These included publishing articles in Vistiz Ukraïny and preparing radio broadcasts setting forth the canonical Soviet view of Shevchenko, organizing the previously mentioned open letter from Ukrainian intellectuals concerning the statue, and distributing pictorial exhibitions about Shevchenko to its diplomatic representations and friendly civic organizations abroad.

The imbroglios over the Washington Shevchenko statue concerned Soviet foreign policy during the Cold War. In the Soviet Union, however, the main event was the 150th anniversary celebrations themselves, which included unveiling a new Shevchenko statue in the Soviet Union's own capital city. Nikita Khrushchev attended its unveiling and gave a speech, in contrast to his counterpart Lyndon Johnson, who preferred to keep his distance from the Washington memorial. The Soviets would not be upstaged, and their ceremony took place seventeen days before the one in Washington, making front-page news in *Izvestiya*, one of the two most important newspapers in the country.

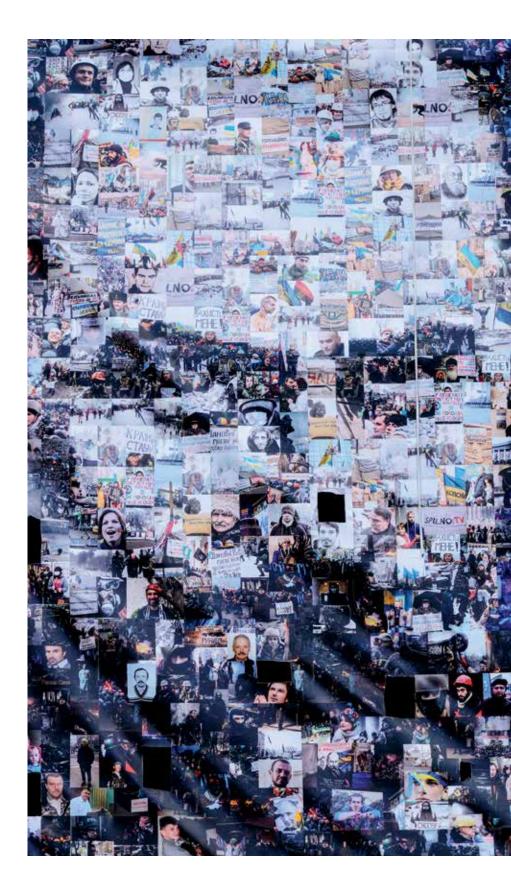
The superpowers built statues of the same man in their capital cities. The statues were the outgrowth of a contest over the fate of Ukrainian culture in the Soviet Union. It was an unequal struggle, waged as it was on one side by the party-state apparatus of a world superpower and on the other by a relatively small and fractious émigré community spread throughout the world. The latter had its greatest influence only when its interests lined up with those of the United States, and it waned as Western policy toward the Soviet Union shifted toward a more accommodative policy of coexistence. As it happens, the early 1960s was also a time when the Ukrainian party organization was at the height of its internal influence under first secretaries Nikolai Podgorny and Petro Shelest, both of whom benefitted from good relations with Khrushchev. Less than six months after the statues were unveiled, Leonid Brezhnev removed Khrushchev from power and Soviet attention began to shift from attempts to influence the diaspora toward defending itself against criticisms of its record on human rights, particularly after largescale arrests of Ukrainian intellectuals in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The struggle over the legacy of Shevchenko has a very long history, going all the way back to the poet's lifetime. It preceded the advent of the Cold War and outlasted it. During the 2013–14 Maidan protests in Kyiv, for example, Shevchenko's image became omnipresent as protesters depicted him as being on their side: wearing an orange construction helmet or obscuring his face with a bandana. Yet in 1964, this competition was shaped, perhaps unsurprisingly, most strongly by the Cold War context. The dedication ceremonies of these two dueling Shevchenko statues in Washington, D.C., and Moscow represented a dramatic increase in his international importance, fleeting though the moment may have been. The Soviet Union's efforts to influence the course of the commemorations in the U.S. were part of a broader campaign to keep up the ideological struggle against their Ukrainian enemies abroad and to win the argument over who represented the correct interpretation of Shevchenko.

Social media may have accelerated the ability of governments to influence public opinion in faraway countries. Yet by looking at the past we realize that pathways have long existed for governments to pursue similar campaigns. Shevchenko seems unlikely to return to the center of ideological struggle between great powers where he was in 1964, but then again, his legacy now belongs primarily to an independent country. The statues remain a testament to another era—that of the pinnacle of the Ukrainian Cold War.

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Portrait of Taras Shevchenko made from photographs taken on the Maidan (Kyiv, June 19, 2014).



All drawings by Julie Winegard.

BY KEITH GESSEN

# I TRY TO FIND A Hockey game

ou had to be fundamentally stupid, I sometimes thought, to become the sort of academic specialist that hiring committees liked. You had to be thick somehow. You had to block out all the other things in the world to focus on one narrow, particular thing. And how, without knowing all the other things out there, could you possibly choose? I was enjoying this thought one day while walking to the Coffee Grind. It wasn't the only time in the day that I had to think, but it was the most concentrated. I always walked past the little grocery where I got my sushki and then I was on creepy, deserted Bolshaya Lubyanka. I had no choice but to think.

If I looked at my classmates, the ones who started at the same time as I did, what was the difference between them and me? It wasn't that they were actually stupid. Most of them were smart, and some were quite a bit smarter than I was. That wasn't the difference, though. The difference was their willingness to stick with something. The successful ones were like pit bulls who had sunk their teeth into a topic and wouldn't let go until someone shot them or they had tenure.

To the ongoing frustration of my adviser, I was not doing that. "Pretend I'm a hiring committee," he said once. "What is your pitch to me?"

"My pitch is that I love this stuff. I love Russian history and literature and I love talking about it to people."

"OK, but a university is also a place for research. What's your specialty?"

I had been through this with him before. "Modernity," I said, knowing already that he wasn't going to like it. "I am a specialist in modernity."

My adviser, a six-foot-four former basketball player from Iowa, did a very girly imitation of my voice. "'I'm a specialist in modernity," he said. "'I study the ways in which modernity affects the Russian mind."

I waited for him to finish.

"I'm a specialist in my own butt!" yelled my adviser. "That's not what got me this job!"

"What's wrong with modernity?"

"It covers three centuries! It's not a specialization. Three *years* is a specialization. Or better yet, three months. Three days. If you were a specialist in, like, Tuesday through Thursday of the first week of February 1904, but *also* in total command of Russian modernism, I could get you a job anywhere you wanted."

I didn't say anything.

"I mean, look at the writers you've studied." We were in my adviser's tiny office, the two printed-out sheets of my CV lying on his desk between us. Despite his unorthodox advising methods, he was a good guy. He said he'd gotten serious about studying Russia after he realized he wasn't going to the NBA. ("It took me a long time to realize that," he said, "because I am dumb.") He was a great teacher, a truly inspired teacher, but his own academic career had not gone smoothly. He wanted me to avoid his mistakes. "Who is Patrushkin?" he asked now, looking at the description of my dissertation. Grigory Patrushkin was an early-nineteenth-century poet. He hadn't actually written very many poems, nor were the poems he wrote very good, but I wanted someone from that era who wasn't Pushkin. Although Patrushkin knew Pushkin.

"In fact the only thing I was in danger of being arrested for was accidentally buying too many cappuccinos at the Coffee Grind and not having enough cash on me to pay."

"Patrushkin was a friend of Pushkin's," I now said. "A friend?"

"He sort of knew Pushkin."

"And does this mean you can teach Pushkin?" "I don't know."

"Because there's no course on Patrushkin!"

"I just didn't want to write about the usual suspects. I thought . . ." I sort of trailed off.

"Look," he said. "Do you think I want to be studying the architecture of early Russian huts?" In his one smart academic move, my adviser had developed a theory that medieval Russian huts lacked chimneys—they discovered chimneys some two hundred years after Western European peasants—and this gave early Russian peasants brain damage, which explains why they didn't develop some of the farming strategies that radically increased crop yields in early modern Europe and helped bring about the Renaissance. "Do you think I wanted to become another of these people who come up with a monocause for Russian backwardness? No, dude. I wanted to be Isaiah Berlin!"

"I know I'm not Isaiah Berlin."

"I know, OK. I'm just saying. I know you love teaching. That's a good thing. But in order to teach, you need a teaching job, yes? And right now, at this point in time, that means finding a topic that's going to appeal to a hiring committee."

Back in July he was very excited when I told him I was going to Russia.

"This is great!" he said. "You'll be on the ground. You can find something new and original. Or something old." It was my adviser who suggested I interview my grandmother. "She'll tell you stories about the USSR. You can weave them in and out of a tale of modernity. That shit is gold, my friend. People *love* that shit."

"Hiring committees love it?"

"Yes. Who did you think I meant when I said 'people'?"

Now that was out. If I couldn't use my grandmother's stories, which she didn't remember, I would have to think of something else. But what? I really had no idea. People like Alex Fishman made their careers repackaging Russian dictatorship. "Gulag," said Fishman, then "internet," and granting institutions swooned. (He was now doing an online history of the Gulag.) People loved reading about the Soviet Gulag—it made them feel better about the U.S. of A.

Of course it wasn't like Russia was now a flourishing democracy. But it was complicated. Back in Brooklyn on the internet, and now in my grandmother's kitchen on Echo of Moscow, all I heard about was what a dangerous place Russia was, what a bloody tyrant Putin had become. And it was, and he was. But I had half expected to be arrested at the airport! I thought I'd be robbed on the train. In fact the only thing I was in danger of being arrested for was accidentally buying too many cappuccinos at the Coffee Grind and not having enough cash on me to pay. (They did not take credit cards.) The only robbery going on was the price of croissants on Sretenka.

The country had become rich. Not everyone was rich—my grandmother wasn't rich, and in fact, speaking of robbery, she *had* been robbed of certain things—but overall, generally speaking, a lot of people, especially in Moscow, were pretty well off. Looking out the window, it was hard to square all the talk of bloody dictatorship with all the people in expensive suits, getting into Audis, talking on their cell phones. Was this naïve? Didn't people in Saudi Arabia drive fancy cars and talk on cell phones in between chopping off the heads of dissidents? Yes. Maybe. I don't know. I'd never been to Saudi Arabia. For me—and not just for me, I think—Soviet oppression and Soviet poverty had always been inextricably intertwined.

Not everyone was happy about the new conditions. The liberals on Echo complained about press censorship and the marginalization of opposition politicians. Sometimes they held small protests to express their anger at the regime. And there were also occasional local issue-oriented protests, for example against the building of a mall in Pushkin Square. Most of these were tolerated, but some were violently dispersed, and my grandmother had apparently seen such a dispersal because every time we walked past a larger than usual group of people—whether waiting in line or watching a juggler perform, and especially if there were police nearby—she would say, "Let's get out of here, it's a protest, the police are very harsh toward protesters," and pull us in the opposite direction. Nonetheless she remained very curious about the news, and every time she found me in the kitchen with the radio on or *Kommersant* or the *Moscow Times* in front of me, she started asking questions. "What are they saying?" she'd say.

"About what?"

"You know, about the situation. What's the situation?"

What was the situation? I couldn't tell! It was some kind of modern authoritarianism. Or authoritarian modernization. Or something. I tried to keep her up on the latest, and she gamely nodded her head.

In the meantime, the fall PMOOC sections had begun. I was in charge of four online sections of Jeff Wilson's class on the classics of Russian literature. It was an OK class. Jeff was in his midforties and taught a kind of hepped-up version of the classics. He would say things like "Vronski is a bro in a hipster outfit" and "Tolstoy was sort of the Kanye of Russian literature-he was always making embarrassing public statements and then being forced to apologize." The idea was to make the books relatable to a younger audience. I didn't mind, even though, having TA'ed for Jeff quite a bit in grad school, I had noticed that he also compared Pushkin, Gogol, and Dostoevsky to Kanye, to the point where I wondered if he knew any other figures from popular culture. ("Pushkin is really the Tupac of Russian literature, though, don't you think?" my adviser quipped once, when I complained about it to him.)

The class began in early September, and so in the Coffee Grind across from the FSB I would watch Jeff's lecture, skim the assigned book to refresh my memory, and then log on to the different class blogs, where the students wrote responses to the text and then commented on those responses and then commented on the comments—forever.

In my many years of grad school I had taught all sorts of people. I had taught arriving freshmen in their first semester, when they still resembled children, their upper lips irritated from their first shaves; they thought that Tolstoy or, better still, Dostoevsky was trying to communicate directly to them and responded accordingly (often without doing the reading). I had taught cynical seniors who had learned to manipulate the limited belief system of contemporary literary studies and receive good grades. They knew that Tolstoy was just a name that we gave to a machine that had once written symbols on a piece of paper. It was ridiculous to try to assign some kind of intention or consistency to this machine. The seniors floated in and out of class, making fun of me. At the end of the year, I watched them all get jobs at hedge funds. I experienced it as a personal failure when they left literature; the only thing worse was when they remained. But the PMOOC students were something else altogether—a volatile mixture of the young and old, the overeducated and the autodidactic. They wrote me a tremendous number of emails.

The first book we read that fall semester was Tolstoy's The Cossacks. It was one of Tolstoy's early novels, about a spoiled young officer from Moscow who is sent to do his army service in a Cossack town on the southern Russian frontier. Back home, the young officer has gambling debts and a bad reputation, but in the Cossack village he starts over again, falling in love with the simple, straightforward, earthbound ways of the natives. He falls in love too with a handsome, strong-boned Cossack girl named Dunya, and though she is engaged to be married to her childhood sweetheart, the spoiled young officer eventually convinces her to break it off. Though skeptical, she knows she'd be a fool to turn down a wealthy Muscovite. And then, just as they're about to make it official, there is a raid on the village and Dunya's former fiancé is killed. Somewhat unfairly, Dunya blames the young officer for her friend's death. Unable to muster a defense of his actions, he packs

his things and goes back to Moscow. The end. The students did not like the

book, primarily because they



Ellen?— but they didn't *feel* like photos that Ellen would take. Sarah was going into her third year in the English department, and she had said that all the boys in English were ridiculous, but maybe she had found one who wasn't. Or maybe she was dating a guy from anthro. I tried not to think too much about it. I went back to studying the Facebook posts of my stupid former classmates: A syllabus completed! A manuscript accepted! An issue of the *Slavic Review* with their peer-reviewed article in it! Oh, how I hated all of them. Through gritted teeth I pressed "like" on all their posts, pretty much without exception.

didn't like the young officer. "Why read a book about a jerk?" they said. After reading seven or eight responses along these lines, I wrote an impassioned defense of *The Cossacks*. Books weren't just for likeable characters overcoming hardships, I said. Some of the world's greatest books are about jerks! I wrote the post and uploaded it and waited. The blogging software we used allowed people to "like" posts, as on Facebook; after my heartfelt essay received just one like, I spent an hour in the Coffee Grind figuring out how to disable that function, and did.

At the end of my work sessions at the Grind, I would check the Slavic jobs listings page—in early September it was, predictably, pretty fallow—and then give myself the dubious treat of scrolling through Facebook. Sarah hadn't bothered to unfriend me after our break-up and it would have been churlish on my part to unfriend her, and now I saw her posting solo photos of herself, looking cuter and cuter with each one, here on some beach over Labor Day, there on some college campus that was definitely not our college campus . . . Her status was still "single," and she was alone in all the photos, and it was possible that it was just a friend of hers who was taking them—maybe her friend

"Oh, how I hated all of them. Through gritted teeth I pressed 'like' on all their posts, pretty much without exception." At that moment I concluded that I needed to solve this sleep situation before it got any worse. I needed to find some exercise. If I couldn't jog or afford a gym, then I would need to find a hockey game.

The next day I wrote Dima to ask if he'd found out anything at all, and he apologized and said it was trickier than he'd anticipated and that the only thing he'd learned was that there was a game at Sokolniki, at the Spartak arena. He didn't know when or who, but maybe I could just show up there and figure it out? It's certainly what you'd do in America. So one day I finally packed all my gear into a large blue Ikea bag I found in the closet—I had, somewhat rashly and also to save on baggage fees, thrown out my ragged old hockey bag before leaving Brooklyn and simply stuffed my gear into my big red suitcase—and in the evening took the metro to Sokolniki.

I reached the rink without any trouble: it was an actual stadium, the home rink of Spartak, and unlike most buildings in Moscow it was neither surrounded by a tall metal fence nor insanely and unreasonably guarded. There was a guard at the entrance, but he saw my hockey stuff and nodded me along. I made my way down to the ice. It was a nice, modern, professional rink, with about five thousand seats; I had never played on a professional rink before; presumably Spartak was out of town or simply wasn't using the ice that evening, and whoever ran the rink rented it out to earn some extra money. Very cool. Only in Russia, I thought. For about five minutes, the country struck me as a vast informal arrangement, outside the reach of modernity and regimentation, an ever-evolving experiment. I liked the place. Like I say, this feeling lasted about five minutes.

A pickup game was in progress. The level was mixed, with a few excellent players weaving through mostly mediocre ones. It was a little incongruous to see these middle-aged nonprofessionals on a professional ice surface and on the professional benches, in this beautiful arena, but it was definitely a game I could play in. And there weren't too many guys—three on each bench, in fact, which is a couple too few.

On one of the benches stood a guy in street clothes, like he was a coach. He probably wasn't a coach—I had noticed that there were always guys like this hanging around in Russia, without any apparent purpose, just because—but I figured he'd know what was up.

As I walked toward him I realized that since I'd arrived I had hardly interacted with anyone who wasn't my grandmother, and I wasn't sure in this situation whether to use the familiar *ty* or the polite *vy*. Back in Boston my parents had said *vy* to just about everyone except their close friends, but the culture had moved on, and my sense was more people now said *ty*. But I wasn't sure. *Vy* was safer, and I went with *vy*. Excuse me," I said, using the polite form. "Can I play with you guys?"

The pseudocoach thus politely addressed looked at me in a neutral fashion and said, "You'll have to ask Zhora," then turned back to the game.

"Excuse me," I was forced to say again, again very politely. "Where is Zhora?"

Zhora was on the other bench. I went over. The guy closest to me on the bench was older than I was, past forty, but in good shape and with a scar on his cheek. I asked him (*vy*) if he could point out Zhora. He could. Zhora was on the ice, a big right-handed forward who could barely keep himself on his skates. Unlike most guys who can't skate, however, he was fed a constant diet of passes from his teammates and given plenty of room by his opponents. I intuited from this that Zhora paid for the ice.

When he came to the bench at the end of his shift I saw that he was about my age, with smooth, almost babylike skin and a tan. All his equipment was brand-new and he held somewhat awkwardly a very expensive stick.

"Zhora, hello, my name is Andrei," I said quickly. Increasingly uncertain of my *vy*, I added, "I just moved to Moscow and am looking for a hockey game. Do you have room?"

Zhora looked at me. I was saying *vy* to everyone, like a foreigner. Instead of a proper CCM hockey bag, I had a big Ikea bag with my stuff falling out. And I was wearing my favorite short-sleeve, collared shirt, from some thrift store in Massachusetts, that had a picture of a gas station and the name "Hugo" on the chest. I either looked like a very committed hockey player or a total idiot.

"For about five minutes, the country struck me as a vast informal arrangement, outside the reach of modernity and regimentation, an everevolving experiment. Like I say, this feeling lasted about five minutes."

Zhora decided it was the latter.

"We're full up," he said.

This was patently untrue.

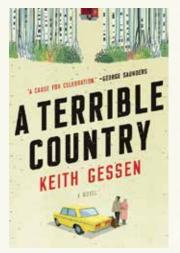
"Every single time?" I said. "Maybe you're full today, but not next time?"

"Where'd you play?" said Zhora. He used the familiar *ty*, like he was my boss. I could now continue saying *vy* to him, in a sign of deference, or I could also switch to *ty*, which could be seen as aggressive. Or I could avoid expressions that required a choice.

"Where did I play?" I asked, not quite understanding.

"Yeah," said Zhora. "For example, that guy played at Spartak." He pointed to the rough-looking guy who'd helped me locate Zhora; he had jumped over the boards when Zhora came back to the bench and was now skating with the puck. Spartak was effortlessly dodging guys half his age; he was a tremendous hockey player.

And, to be fair, the question of where one played was not unreasonable. In hockey you don't want to play with people who suck. They disrupt the flow of the game, for one thing, and for another, skating on a slippery surface and holding on to sticks, they can be dangerous. Zhora himself, for



A Terrible Country: A Novel Keith Gessen Viking (2018) ISBN 978-0-735-22131-4

Keith Gessen (November 16, 2018).

example, was such a player. So I didn't exactly resent his question; it's just that there was no way for me to answer it sensibly.

"In Boston," I said.

Zhora chuckled. "Where in Boston?"

"In school," I said. In Russian there is no word for high school—all school, from first grade to tenth, is referred to as "school"; more important, as I did not quite understand at the time, there is no such thing as high school sports in Russia. Youth sports take place in so-called "sports schools." They can be affiliated with one of the major professional teams (Red Army or Dynamo or Spartak), or they can be independent. They train kids from a young age, sometimes for free, encouraging those with talent and discouraging those without it. Whereas my answer to Zhora made it sound like I'd played shinny on the pond behind my elementary school.

"School, huh?" Zhora laughed again. "No, it's all right, we're full up." Then, in English: "*Sorry*."

"All right," I said, though I was pissed. At least I hadn't had to call him vy again. As I walked away, I watched the game a little longer. There really were three or four terrific players out there, but the rest of the guys were at my level or worse. They had not played at Spartak.

My stuff felt heavy as I lugged it back to the metro, and to add further humiliation to the previous humiliation, I got stopped by two cops and asked for my "documents." This had happened to me all the time when I was younger—the police usually stop non-Slavic-looking men, in case they're illegal migrants or Chechen terrorists—but it hadn't happened to me since I'd been in town, presumably because I had aged out of the illegal immigrant/Chechen terrorist cohort. But my bag must have looked suspicious. I showed them my passport, they started practicing their English but I answered them in Russian, and then they lost interest and rudely (*ty*) sent me on my way.

What the fuck was wrong with these people? In America, at least in 2008, you didn't have to show your documents all the time. And you could play hockey! You showed up at a rink, found out the schedule, put down ten dollars—maybe twenty if you were in New York—and played hockey. That was all. "Open hockey," it was called, or "stick time." Beautiful words! As long as you had a full face mask, you could play. And here? I had come to Moscow to take care of my grandmother and I couldn't even get into a hockey game. When I went to the store to buy groceries, the cashiers were rude. The people on the subway were pushy. The baristas at the Coffee Grind were always smiling, but that was clearly because someone had instructed them in Western-style customer service, and they would lose their jobs if they cut it out.

Editor's note: Excerpted from the chapter "I Try to Find a Hockey Game," from A Terrible Country, by Keith Gessen © 2018, Viking. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Novelist, translator, and *n*+*l* founding editor Keith Gessen (George T. Delacorte Professor in Magazine Journalism) has been on a roll this past year with the publication of his essay "The Quiet Americans behind the U.S.-Russia Imbroglio" in the *New York Times Magazine*, a review essay on Stephen Kotkin's Stalin biography in the *New Yorker*, capped off with the publication of his second novel, *A Terrible Country* (Viking). As the standing-room-only book launch events last summer showed only too clearly, a lot of people have been eagerly awaiting Gessen's next novel; many fans got a taste when an excerpt ran in the *New Yorker*, along with an interview and a recording of Gessen reading the work.

Like Gessen's debut novel, *All the Sad Young Literary Men* (2008), whose main character is named Keith, this new novel is semiautobiographical. As he explains in a *New Yorker* interview, "I love nonfiction, and I really love oral

history. I like fiction that is made up, but I really love fiction that is thinly veiled autobiography. Each form has its rules, not even so much in terms of truth and falsity (although nonfiction should certainly be true) but, rather, in its pacing, its tolerance for coincidence (sometimes greater in nonfiction than in fiction, paradoxically), and even its tone" (April 9, 2018).

In A Terrible Country, Andrei, a newly minted Ph.D. in Slavic studies from a university vaguely modeled on NYU, answers the call of his older brother, Dima, to come to Moscow and take care of their grandmother. The year is 2008 and the already slim pickings of the U.S. academic job market have become even slimmer with the worldwide financial crisis. Jobless and single again, Andrei seizes on the idea of going to Moscow, interviewing his grandmother for a possible research project, and supporting himself by teaching online sections of his university's PMOOC (paid massive online open course) initiative. But none of that works out as planned. His grandmother suffers from dementia. She can't remember the past and even forgets who Andrei is. He cannot afford the expensive cappuccinos at Coffee Grind, where he escapes to work on the PMOOC. And to top off everything his students hate reading Tolstoy's The Cossacks because the main hero is a "jerk." It is certainly no coincidence that Tolstoy's quasi-autobiographical work served as Gessen's main model for his novel.

But A Terrible Country is a book about Russia, not an academic satire. As he recounts in a double interview with his sister, journalist Masha Gessen, "I wanted to communicate the experience of coming to Russia and having certain expectations from reading the news about the 'bloody regime,' and then showing up and finding it doesn't look at all like what you expected, and the bloody regime is a much more complicated and amorphous entity. Certainly, in the period described in the book, 2008 to 2009, it wasn't dragging all that many people off in the middle of the night" (New Yorker, March 17, 2019). During the nine years it took to write the novel, Gessen considered moving it closer to the present, perhaps to the year of the Bolotnove Square protests or the Ukraine crisis, but he ultimately decided against this because he felt that 2008-9 was "a golden moment" and that the situation in Russia had not changed all that much-Putin was still in power.

Andrei's search for a hockey game illustrates the importance of networks for making your way in Moscow—for just about everything, including sports. Andrei has a difficult time finding a game, even coming up with the locations of rinks, and when he does find one it's a bunch of middle-aged business guys who have done well in the new Russia. They may not be Putin supporters, but they are certainly Putin-tolerant. Andrei's outsider status in this crowd is quickly brushed in with his indecisiveness about whether to use the polite or informal form of "you" (vy/ty). He may have been born in Moscow, but he's not a Muscovite. He's a Russian American.

In her appreciation of the novel for the *New York Review of Books*, Francine Prose concludes: "In its breadth and depth, its sweep, its ability to move us and to philosophize without being boring, its capaciousness and even its embrace of the barely plausible and excessive, *A Terrible Country* is a smart, enjoyable, modern take on what we think of, admiringly, as "the Russian novel"—in this case, a Russian novel that only an American could have written."

-Ronald Meyer

# Alumni & Postdoc Notes



#### Sarah Calderone



Monica Angelena Johnson Driven by an interest in studying the Eurasian migration system, I completed my Fulbright research project on the integration of Central Asian migrants in Ekaterinburg, Russia. That experience led me to SIPA and the Harriman Institute, with the goal of establishing a policy-relevant research career focused on post-Soviet states. Having long studied Russia, and with a background in human rights and nonprofit organizations, I sought to further concentrate on the security, political, and economic context of the region. At Harriman, I worked as a research assistant, conducted research trips to Astana and Moscow, and wrote my certificate essay on Russian foreign policy and authoritarianism in Central Asia. I interned at the Carnegie Moscow Center and Eurasia Group and completed a capstone project consulting the government of Estonia on global strategies.

After graduation, I joined Horizon Client Access, a political risk firm located in New York, as an analyst focusing on political and economic developments related to the energy sector in Russia, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. The role has allowed me to apply my regional knowledge in a business setting, while gaining additional research and consulting experience. Meanwhile, I have also independently continued my own research on Eurasian migration and authoritarianism, with plans to present at conferences in the U.S. and UK this year. My coursework, the Harriman network, and the numerous opportunities offered at the Institute have been integral to my current work. In turn, my political risk experience and continued independent research have proved useful as I prepare for further study and practice related to transnational and global issues in the Eurasian region.

-Sarah Calderone (M.I.A., SIPA, 2018; Harriman Certifícate, 2018)

I began my graduate studies at Columbia in 2015, after having served in the Peace Corps in Romania from 2008 to 2011. I came to the university with a lifelong passion for workers' and immigrants' rights, and a keen interest on how recent entrants into the EU (namely, Romania) would integrate refugees from the Syrian refugee crisis into their labor forces. During the summer of 2016, I interned at the International Labour Organization's Central and Eastern European Country Office in Budapest.

At the beginning of my second year at Columbia, I enrolled in the Harriman Certificate program and dedicated myself to gaining a more comprehensive understanding of Romania and the former Communist bloc, the country and region I had called home for over three years. I took the Harriman's "Legacies of the Empire and Soviet Union" course during the 2016 presidential campaign and election. The experience presented a unique and unforgettable opportunity to gain perspectives from experts in the Russian, Eastern European, and Central Asian region on the U.S. election's impact and fallout as events were unfolding. I received the Harriman Institute Certificate, graduated from Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs with a master of public administration in development practice, and specialized in advanced policy and economic analysis by May 2017. Since graduation, I've been working at the New York City Mayor's Office of Management and Budget as the analyst reviewing City agencies that focus on small businesses, workforce development, and minority- and women-owned business enterprises.

I've formed lifelong connections at the Harriman Institute—classroom discussions with peers and faculty from my time as a student have continued at Harriman events and catch-up sessions throughout New York City.

-Monica Angelena Johnson (MPA-DP, SIPA, 2017; Harriman Certificate, 2017)

I am a professor at the Woodrow Wilson Department of Politics at the University of Virginia. I research Russian foreign policy, Russian politics in comparative perspective, and relationships between international order and political development. I recently published a piece in *The American Interest*, "What Russia Will Be: Four Scenarios for the Future of Putin's Russia and Russia's Putin." In 2006, I received an All-University Teaching Award. My publications have appeared in numerous learned journals abroad and in the United States; my works have been translated into Russian, Chinese, French, German, Serbo-Croatian, and Polish.

But I am really writing to let you know that two years ago, at the age of 61, I was recruited by the Charlottesville semi-professional football team, the Virginia Silverbacks, to be their kicker. They play by NFL rules and most players are between 20 and 35 years old. In 2017, I made the All-Star Team. In 2018, we won the League title. On May 13, 2017, I kicked a "walk-off" 24-yard field goal with a half-second left in the game to win it for my team.

-Allen C. Lynch (Assistant Director, Harriman Institute, 1989–1992; Ph.D., Political Science, 1984; Russian Institute Certificate, 1979)

I am an assistant professor in the Slavic department at the University of Southern California, specializing in 19th-century Russian literature. If I had to give myself a label, I would call myself a scholar of historical poetics. I am especially interested in how literary form influences content. How does Gogol's use of simile and metaphor shape (or misshape) his fictional landscapes? How do Dostoevsky's experiments with building suspense charge his interest in the ethics of human curiosity? And what are the historical, cultural, and institutional contexts that make these experiments possible in the first place?



Allen C. Lynch



Greta Matzner-Gore



James W. Morrison

My first book, *Dostoevsky and the Ethics of Narrative Form: Suspense, Closure, Minor Characters* (forthcoming from Northwestern University Press in 2020), addresses precisely these questions. It traces Dostoevsky's investigations into the ethical implications of his own formal choices, especially in his last three novels—*Demons, The Adolescent,* and *The Brothers Karamazov.* It argues that, in so doing, Dostoevsky anticipated some of the most pressing debates about the ethics of reading and writing today. Can reading novels make us more compassionate and sensitive to difference? Or is reading simply a variation of voyeurism? By placing Dostoevsky in dialogue with theorists like Wayne Booth, Suzanne Keen, and Alex Woloch, my book seeks to make a contribution not only to Dostoevsky studies, but to the study of narrative ethics as well.

The book is a Harriman Institute project through and through. A junior fellowship funded a year of my dissertation research; a postdoctoral fellowship gave me the time I needed to turn that dissertation into a book; and a First Book Subvention Award is helping me prepare the manuscript for publication. For me, Harriman Institute support has made all the difference.

-Greta Matzner-Gore (Pepsico Junior Fellowship, 2012–14; Postdoctoral Fellowship, 2014–15; Harriman First Book Subvention Award, 2019)

I was a student in Columbia's School of International Affairs and Russian Institute in the early 1960s, graduating with an M.I.A. in 1963. In 1964, having earlier received a commission in the U.S. Army via ROTC at Indiana University, I entered into active duty with the army in the Intelligence Corps. After completing basic infantry officer training and intelligence school, I worked in intelligence in the Pentagon until 1967. Leaving active duty, I returned for further study at Columbia until mid-1968, when I was accepted into the U.S. government's Management Intern Program. I chose to enter the Executive Trainee Program at the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). I spent 27 years in the OSD, working on policy toward Europe, NATO, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union. I served as deputy director of a Defense Department task force on the Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions negotiations between NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

Mid-career, I attended and graduated from the National War College. Subsequently, as a member of the federal Senior Executive Service, I served in the OSD as director of policy toward the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. I also spent a year and a half as a visiting fellow at the National Defense University's Institute for National Strategic Studies, where I wrote two short books, one on Vladimir Zhirinovsky and one on NATO expansion, and contributed to an annual global strategic assessment. I retired in 1995 and in retirement have written three books and volunteered in my community.

-James W. Morrison (M.I.A., SIA [SIPA], 1963; Russian Institute Certificate, 1963)

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