

THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

# HARRIMAN

FALL 2022



WRITERS RESPOND TO  
THE WAR IN UKRAINE



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Valentina Izmirlieva.  
Photo by Jeffrey Schiffman.

**Dear friends of the Harriman Institute,**

I'm delighted to present to you this new issue of *Harriman Magazine*, coming out at a uniquely challenging moment for all of us. Russia's war in Ukraine has put to the test every aspect of the Institute's life, closed many familiar routes of operation, called many more into question, and demanded swift decisions and new initiatives under pressure from an evolving conflict at the very heart of our region of study. The months after February 24 have been filled with heartbreak and hard work, but, as usual, the Harriman Institute more than rose to the challenge and set the model once again for working successfully in the new political reality. This issue reflects on this experience by opening a creative space to both mourn the horrors of the war and honor the resilience of our community.

Most of the pieces you are about to read were intended for a second issue celebrating the Harriman Institute's 75th anniversary. We had the materials ready to go by early February. Then everything changed. The need to voice our collective emotions in the face of unspeakable suffering and loss gave rise to our new, highly popular podcast series, "Voices of Ukraine," hosted and produced by the magazine's editor, Masha Udensiva-Brenner. For this issue, we chose to publish a transcript of Episode 11, a conversation with our resident Ukrainian scholar Mark Andryczyk about novelist Volodymyr Rafeyenko. Rafeyenko is a familiar name to the Harriman family. In fact, the previous issue of this magazine featured an excerpt from Andryczyk's English translation of Rafeyenko's novel *Mondegreen* (2019), published in the U.S. earlier this year. The novel, a poetic meditation on loss and displacement in the wake of the war in Donbas, could not be more timely. Now, as war has engulfed Rafeyenko's entire country, the writer, together with so many Ukrainians, has been forced to relive the same traumas a second time. His novel thus brings into sharp focus the continual experience of war in Ukraine across the grim watershed of February 24, while also extending a narrative bridge between our magazine's latest issues.

It also signals a larger theme around which this issue took its current form—the role of creative writers as spokespeople for a community in shock. Our centerpiece, "Writers Respond to the War in Ukraine," opens with excerpts from the online project "The War Diary" by Ukrainian writer and photographer Yevgenia Belorusets. Writing from Kyiv, she dispassionately records experiences in the immediate aftermath of the invasion. Day by day, her words and photographs document the unimaginable—nightly shelling, life in shelters, cleaning one's apartment in the dark just to retain some semblance of normalcy—in the hope that each entry would be the last. Belorusets is currently a fellow at Columbia's Institute for Ideas and Imagination in Paris, which is also hosting this year four Harriman residencies created especially for Ukrainian artists and writers.

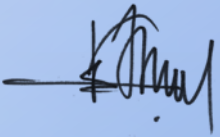
Under the same rubric, you will also find essays by Harriman's two most recent writers-in-residence: Maria Stepanova, whom we hosted in Spring 2022, and Georgi Gospodinov, who is with us this fall. As two of Eastern Europe's most powerful literary voices today, they offer distinct, though emotionally concordant, perspectives on the war. A citizen of the invading country, Stepanova tries to make sense of the events, horror-struck: "We watch in real time, trembling in our shame and grief that this is happening here and now." Gospodinov writes as an involved



observer from his native Bulgaria, just across the Black Sea from the worst battles of the conflict. Written during the first week of the war, his “Fragments” draw parallels between the invasion of Ukraine and the outbreak of World War II, wary of the pernicious role media plays to make us complicit in the crimes and politics of war.

While this issue is emotionally anchored in the ongoing war in Ukraine, it still honors its initial mandate to celebrate the Harriman Institute with an anniversary lineup that spans its entire remarkable history. We feature alumni contributions from the earliest days of the Russian Institute all the way to the present day. Francis Randall recollects the very first visit to the USSR by the Institute’s students in 1954, and Alexander Motyl reflects on the Ukrainian diaspora in New York City as both an insider and a scholar, while Marijeta Bozovic and Benjamin Peters share their recent investigation of “The Belarus Cyber Partisans.” We equally honor old and new Harriman faculty with contributions by Peter Clement, who writes on his career path “from academia to the CIA and back again,” and Mark Lipovetsky, who outlines the literary significance of Maria Stepanova in an essay originally scheduled to coincide with her Harriman residence. Last but not least, we are pleased to share with you selected texts and illustrations from the forthcoming volume *Zenithism: A 1920s Yugoslav Avant-Garde Movement*, edited by Aleksandar Bošković, of the Slavic Department faculty, and Steven Teref.

We marked our 75th anniversary during a tumultuous year like no other. Here’s to 75 more years of continued Harriman success. And may the new chapter be a time of peace after a year of war.



Valentina Izmirlieva  
*Director, Harriman Institute*







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# THE WAR DIARY\*

(AN EXCERPT)

BY YEVGENIA BELORUSETS



\*First published on the website of ISOLARII; reprinted in the anthology *In the Face of War*: [isolarii.com](http://isolarii.com). Reprinted here with the publisher's permission. Photos on pages 7, 8, 10, and 11 are from *The War Diary*, courtesy of Yevgenia Belorusets.



## DAY 1

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24

### *The Beginning*

I woke up early this morning to eight missed calls on my cell phone. They were from my parents and some friends. At first I thought something had happened to my family and that my friends were trying to reach me because for some reason my parents had alerted them first. Then my imagination traveled in another direction, and I pictured an accident, a dangerous situation in the center of Kyiv, something to warn your friends about. A cold anxiety gripped me. I called my cousin because her beautiful voice, brave and rational, always has a calming effect on me. She just said: “Kyiv has been shelled. A war has broken out.”

Many things have a beginning. When I think about the beginning, I imagine a line drawn very clearly on a white surface. The eye observes the simplicity of this trace of movement—one that is sure to begin somewhere and end somewhere. But I have never been able to imagine the beginning of a war. Strange. I was in Donbas when war with Russia broke out in 2014. But I had entered the war then, entered into a foggy, opaque zone of violence. I still remember the intense guilt I felt about being a guest in a catastrophe, a guest who could leave at will, because I lived somewhere else.

The war was already there, an intruder, something strange, alien, and insane that had no justification to happen in that place and at that time. Back then, I kept asking people in Donbas how all this could have started, and I always got different answers.

I think that the beginning of this war in Donbas was one of the most mythol-

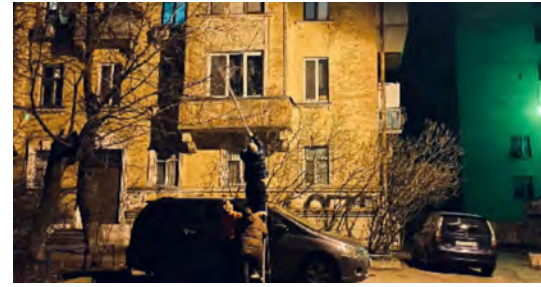
ogized moments for the people of Kyiv, precisely because it remained incomprehensible how such an event is born. At that time, in 2014, people in Kyiv said, “The people of Donbas, those Ukrainian Putin-sympathizers, invited the war to our country.” This alleged “invitation” has for some time been considered an explanation for how the absolutely impossible—war with Russia—suddenly became possible after all.

After I got off the phone with my cousin, I paced around my apartment for a while. My head was absolutely blank. I had no idea what to do now. Then my phone rang again. One call followed the next, friends came forward with plans to escape, some called to convince themselves we were still alive. I quickly grew tired. I talked a lot, constantly repeating the words “the war.” In the meantime, I would look out the window and listen to check if the explosions were approaching. The view from the window was ordinary, but the sounds of the city were strangely muffled—no children yelling, no voices in the air.

Later, I went out and discovered an entirely new environment, an emptiness that I had never seen here, even on the most dangerous days of the Maidan protests.

Sometime later I heard that two children had died from shelling in Kherson Oblast, in the south of the country, and that a total of fifty-seven people had died in the war today. The numbers transformed into something very concrete, as if I had already lost someone myself. I felt angry at the whole world. I thought, “This has been allowed to happen. It is a crime against everything human, against the great common space where we live and hope for a future.”

I’m staying with my parents tonight. I’ve visited a bomb shelter next to the house, so I know where we’ll all go when the shelling comes later.



## “ALL OF A SUDDEN THE NIGHT IS SILENT.”

(From *The War Diary*, Day 2)

The war has begun. It is after midnight. I will hardly be able to fall asleep, and there is no point in enumerating what has changed forever.



## DAY 2

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 25

### *Air Raids*

I wake up at seven in the morning to the sirens warning of air raids in progress. My mother is convinced that Russia will not dare to shell the thousand-year-old St. Sophia Cathedral in our city. She believes that our house, which is in the immediate vicinity of the cathedral, is safe. That’s why she decides against going to the bomb shelter. My father is sleeping.

I think if a UNESCO monument could actually stop the Russian army from shelling, this war wouldn’t have started in the first place. My head is throbbing with thoughts: Kyiv under fire, abandoned by the whole world, which is ready to sacrifice Ukraine in the hope that it will feed and satiate the aggressor for some time.



Kyiv is being shelled for the first time since the Second World War.

I am struggling with myself. I know that slowly the world is waking up and beginning to see that it's not just about Kyiv and Ukraine. It's about every house, every door—it's about every life in Europe that is threatened as of today.

[...]



#### DAY 4

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 27

*An Extinguished City*

Normally, the many brightly lit windows in Kyiv warm the city's cold February days. The lights have something secret, private, but at the same time cozy about them. But now the lights of the city have gone out. People are afraid of Russian missiles and artillery fire. I tape my windows shut so that they won't shatter in case of shelling. I go out on the balcony to see if my apartment is dark enough. I put only one lamp in each room—they hardly give off any light where they stand on the floor. It is difficult for me to find my way

around the apartment, but I am trying to discover a new form of comfort.

The sirens that warn of air strikes wail with a long signal that is somewhat reminiscent of the playful sounds elephants use to communicate. In Kyiv, the wailing of sirens is also a form of communication, but the message is always the same: "Hide, hide well!"

When dawn came, I decided for some reason to clean my apartment. I thought, "Right now you have to stick to the plans, to the usual routines." From the outside, my apartment is almost black, with its empty, dark windows greeting all the other dark and empty apartments in the city.

The darkness is frightening, but at the same time I sense that the city has decided to defend itself. On official Telegram channels, I read about so-called "diversionary groups," Russian units moving into Kyiv as a vanguard. Like terrorists. Their goal is to destabilize the city, carry out attacks on politicians, and ultimately take Kyiv. One such group appears to have shot at the car of two women who had decided to flee the city with their children this morning. The women and their children died.

My thoughts become as dark as the windows of my apartment. While cleaning, I thought that when I write this diary, I should make a joke about house-keeping during war. My tip would be: "Cleanliness is a must in a dark room with taped windows—if you were going to do it earlier and are almost crying now, go ahead and mop your apartment anyway. True, you will not see anything, and the apartment may not get much cleaner, but following procedures and implementing plans is more important."

The fourth day of the war is over. Half the city is resisting the normalization of violence that is knocking on every door. War also tests us to see if we have even a touch of compassion for those sent here to murder. Since the war began, sixteen children have been killed across the country. In my town, nine "civilians" (I hate that word more and more) have died so far, and forty-seven have been injured, including three children.

The destruction of the small town of Schastia, "Happiness," in northeastern Ukraine, began with the shelling of an electrical station. At some point it was destroyed, the lights went out, the water, the heating. In distress, people, especially elderly residents, went outside to get water or food. Then the soldiers attacked, with artillery and rockets. A bus with fleeing people was fired upon. There are no journalists in this area at the moment. No one counts the injured, the murdered. Who will describe what Putin has done to Donbas since the beginning of the war, since his operation to "Protect the people of Donbas from Ukrainian fascists"?

By occupying these territories and waging information warfare, Putin has managed to isolate this region from the world. The occupied territories have not been observed by human rights organizations since 2014, and now the Russian

**"PHOTOGRAPHY IS SOMETHING THAT YOU CANNOT CONTROL COMPLETELY, AND THERE ARE ALWAYS, IN EACH PHOTO, FOOTPRINTS THAT YOU DIDN'T PUT THERE."**

(From *The War Diary*, Introduction)





Photo of Yevgenia Belorusets by Olga  
Tsybulska. Courtesy of the Columbia Institute  
for Ideas and Imagination (Paris).





army is once again showing how little it values the lives of these people.

From the news, I learn that the Regional History Museum—in the settlement of Ivankiv, in Kyiv Oblast—was destroyed. In it were the works of Maria Prymachenko, one of the most famous twentieth-century artists in Ukraine. A joint exhibition of my photographs and her paintings had been planned for the fall, which is a great honor for me. I am sure that somehow, somewhere, this exhibition will take place.



#### DAY 15

THURSDAY, MARCH 10

#### *Illusions*

In a diary, a day feels like a self-contained unit. An entry feeds the illusion that conclusions can be drawn—the illusion of a logical narrative.

This war takes shape through many such illusions. For example, it had a preface that preceded the actual attacks: Russian divisions gathered at the border of Ukraine, politicians spoke of war, dip-

lomats left the country. The war followed upon this expectation, this prediction, like a play where the plot is told in a preamble, as a prophecy to be fulfilled.

I am still struggling to imagine what happens when you learn that a war is knocking at the door, a war whose cycle will terrorize peaceful cities with bombs and murder thousands of people. Today, the news in Ukraine said that civilian casualties are much higher than military casualties. I suspect that before the war started, even the politicians who predicted it did not believe it would happen and kept hoping it could be avoided. Otherwise, the world would have done everything—or much more than “everything”—not to allow this abyss. The war was unrealistic, absurd, and frankly unthinkable. And when you wake up in the midst of war, it remains the same: still unimaginable.

At the political level, the unimaginable was compounded by the fear of a huge phantom—a phantom that a corrupt and aggressive dictatorship had spent years constructing with propaganda. This phantom even managed to convince itself that it was powerful enough to capture Ukraine in just a few days with a blitzkrieg. It would be like

**“I AM STILL STRUGGLING  
TO IMAGINE WHAT  
HAPPENS WHEN YOU  
LEARN THAT A WAR  
IS KNOCKING AT  
YOUR DOOR.”**

(From *The War Diary*, Day 15)







**“IT’S ONE OF THOSE MOMENTS WHEN I THINK I’VE DISCOVERED SOMETHING FUNDAMENTAL: I UNDERSTAND WHAT PHOTOGRAPHY IS FOR.”**

(From *The War Diary*, Day 16)

a vacation for the soldiers—they would be greeted with flowers. A quick victory was guaranteed. Fear tied our hands, and caution seemed the wisest option. Everyone waited until the catastrophe really began. Now, in Kyiv, and together with the whole world, I have to watch as houses, lives, and memories disappear in a huge fire.

And still, in the midst of war, in the midst of senseless death, injury, suffering, and loss, more crimes are predicted. Russia comes forward almost daily with old and new demands, always based on territorial claims. A new preface is being written into the war narrative once again. If its demands for more territories are rejected, Russia will announce even more war, even more death.

As I write, a friend calls to say that her mother, who still lives in Kharkiv, was out on the balcony when she spotted a man speaking Russian. He was relaying the coordinates for a bombing on the street outside her house. He was apparently a *navodchik*, an antiquated word meaning “gunner”—someone who decides the location of the next strike and helps to shell peaceful districts. The distribution of food was supposed to happen next to her house.

Perhaps that is why the *navodchik* chose this spot.

The father of another friend stayed in Kharkiv because the employees of his small company could not escape the city. He wanted to help people on the ground. For days he endured the rocket and mortar attacks unharmed. But now, my friend is trying to find psychological help for her father, in this city under fire. He can no longer understand where he is or what is happening around him.

In Kharkiv, during the first days of the war, the animals in a small private zoo were injured. The zoo staff stayed in the city to care for them. Today, some of the staff were deliberately shot at on their way home from the zoo. Some were injured. Some died.

An acquaintance of mine spent twelve days in her basement in a small town outside Kyiv—without light, almost without food. She was rescued today.

I myself was detained today on the street in Kyiv by an elderly couple. They noticed that I was taking photos and suspected that I might be spying for Russia. They took me to a checkpoint in the hope that I would be disarmed. And all I had wanted was to take a hopeful photo of the city. I wanted to show that food

delivery services were running again, bringing meals to the elderly and the sick. The few remaining employees walk around the city to make deliveries! This means that those who need help but cannot shop for themselves will have a little more security and care. ■

*Yevgenia Belorusets, born in Kyiv in 1980, is a Ukrainian artist, writer, and photographer. Her collection of short stories, Lucky Breaks, for which she received the International Literature Award—Haus der Kulturen der Welt in 2020, was published in Eugene Ostashevsky’s English translation by New Directions Publishers (2022). The War Diary, co-published daily in English translation by Art Forum and ISOLARII, was presented alongside the wartime work of Ukrainian artists Nikita Kadan and Lesia Khomenko on the occasion of their exhibition at the 59th Venice Biennale. Belorusets is currently a fellow at Columbia University’s Institute for Ideas and Imagination (Paris).*



# FRAGMENTS ABOUT THE WAR

BY GEORGI GOSPODINOV

## AND WE ARE ALL FATHERS AND MOTHERS AGAIN

In the beginning, when I first saw the reports of the bombing, the broken streets, and the tanks, I had the feeling that I was watching old Russian footage from the war, a black-and-white documentary from the archive about World War II. We grew up on these films. At first the mind can't accept that it's all happening here and now, with today's people in today's cities. In fact, these shots, though in color, are almost black and white—the grays, blacks, and whites of burned houses, muddy roads, charred tanks and machinery, smoky grayish-white horizons—the colors of all wars. The discoloration of the world.

\*\*\*

According to a recent Russian statistical poll, 60 percent approve of the war against Ukraine (or the special operation—the word “war” is forbidden). And 88 percent want to live together with the Ukrainians. Probably with the survivors. What is this schizophrenia anyway? To invade them and love them? To attack them because we love them? To attack them so they will love us? In fact, any simple theory of bully and victim will explain this madness in everyday terms. The domestic abuser usually thinks that the problems of love and peaceful coexistence are most easily solved with two to three slaps; I'm talking about the easy cases.

\*\*\*

Okay, let's say you take over this country and stay there to guard what you've taken over. How are you going to walk down those streets that you blew up with your shells? How will you sleep in those buildings that you destroyed? How will you look into the eyes of the people whose loved ones you killed? How will you keep order in the city after you

have crossed that line? How will you explain to your own children back home why you are gone and what you've been doing while away from home? How will you manage to lie to yourself that these are not human beings, that they deserved it, that they did it to themselves? ...

Artillery shells can produce death and fear, rockets and incendiary bombs produce death and fear, tanks produce death and fear ... What are you going to do with these piles of death and piles of fear? How are you going to clear them away; how are you going to save yourself from the radiation that they will emit for decades?

You can take over cities, but you can't hold them. You can win the war, but you can't win the people.

\*\*\*

A Ukrainian woman from Kyiv says: “I tell my aunt, who is in Moscow, that a war is going on and that we are hiding in shelters, and she says, ‘nonsense, they're lying to you on your TV.’”

What irony! In our media-saturated world, we know less about what's happening in the neighboring country during a war. Propaganda has proved to be more powerful than a personal story. The aunt doesn't believe her niece who is calling her from the bomb shelter of her building that has been hit by a missile. But they don't show this building on auntie's TV in Moscow, and, therefore, Moscow does not believe in tears (to recall the title of an old Russian movie).

\*\*\*

We are helping some friends take in a Ukrainian family. The family consists of nine members from different generations, and three cats. Only one of the cats is theirs; they took the other two at their neighbors' request. No one counts the animals that have been killed during the war, nor those



A black and white portrait of Georgi Gospodinov. He is a middle-aged man with short, dark hair and a light beard. He is looking down and to the left, with his right hand resting on his chin in a thoughtful pose. He is wearing a dark, textured jacket. The background is dark and out of focus. A blue vertical bar is on the left side of the image.

Georgi Gospodinov.  
Photo by Dirk Skiba.

who emigrated. We have not got that far. They are the other invisible victims and refugees in this war. (Ukraine is among the first in the world when it comes to the number of domestic cats.) Animals that by nature are pure are even more vulnerable to our political atrocities.

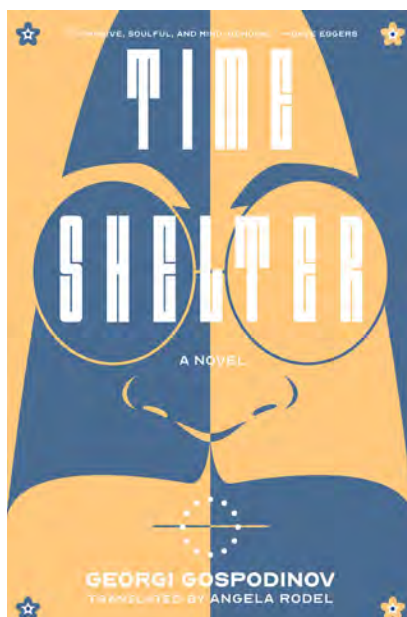
If nature is the mother of humanity, then every war commits matricide.

\*\*\*

And how easily, insultingly easily, the thin red line is crossed, the line that until yesterday kept people sane. Yesterday—everyday life, with all its details; today—war. Time has abruptly hit the brakes, the tires squeal, and veers in another direction or turns back. And the days are no longer days. And the nights are no longer nights. Sirens, shelters, anxious insomnia ... Time doesn't just change direction, it changes (and this is not a metaphor) almost physically its duration, its rhythm, its consistency. Yesterday's tasks and plans for today have become insignificant and bizarre—having coffee with H., going to the dentist, going to the theater in the evening. Repetition, rhythm, and a little bit of boredom for luxury—that's what everyday life is made of. It's all in the garbage now. Someone has replaced our days; someone has replaced our lives. Especially for those who are in the war. But also for those who are around, still on the outside, the next ...

That's how everyday life abruptly became history.

\*\*\*



Dustjacket for the U.S. edition of Georgi Gospodinov's *Time Shelter*, translated by Angela Rodel (Liveright, 2022).

And yet sometimes everyday life breaks through. I see people in the neighborhood collecting humanitarian aid—mainly baby diapers, sanitary napkins, clothes, canned goods. I walk into the nearby pharmacy. The sanitary pads are on the shelf; I pick up some packages without understanding much, but I don't find any diapers and decide to ask. Do you have baby diapers? The pharmacist looks at me a bit puzzled in a "What can you expect of them? Men!" kind of way and says gruffly, "At least tell me how many kilos the kid is ..." Well, I don't know, I don't know the baby ... I think that finally does her in. Then I quickly add that it's for Ukraine, and everything falls into place. I walk out with the packages and feel like a newborn father. On days like this, we apparently are all fathers and mothers again.

\*\*\*

The phrase "Let history show ..." becomes absolutely meaningless in the face of a nuclear threat. History can only show us ... if there is history. Besides, nuclear war kills history. How ironic! On the first day after the apocalypse there will be no media. The most important event in human history will go unreported.

\*\*\*

"Everyone here is suffering from a loss of the sense of time," writes Zbigniew Herbert in his poem "Report from the Besieged City."

\*\*\*

Will there really be "time" after the nuclear end of the world? Clearly, there will be no everyday life. It seems to me that it is no coincidence that most Russians took the withdrawal of IKEA from Russia as a particular injustice. Precisely because someone is pulling everyday life out from under their feet. How so? IKEA is the idea of home—all the sofas, wardrobes, beds, kitchen cabinets, and children's rooms. It's the room of the world. You're chasing me out of your rooms and mine at the same time.

\*\*\*

"I want to go back home, I want to go home, I don't want to go anywhere," cries a Ukrainian woman at the border. And there is no home. Life has shrunk; the world has shrunk to the size of a bomb shelter.

\*\*\*

Shelter will probably be the word of the year. Let's hope it's not bomb shelter.





ave we really come this far? ... Going to war in Europe, putting bomb shelters back into service—bomb shelters ... Once again to fill with blood what we thought of as history and literature.

I dealt at length with the discrete monster of the past and 1939 in my last novel, *Time Shelter*. It ends with a scene of a detailed reenactment of the beginning of World War II. The troops are gathered at the border, waiting. Suddenly, a real gunshot is fired from the reenactment and ...

I want to say once more, from my perspective as a writer, that no war with and for the past has ever been won. No war can ever be won. War impairs human time; it impairs humanity as a whole. It erases layers of culture from Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle through Shakespeare and Goethe to Chekhov and Brodsky ...

Putin wants to bring Europe back, first, to a point before 1997, then before the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, but in fact he wants to go back to 1939. Will we always be on the verge of 1939? Even the timing of the attack this morning is the same as on September 1. When does everyday life turn into history (again) ...? And why—after all that has already been? Somehow we didn't get the story right. We were sure it couldn't happen again, not in a Europe that had lived through two wars. Despite all the books and films, despite all the archives and conversations, it turned out we hadn't understood. Or we had forgotten. We have a bad case of social Alzheimer's. This war broke out at a time when the bearers of the living memory of World War II are no longer among us. Today we find ourselves on that generational boundary, when the last participants who kept that memory alive, the last survivors of the death camps, the last soldiers from the trenches are no more. And many people again like dictators.

Some days shift something in the machinery of history, and today, unfortunately, is one of those days. Everyone will remember where they were, what they were doing. As on September 1, as on September 11, as today ...

Everyday life must remain everyday life.

The news reports show people seeking out bomb shelters ... Damn, I had thought that the word "bomb shelter" was something that would need to be explained for young readers in a footnote. I insisted in my novel that we would be looking for more and more time shelters. And it was supposed to sound

like a dystopia, a warning about the future. I had chosen the year 2039, exactly one hundred years after World War II. Things have gone irredeemably backward when dystopian novels start turning into documentaries. My dystopia is democratic, after all. Countries in Europe choose by referendum to which year of the 20th century they will return. Referendums for the past. Today Putin turns back the clock without offering any choice. With this war, he is turning the 21st century back to the 20th century. And he is deciding it not only for his own country, but for a neighboring country, for all of Europe, and perhaps the world. You cannot forcibly return anyone to the dungeon of the past, not an individual, much less entire nations.

And what will I tell my daughter tonight, after promising her every evening that there will be no war? What can we say to our children? How can we explain that the world's nursery is not ready for them?

"We need to clean out the basement," my wife said. It's a good thing there's running water downstairs; we might spend a long time down there. ■

February 24, 2022


Translated by Bilyana Kourtasheva

*Georgi Gospodinov is the Fall 2022 Harriman Institute Writer in Residence. A writer, poet, and playwright based in Sofia, Bulgaria, he has been described by The New Yorker's Garth Greenwell as a "trickster at heart, and often very funny," while Dave Eggers has called him "one of Europe's most fascinating and irreplaceable novelists." Gospodinov's second novel, The Physics of Sorrow (Open Letter, 2011), catapulted Gospodinov to the front ranks of Europe's most inventive and daring writers, garnering him the Angelus Central European Literature Award and the Jan Michalski Prize for Literature. His third novel, Time Shelter (Liveright, 2022), was hailed by The Times as "a genre-busting novel of ideas" and received Italy's prestigious Premio Strega Europeo. Visit Gospodinov's personal website at [georgigospodinov.com](http://georgigospodinov.com).*

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# The of War Putin's Imagination





I can't stop looking at photographs taken in Ukraine during these unending days of war, a war so unthinkable that it's still hard to believe in the reality of what is happening. The streets of Kharkiv—rubble, concrete beams, black holes where windows should be, the outlines of beautiful buildings with their insides burnt away. A station, a crowd of refugees trying to board a departing train. A woman carrying a dog, rushing to get to a shelter in Kyiv before the shelling begins. Bombed houses in Sumy. A maternity hospital in Mariupol after a raid—this I will not describe.

An 80-year-old friend told me of a dream she'd once had: a huge field filled with people lying in rows of iron beds. Rows and rows of people. And rising from this field, the sound of moaning. I always knew, she said, that this was to be expected. It would come to pass.

Dreams about catastrophe are common in what was once called the "post-Soviet world"; other names will surely appear soon. And in these recent days and nights, the dreams have become reality, a reality more fearful than we ever thought possible, made of aggression and violence, an evil that speaks in the Russian language. As someone wrote on a social media site: "I dreamt we were occupied by Nazis, and that those Nazis were us."

The word "Nazi" is one of the most frequently used in the political language of the Russian state. Speeches by Vladimir Putin and propaganda headlines often use the word to describe an enemy that they say has infiltrated Ukraine. This enemy is so strong that it can and must be resisted with military aggression: the bombing of residential areas, the destruction of the flesh of towns and villages, the living tissue of human fates.

The word still horrifies us, and in our world there are certainly candidates for its application. But propagandists use the word like the black spot in *Treasure Island*, sticking it wherever it suits them. If you call your opponent a Nazi, that explains and justifies all and any means. The means in this war

**By Maria Stepanova**  
**Translated by Sasha Dugdale\***

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have been carefully calculated. The army, usually spoken of as modern, technological and highly effective, is using tactics that could have been borrowed from old war films. Any war is terrible, repugnant, but this one seems in another league: the tank units stretched along roads, the bombing raids, the residential districts turned into ruins—everything that we're watching on screens and that those in Ukraine are watching in real life. It all looks like some hideous reconstruction, a film set into which live rounds are fired, with real people as the targets.

This is something new and very far from being a pragmatic military operation; yet at the same time it is incredibly anachronistic—a 20th-century war shifted into the frame of the 21st century. We watch in real time, trembling in our shame and grief that this is happening here and now: once again, someone wants to arrange the world as he sees fit, without any regard to what humanity thinks about this. The use of violence as a decisive argument in any discussion of the future places that future under threat—and what is happening now

in Ukraine (and Russia and Belarus, both of which have long since become the hostages of their rulers) has implications for every one of us.

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**What we are living through** might be termed the death of the conceivable. Over many decades, the western imagination (across many genres and forms, from high literature to Hollywood and television series) has used the industry of the imagination as a sort of training ground for experience. Fearful dystopian scenarios are played out, tested for accuracy, and thereby become normalized and safe, like films about zombies and aliens. After all, they're just inventions! Total surveillance, the war of the powerful against the weak, ecological catastrophes—all come to pass in the guise of the artistic experiment: yes, this scenario is impossible in real life, but let's play it through to see how it might work out.

Having to accept that the unthinkable, what we have rejected from the collective imagination as both impossible and impermissible, could actually come to pass on an

unremarkable winter's morning would be a catastrophe. It destroys all our notions of the contemporary world and a social contract that recognizes the need for mutual understanding, empathy, common sense (and a certain skepticism toward alarmist pronouncements). But today all this has come to pass and we are standing among the ruins.

The aggressor in this unjust war in a foreign territory, with its war crimes and its victims (who already number in the millions if we include not just the casualties but those who are left homeless, without loved ones, without a future), operates as if he's making a piece of art, a book or a film, in which the events are controlled by their creator. But this particular book has a bad author. Bad in all senses, as a person and as a writer with scant interest in his own characters. He doesn't care if they survive or die; he doesn't care what their needs or desires are; and he's definitely not interested in recognizing their freedoms.

The only thing that he cares about is his own authorship, the affirmation of his will, and his control of the text and events. This is what is occupying Putin at this moment: the enactment of his personal will, the attempt to rewrite the history of Ukraine and Europe, to change our present and determine our future. He plans to draw Ukraine, Russia, Europe, the world (and everyone who is constantly refreshing the live news) into the appalling book he has himself written. He believes that from now on we will exist only within his book; he wants to be our author, our screenwriter, the one who knows how to change our lives for the better. But now the results of his handiwork are clear for all to see.

**The use of violence as a decisive argument in any discussion of the future places that future under threat—and what is happening now in Ukraine has implications for every one of us.**



## The only thing that Putin cares about is his own authorship ... and his control of the text and events.

You could say that this is the essence of every dictatorship and the logic of every dictator—the need to assert his own solipsism, a sense of the living populated world as a still-life painting, a *nature morte*, in which the meek china plates on the table won't scream out if you smash them. But to my mind this is a special case: there is, behind the movement of Russian military vehicles, a genuine fear of the existence of an Other, a desperate desire to crush this Other, to reform it, ingest it, draw it in, gulp it down, swallow it.

C. S. Lewis describes something similar in *The Screwtape Letters*: the demons feed on human suffering and despair, and their own brotherly love is expressed as a desire to eat their younger brethren. Whenever I hear Russian politicians explaining that the fraternal Ukrainian nation simply needs to be taught a bit of common sense, I smell a distinct whiff of sulfur.

Putin is waging war in Ukraine with the unwavering fury of a man who has his own scores to settle, who is ready to do anything to win; to win, not as countries win conflicts in an age of nuclear nonproliferation, through negotiation, treaties and

compromise, but as if everything that had significance for him was merely a script, lovingly devised and with a clear compensatory aim.

Ukraine must be humiliated, it must lose all the attributes of an independent sovereign state, from its legitimately elected government (its “denazification”) to its army (the country must be demilitarized). It must give up its territorial claims to Donbas and Crimea. But even that is not enough. Even before any process of negotiation, Ukraine must be ritually punished, publicly, openly, in front of a live audience; it must be forced to its knees, made an example of, so that its residents and anyone else watching see what happens to those who don't submit.

The cruelty of this war is inexplicable if you don't take into account what you might call this “educational” aspect. If Europe is home, then Putin wants to show who is master in this home. Destroyed towns and ruined lives are a visual aid, a long-term reminder. But there is also another aspect to this, and it seems important to me.

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**The events of today are occurring in a symbolic space, just as irrevocably as they are occurring physically in the fields and bomb shelters of Ukraine.** Ukraine today is the arena of an ancient battle between good and evil, however grandiose that might sound; its outcome affects every one of us, not just Ukraine and Russia.

Evil is an old-fashioned concept. The postwar decades have taught us to see things automatically from the perspective of our opponent in order to establish understanding, compromise and dialogue. But sometimes there is

no one to speak with—in the place of an interlocutor there is only impenetrable darkness, and it insists on its own outcome at any cost.

Right now a decision is being made about the sort of world we will live in and, in some ways, have already been sucked into: we exist and act in the black hole of another's consciousness. It calls up archaic ideas of nationhood: that there are worse nations, better ones, nations that are higher or lower on some incomprehensible scale of greatness; that all Ukrainians (or Jews, Russians, Americans and so on) are weak, greedy, servile, hostile—and these cardboard cutouts are already promenading through the collective imagination, just as they were before the Second World War. As they say in Russia, “the dead take hold of the living,” and here these dead are ideas and concepts into which new blood flows and they begin killing, just as in a horror film.

Time returns obediently into that stifling past that so filled our nights with horrors. One of the first tasks of the “military operation” was to turn the clock back eight years, to return Ukraine to the state in which

the Kremlin would like to preserve it forever. Viktor Yanukovich is taken out of the trunk in the attic, only slightly moldy, ready to be placed on the presidential throne as if he had never left it, and the Maidan protests and eight years of democratic freedom simply fade like a dream.

War in the 21st century imitates the 20th century, wants to return to an age of wholesale massacre and monstrous historical experiments. Now it is inseparable from a fashionable dependence on the image—but on our screens all we see are the deep tombs of the past. Resisting today means freeing ourselves from the dictatorship of another's imagination, from a picture of the world that grasps us from inside and takes hold of our dreams, our days, our timelines, whether we want it or not. A battle for survival is going on right now in Ukraine; a battle for the independence of one's own rational mind. It is going on in every house and in every head. Here as well as there, we must resist.

Yesterday I wanted to send birthday greetings to a friend. I wrote, as I often write in such circumstances,

**I'm writing this in Russian and with every sentence it gets harder. ... The language isn't to blame, just as the earth isn't. But it has changed, it is rutted and cratered.**



“ura!” I stopped. A bad word, with military associations.

“Everything is burning and smoking” is an idiom we use to mean there’s a lot going on, that you can’t manage all your tasks at once. But now that phrase is impossible. Things are burning and smoking, but not here.

There was a proverb I used to like: “a soldier would never hurt a child”—a phrase you could use to suggest that everything would be OK, we’ll find a way. The proverb has vanished: now we read about soldiers and children in publications that are forbidden in Russia, via a virtual private network.

I’m writing this in Russian and with every sentence it gets harder. The ridge of language, its living conversational edge, changes first. It’s like an ancient minefield, and the old mines begin exploding as you pick your way across. They are all live now, these mines. The language isn’t to blame, just as the earth isn’t. But it has changed, it is rutted and cratered. And the craters will only grow in number. ■

*Maria Stepanova has long played a central role in post-Soviet culture as leading poet of her generation; essayist; and editor-in-chief of Colta.ru, the enormously influential online publication. The prestigious Andrei Bely Prize and Joseph Brodsky Fellowship are among her many awards. Her novel In Memory of Memory solidified her reputation with the Big Book Prize and the NOS Literary Prize, not to mention the dozens of translations and reviews that appeared in the international press. Prevented by the pandemic from coming to Columbia in 2020, Stepanova came to Columbia as Harriman Writer in Residence in Spring 2022.*

*Poet, playwright, and translator Sasha Dugdale is the translator of Stepanova’s In Memory of Memory (New Directions, 2021), which was shortlisted for the International Booker Prize. Former editor of Modern Poetry in Translation, Dugdale also translated Stepanova’s War of the Beasts and the Animals (Bloodaxe Books, 2021), which was the winner of an English PEN Award and a Poetry Book Society Translation Choice.*

# THE INTERNET RUNS FASTER AT NIGHT

## THE BELARUS CYBER PARTISANS

**T**wo Harriman alumni working on a contemporary media history project, *Imagining Russian Hackers*, encounter the most ambitious current hack on a stage—in Belarus. An intrepid band of hackers claims to be on the verge of toppling the Lukashenko regime, bringing new tools to an old political playbook. When is hacking revolutionary? And what happens next?

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The nighttime explosion of a rocket on a military base in Belarus appeared relatively minor. (Hackers possess many technologies, but an organized militia is not yet one of them.) Still, the footage from an armed drone striking against the Lukashenko regime appears to tremble with both nighttime air turbulence and anticipation. Can a transnational movement of hacktivist partisans really overthrow “Europe’s last dictator”? If the Belarus Cyber Partisans (BCP) succeed, what

happens next—in Belarus, or in Russia and Ukraine?

Months after the fall 2021 explosion, at a virtual event cohosted by the Berkman Klein Center at Harvard and Yale’s Beinecke Working Group on Art & Protest, three representatives of the Cyber Partisans spoke for themselves. The BCP self-describe as a leaderless collective of former information technology professionals, including a few sysadmins—not “career” hackers—driven to use off-the-shelf tools to hack



Screenshot from footage of the armed drone strike.

Background image source: White-and-red ornament pattern that resembles *ruchnik* designed in 1917 by Matrona Markevich for the Flag of Belarus.

BY MARIJETA BOZOVIC  
AND BENJAMIN PETERS



in the service of public interest. In an anonymous interview with Gabriella Coleman (the anthropologist famed for her work with Anonymous) as well as the authors of this paper, the three BCP representatives, including the group's spokesperson in New York City, joined a virtual room full of journalists and invited specialists.

Through an encrypted typepad, the BCP reported that they had formed a significant coalition with other resistance movements on the ground as well as with former members of the state police who had had enough of Lukashenka's war against his own people. The BCP claimed that they had received neither technological nor financial help from any foreign powers, although they were open to help from

any quarter. At least one representative of the group sketched out a political philosophy that borrows both from the American Revolution and from the Russian Revolution of 1917, asserting that, given sufficiently violent repression, the Belarusian people have a legal and moral right to take up arms against the regime. For now, their weapon of choice is code; namely, code to pilot rocket-launching drones, mobilize resistance fighters, and target the regime's vulnerabilities.

After delivering their message and appealing for international attention, the Cyber Partisans typed that they were happy to go on as long as there were questions. It may have grown late in Belarus, or perhaps in Poland—where so many Belarus dissidents are finding

refuge—but as their parting words spelled out, one expectant character at a time: "The internet runs faster at night."

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The internet does, in fact, tend to run faster at night, when ISP loads are lessened while most of the population sleeps. Vladimir Putin infamously overlooked this fact in one tactical riff about not being personally responsible if patriotic Russian hackers felt inspired to rise in the morning and do their peculiar work. ("Hackers, work in the morning?" scoffed Twitter users in response.) The reality is more mundane: hacktivists work in the daytime if they can get away with it on the job, or at

nighttime if not. But there's another metaphorical reading of these closing words: in the darkest of times, hope—and rebellion—burns bright.

Times in Minsk have indeed grown dark: Lukashenka won his sixth term as president of Belarus in August 2020 by internationally recognized fraudulent election results. Hundreds of thousands of citizens marched in protest across the streets of Minsk; at least 10 were killed and many more tortured in the resulting brutal crackdown carried out by marked and unmarked police. The EU then imposed economic sanctions on Belarus, in response to which Lukashenka began weaponizing immigrant bodies in an unprecedented crime against humanity in the region: his regime recruited roughly 20,000 immigrants from around the world to fly into Minsk and then drove them to the Polish border. When the Polish border police, instead of assessing each case one-on-one as law requires, pushed the immigrants back into Belarus, those seeking a better life were caught in a deadly stalemate, stranding families and children in the freezing forests on the eve of deadly winter months, trapped between

beatings from the Belarusian police and rejection from the Polish police. The international border crisis in November has since subsided, but only because, perhaps more worryingly, the Lukashenka regime has whisked the immigrants off to undisclosed locations under unknown conditions. The situation is untenable: What is to be done in Belarus?

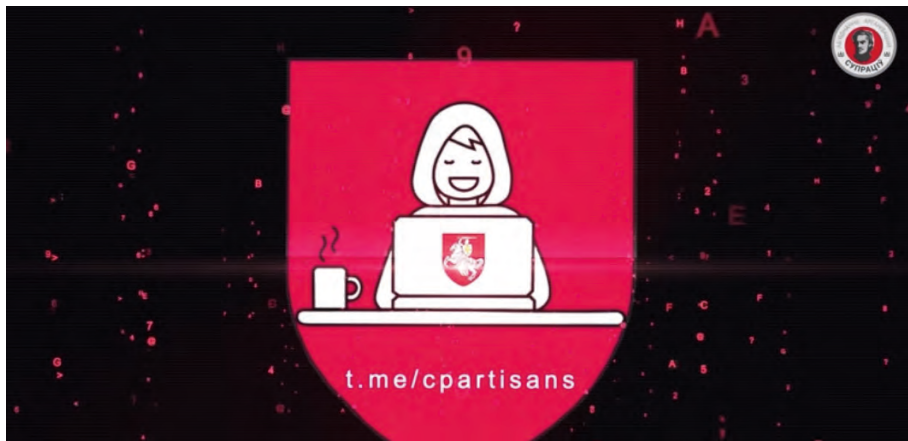
Are the BCP right? Does the internet really (still? yet?) have revolutionary potential? For many, the hope that computer networks offer in dark times appears at best poetic and at worst quixotic and counterproductive. And yet the Cyber Partisans appear to be a startling exception to what scholars have dubbed the growing “techlash” over the last five to ten years—a rising critical awareness of and resistance against the tech optimist and even utopian dreams that ran roughshod over technology discourse in the 1990s and aughts: What has the internet wrought in the 2010s except, critics observe, more rich-get-richer surveillance capitalism, political polarization, splintering disinformation campaigns, and the creeping erosion of basic democratic

institutions? Against such rocks of tech neorealism, the Cyber Partisans offer a striking, even refreshingly retro, wave of tech utopianism. Belarus may prove an oasis in a desert of Eurasian tech defeatism, not to mention a model for foment elsewhere (although who is to say whether it will be on the left or the right?).

The Cyber Partisans may well be perfecting the next generation of what anthropologist Gabriella Coleman has called the public-interest hack, or “a computer infiltration for the purpose of leaking documents that will have political consequence.” The group, as first reported by the *Washington Post* in September 2021, successfully carried out an unprecedented series of hacks into the cyber defenses of the Lukashenka regime. The spoils are significant: the group now claims to have 5.3 million records of phone taps, the regime's own documentation of its violence against its people, the contact information for police informants and enforcers, and the entire national passport database. The group, in scooping these documents, discovered for example that the regime underreported

**ARE THE BCP RIGHT? DOES THE  
INTERNET REALLY (STILL? YET?)  
HAVE REVOLUTIONARY POTENTIAL?**





Logo of the Cyber Partisans on their YouTube channel.

COVID mortality rates by a factor of at least 15. The hacks have also made it possible to monitor the regime's ongoing abuses and politicization of immigrant men, women, children, and families.

The BCP have a relatively sophisticated media team and publicity strategy. Building on lessons learned from other hacktivist traditions around the world, they report that their plan is to slowly release over six terabytes of sensitive data, dripping one story at a time into the hands of hungry journalists. The aim, of course,

is to use the data to continuously refocus and heighten the scrutiny of the international press on the plight of Belarusians living under Lukashenka. Coleman, a leading anthropologist of hackers, has called the work of the Cyber Partisans "the most comprehensive hack of a state by a group of hacktivists to date." The group—which maintains active Telegram, YouTube, and other social media channels—even offers video primers, with English subtitles, to train the everyday Belarusian citizen as well as the outside observer on its emerging

plan to mobilize international support against the regime, to develop logistical coordination apps for Belarusian citizens ready to fight, and to provide countersurveillance and strikes against the regime's military defenses. Should a toppled Lukashenka regime be held responsible for its horrendous crimes against humanity in the international criminal court, the BCP will be holding the digital receipts.

The Cyber Partisans present a beautiful contradiction to the current global imaginaries about Russian and East European hackers. On the one

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hand, they appear almost the opposite of the anxieties driving Russian hacker discourse of late, where, in a motif all too familiar to scholars of the long Soviet century, the Russian spy (reimagined) emerges as the favorite enemy Other around whose neck may be perennially hung the responsibility for most U.S. and Western struggles. The Russian hacker is conveniently (imagined as) white and male—an unproblematically demonizable enemy, easy enough to hate without setting off U.S.-centrist worries about its own racism and sexism. In this sense, the Russian hacker serves as a convenient imagined Other for the U.S. political center to police both the American left and the right. More convenient than scrutinized, the imagined Russian hacker offers a kind of media event across transnational culture, tech, and screens, embodying recurrent 20th-century anxieties upgraded with the technology of the mid-21st.

The Belarus Cyber Partisans, of course, appear a stark contrast from fears of foreign hackers as extensions of dictatorial states. Yet at the same time there is a striking commonality between the BCP's hopes for speeding

a long-overdue social revolution in Belarus and the often underarticulated American anxieties about Russian hackers doing the same to U.S. democracy over the last decade. The Cyber Partisans and American critics both, knowingly or unknowingly, take their strategic direction from Lenin's playbook: the first step is to seize the means of communication; to plan the strategic and tactical ground war; and to win over, whether through genuine messaging or disinformation campaigns, enough of the public goodwill to erode the regime's strengths from the inside out.

The aesthetics of the two hacker imaginaries diverge to an extent: the Cyber Partisans offer YouTube and Telegram videos full of voice camouflaging, jarring montage, anarchic energy, and rage against the machine. American concerns about Russian disinformation campaigns, by contrast, feature idiot uncle misspellings; underwhelming reactionary memes; the subtle crucifixion of religious values onto the political agenda of the far right; and a much longer, slower game for whom the boogeyman of the Russian



Demonstration in Munich in April 2022.



hacker normalizes these concerns for the American center. The BCP imagine themselves to be partisan professionals mobilizing all tools and resources available to them to end state violence on their streets, as might Robin Hood; by contrast, the American imagines Russian hackers as malicious state-sponsored bot kings, thinly disguised cold war spies with laptops and hoodies, preying on perennial fault lines (race, class, political bifurcation) to distort public discourse. Both visions are, of course, fantasy, but oddly potent, enduring, and revealing.

No one knows whether the Cyber Partisans will speed a change of power in Belarus. The blueprint they are following, however, offers a sense of disconcerting déjà vu as well as awe and wonder. Perhaps the internet really does run faster at night. ■

January 2022

**Editor's note:** Marijeta Bozovic and Benjamin Peters, the coauthors of this article, met through the Harriman Institute as doctoral students at Columbia University and are now principal researchers of the Imagining Russian Hackers project at

Yale University (see <https://hackersinitiative.yale.edu/>). Their research analyzes the dramatic revival of what some have termed the rhetoric of Cold War 2.0, following mainstream media coverage of various tales of "Russian hackers" in the United States and the former West alongside studies of fictional portrayals in television and film. How does the Russian hacker narrative shape, stand in for, or obfuscate the popular imagination of Web 2.0 technologies more broadly? This is a story of mediation, motivated imaginaries, the political power of aesthetic productions, and media (more even than state) rivalries—an intersecting story that follows the actual intellectual histories of IT specialists from the Soviet-era and post-Soviet era, spanning across the world. The Soviet Union may have failed to network first, but the internet even today remains curiously Soviet. Through these two intercutting stories, Bozovic and Peters show how interrogating practices of "imagining Russian hackers" illuminate the political fissures and blind spots in our global media landscapes.

*Marijeta Bozovic is assistant professor of Slavic languages and literatures, affiliated with Film and Media Studies and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Yale University. She is the author of Nabokov's Canon: From Onegin to Ada (2016) and coeditor of Watersheds: Poetics and Politics of the Danube River (2016) and Nabokov Upside Down (2017). She recently completed work on her second monograph, "Avant-Garde Post-: Radical Poetics after the Soviet Union." Bozovic is coeditor of the journal Russian Literature; film and media editor of Slavic Review; and associate editor of ASAP/Journal.*

*Benjamin Peters is a media scholar and author of How Not to Network a Nation: The Uneasy History of the Soviet Internet (2016), editor of Digital Keywords: A Vocabulary of Information Society & Culture (2016), and coeditor of Your Computer Is on Fire (2021). He is Hazel Rogers Associate Professor and chair of Media Studies at the University of Tulsa and affiliated fellow at the Information Society Project at Yale Law School.*

# THE UPPER LOWER EAST SIDE UKRAINE IN NEW YORK

BY ALEXANDER J. MOTYL

It was Alex Cooley's idea, not mine. He contacted me sometime in 2016 and suggested I teach a course on the Ukrainian diaspora in New York. I immediately said yes. A few months later, the Committee on Instruction approved "Ukraine in New York"—the title was also Alex's—and the course launched in spring 2017. I've been offering it every year since then. It's housed in Columbia's History Department, but the approach is decidedly multidisciplinary. As the syllabus notes:

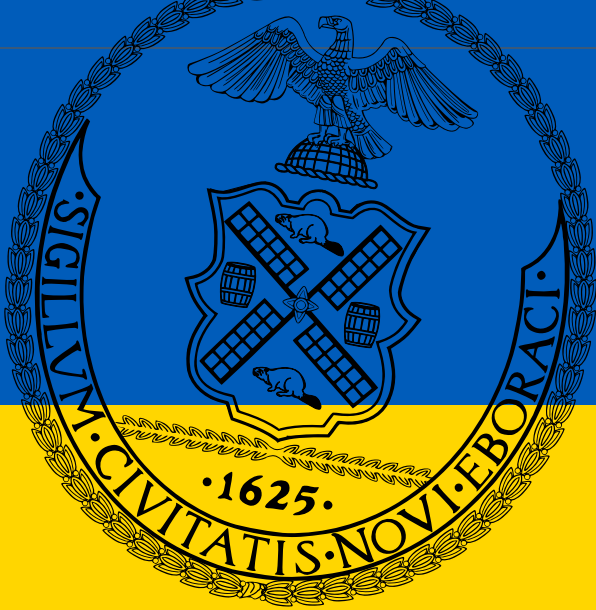
"Ukraine in New York" is a multidisciplinary exploration of the Ukrainian American community in New York City from its beginnings in the late 19th century to the present. The course focuses on the history, politics, culture, demographics, economics, religion, and society of the community, devoting particular attention to the influence of the New York setting; the tensions encountered in navigating between America, Soviet Ukraine, and independent Ukraine; the impact on community politics and culture of major crises (World War I, Ukrainian independence in 1918, the Famine of 1933, World War II, Ukrainian independence in 1991, and the Euromaidan Revolution of 2014); identity shifts within and between immigrant waves; and self-representations.

The reference to the "New York setting" bears underlining. The course explores the primary area of Ukrainian settlement—bounded by Houston and 14th Streets on the one hand and Third Avenue, the Bowery, and the East River on the other—in relation to the neighborhood's Irish, Italian, Polish, German, Jewish, and Puerto Rican communities as well as to the larger forces that shaped the environment with which New York's immigrants had to contend. Our second session is always a walking tour of what residents called the Lower East Side, the upper part of which gentrifiers later rechristened as the East Village.

## Germans, Jews, and Ukrainians

The neighborhood is an ethnic palimpsest whose traces remain visible—but only if you know where to look—in buildings, houses of worship, and monuments. In the second half of the 19th century the Lower East Side was home to a huge German community, with Avenue B serving as the German Broadway. The Ukrainian National Home on Second Avenue was originally the German YMCA; facing it are two red-brick buildings: the Ottendorfer Public Library (described above the portal as the Freie Bibliothek und Lesehalle) and the former German Polyklinik. The building that houses La MaMa Theater was once the headquarters of the German Turnverein movement, which arose during the resistance to Napoleon. (Its combination of gymnastics and patriotism later inspired the Sokols in Bohemia and the Scouts.) By the late 1800s, the Germans began moving uptown to Yorkville—the site of several newly built breweries. Their move was accelerated in 1904, when over a thousand German women and children perished after their cruise





ship, the *General Slocum*, caught fire in the East River and sank. There's a white stone monument to the victims of the disaster set on the northern side of Tompkins Square Park. I remember playing in its shadow as a child.

After the Germans left, the Lower East Side turned overwhelmingly Jewish. The stretch of Second Avenue between Houston and 14th Streets was known as the Yiddish Rialto, featuring numerous Yiddish theaters (three of the buildings still stand) and restaurants. The Hebrew Actors Union building is located diagonally across from St. George's Ukrainian Catholic Church (an earlier incarnation of which used to be a German church, of course) on East Seventh. The famous Ratner's restaurant is long gone, but the Jewish eatery on the corner of Ninth Street and Second Avenue was transmogrified as Veselka (or Rainbow), now a fashionable Ukrainian café. A synagogue on East Sixth once served as the German parish that sponsored the ill-fated *General Slocum* boat ride.

My personal favorite is the Congregation Tifereth Israel Town and Village Synagogue on East 14th Street.

Built in 1869, when the Lower East Side was still *Kleindeutschland*, the structure originally served as the First German Baptist Church. In the 1920s, Orthodox Ukrainians purchased the church, named it after Saint Volodymyr—the grand prince who christened Kyivan Rus, and added three green onion domes with crosses. In 1962, the building changed hands again and became a synagogue. The crosses were removed, and a Star of David was added above the main entrance, but the onion domes were left in place.

Like the Germans before them, many of the area's Jews left after World War II and either moved uptown or settled in the suburbs. Ukrainians had already coexisted with the Germans, Jews, and other groups before the war, but the area acquired a distinctly Ukrainian feel to it after 1949, when the inhabitants of West German and Austrian Displaced Persons' camps were permitted to immigrate to the United States. Four years of living in the camps enabled the Ukrainians to establish a vigorous "civil society" consisting of scholarly institutions, newspapers, journals, publishing houses, choirs, and political groupings

and to transfer many of them to New York and other cities in the Northeast. My own childhood was defined by an overwhelmingly Ukrainian world in which the church, school, youth organization, store, doctor, lawyer, and dentist were all Ukrainian. Naturally, my friends and I also lived in an American world. Although we mostly spoke English with one another, we'd revert to our Ukrainian secret code among Americans. In contrast, my parents and their friends referred to Americans as "the foreigners."

Ukrainians began leaving the Upper Lower East Side in the 1960s and 1970s. New York was in the throes of a severe economic decline; Saint Mark's Place had become a mecca for a hippie culture that was alien to most East Europeans (even as the *Polski Dom* [Polish Home] hosted Andy Warhol and the Velvet Underground); and drugs, crime, and homelessness came to saturate the neighborhood. We moved to Queens in November 1967. It was in those years that some savvy Ukrainians bought buildings for a song and became real estate moguls.

The 1970s and 1980s were hard for the neighborhood, but, as rents

fell, impecunious young people and artists discovered it. Then came the affluent professionals who brought in their wake the gentrification that transformed the Lower East Side into the East Village. The irony is that, although very few Ukrainians can now afford to live in the area, almost all the Ukrainian institutions servicing the community—from the churches to the museum to the banks—are still there. The big question is: Can they survive in the long term in the absence of an immediate community base?

### Diasporas

The German, Jewish, and Ukrainian experience in the Lower East Side is reflective of the general immigrant experience in New York and other cities, but it is also a case study of the diaspora experience. Diasporas—and by this term I simply mean the ethnic groups who live apart from their eponymous homelands but still harbor some allegiance for those homelands—and borderlands are currently in vogue in the academy, partly because peripheries are supposed to say something about centers, but also because life on the

margins exposes people to forces that affect their identities and livelihoods in ways that life in the core does not. Diasporas are thus doubly marginal, living beyond their putative homelands *and* their new homelands. One could imagine that double marginality would incline diasporas to want to leave this condition of existential uncertainty and seek to be fully integrated into their new homelands. And yet, ethnics remain, as Michael Novak once said, “unmeltable.” Why, then, do some members of diasporas choose to assimilate and lose all or most of their ethnic identity? And why do others choose to retain that identity and buck the assimilationist tides?

These questions take us into the realm of nationality studies and pose equally tough questions for its practitioners and their theories. If, as Benedict Anderson famously said, nations are “imagined communities” created by a variety of conditions related to modernity, then why retain an imagined old loyalty in a setting that encourages and rewards an imagined new loyalty? If, as rational-choice theorists argue, identity is a function of rationality, then why

choose to remain Ukrainian, when being American brings so many more rewards—as millions of Germans who assimilated in the aftermath of the two world wars can testify? One might imagine that those scholars who claim that national identity is primordial or perennial might take succor from these conundrums, were it not for the fact that many immigrants discover their ethnic identity *after* coming to America. A friend of mine, who lived his life as a Soviet in the USSR, came around to a Ukrainian identity only after enrolling in a university in western Pennsylvania and, after repeated encounters with local Rusyns and Russians, realizing that he was neither.

Clearly, identity is not immutable, despite claims to the contrary by identitarian activists. Identity can change, but it generally does so slowly, under the influence of a concatenation of forces ranging from the workplace to friends to clothes to food to political cataclysms. When people speak of multiple identities or rapidly shifting identities, what they really mean, I suspect, is that the *roles* we play can be many and varied, even as the answer to the question, Who exactly are



St. George's  
Ukrainian Catholic  
Church on East  
Seventh Street off  
Third Avenue.





*Farthest left: One of the few remaining Yiddish theaters on Second Avenue, the Yiddish Rialto, currently the Village East Cinema. From immediate left, also along Second Avenue: Veselka Restaurant; the Ukrainian scouting organization, Plast; the Ukrainian National Home.*

you?, remains fairly stable. While not providing a definitive answer to why Ukrainians are still around in New York, this fairly obvious insight does suggest that we shouldn't expect them to abandon their identities at the drop of a hat. But neither should we expect them never to abandon their identities, especially as the years go by. So much depends on the environment and on whether diasporas are continually replenished by new members.

The Ukrainian diaspora in the United States has experienced four waves of immigration. The first, involving about half a million poorly educated villagers, extended from the late nineteenth century to World War I. The second, numbering some 30,000 as a result of the tightening of U.S. immigration laws, took place in the interwar period. The third, deeply anti-Soviet wave came after World War II and numbered about 85,000. The fourth, which began with Ukraine's independence in 1991 and has a large percentage of well-educated city folk, has exceeded 100,000 and is still continuing.

Each wave made its contributions to Ukrainian American culture. Each experienced a period of growth, a

period of vitality, and a period of decline, as assimilation inevitably took its toll. But each new wave revitalized and changed the declining culture of the previous wave. Ironically, while the Ukrainian American community and the United States may have benefited from these waves, the clear loser has been and is Ukraine. Emigration, especially of the third and fourth waves, has been equivalent to a massive brain drain.

On the other hand, with some 1.25 million people of Ukrainian ancestry in the United States, Ukraine has benefited from their unceasing lobbying on its behalf. No less important, Ukrainian Americans have managed to preserve the language and culture, even if in occasionally antiquated forms, while they were under attack in the Soviet Union and at times in post-1991 Ukraine. Diasporas, in other words, can use their double marginality to serve as interest groups in their new homelands and as activists in their old homelands.

Students appreciate and are fascinated by these complexities. Those who've taken my course have come from a variety of departments and

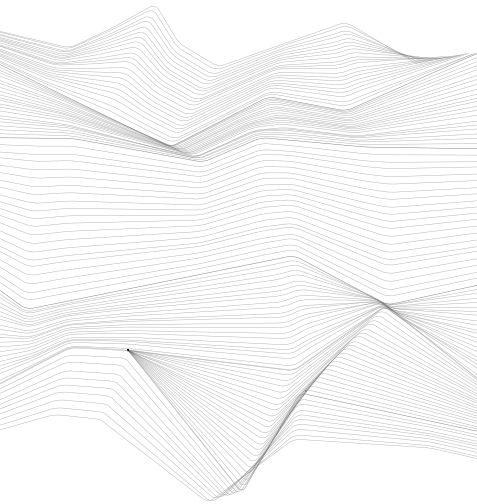
ethnicities, and the resulting discussions have always entailed a multiplicity of contending and complementary views. By the time we've completed our intellectual tour of the East Village, their understanding of Ukrainians, of New York, and of its ethnic groups has deepened. As has, of course, mine. Indeed, I've probably learned the most, if only as a result of repeated explorations of my own past. ■

*January 2022*

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# Analyzing Russia, Putin, and Ukraine at the CIA and Columbia

By Peter Clement



**Author's note:** *This essay was written before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. I've updated it because the war highlights the need for expertise on Russian and Ukrainian history, as well as the importance of a multidisciplinary approach in the analysis of unfolding events.*

**M**y involvement in Russian and Eurasian affairs started with a single goal: To get a Ph.D. in Russian history and teach and write about Russian history and politics. Halfway through a doctorate program at Michigan State University, I realized that goal was perhaps overambitious, given the terrible academic job market. I left academia behind and sought a position in the U.S. government that would allow me to pursue my passion for all things Russian, which had started back in high school and college as I took a course in Russian history and read books by Solzhenitsyn, Pasternak, and Tolstoy. I ended up at the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence.

Upon entering the halls of the headquarters in Langley, Virginia, I discovered that my new employer was essentially a “mega-university” with large, regionally focused offices that covered the world: the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, and so on. Each office housed analysts who worked on the politics, leaders, economics, and military-security issues of the many countries in each region.<sup>1</sup>

By the early 1980s, I found my way to the Office of Soviet Analysis (SOVA), home to hundreds of analysts who did nothing but work on the former USSR—in short, a dream for someone like me. I quickly discovered how much it resembled what I had

been doing in grad school: dissecting Communist leaders' speeches, scrutinizing photographs of Soviet Politburo members standing atop Lenin's tomb as I searched for clues about succession politics in the late Brezhnev and Gorbachev years. Even better, I worked during times of historic change in Soviet history: the late Brezhnev “era of stagnation,” Gorbachev's failed attempt to reform the Soviet system, the ultimate collapse of the USSR, and the chaotic Yeltsin decade that followed.

A highlight in those early years was the opportunity to apply these analytical skills to a critical moment in Soviet history. I arrived in Moscow—my first-ever trip to the Soviet Union—in March 1985 on the night of Konstantin Chernenko's death, which started a much-anticipated succession process. I recall thinking then that there couldn't be a more exciting time for a junior political analyst to be in Moscow! Ultimately, Mikhail Gorbachev was selected Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) General Secretary—but that was not a foregone conclusion as several other ranking Politburo members were vying for the post.

My early SOVA accounts focused largely on Soviet foreign policy and decision-making, covering such hot issues as Soviet-Cuban collaboration in Africa, Soviet influence-building in Nicaragua, and later Soviet policy in the Middle East. (As time allowed, I tried to develop some academic credentials, writing journal articles and book chapters on Soviet foreign policy, as well as teaching evening courses on the same topic, and on 20th-century Russia. I even took a brief leave to complete my doctorate



at Michigan State. Once I assumed greater responsibilities as a SOVA branch chief, ever-longer work days at Langley headquarters precluded such activities.)

In early 1990, as Gorbachev's USSR was imploding, SOVA senior leaders created a new "Republics Division," deploying a large cohort of analysts to closely monitor and assess developments in the non-Russian Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs). I was named deputy chief of that new division, responsible for substantive and editorial review of division analysts. Fortunately, many of those analysts had strong regional studies backgrounds (several were Harriman Institute grads). Through their research papers, memos, and current intelligence reports, I was able to quickly build upon my basic knowledge of the history, culture, and political dynamics within those non-Russian SSRs.

Interestingly, despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, those Kremlinological skills—the use of detailed chronologies, the thorough reading of the media and Soviet leaders' speeches, the uncovering of personal networks and relationships among the political elite—remain essential today as we look for clues about who might one day succeed Putin, who might be the Kremlin's key decision makers on Middle East policy, relations with China, and so on.

Russian policy toward Ukraine, not surprisingly, has been a central issue in the CIA's analytic work since the collapse of the USSR in December 1991. Indeed, Ukraine's President Leonid Kravchuk was a key player in the Belovezha Accords that formally dissolved the USSR. The tension between Russia and the West about

policy toward Ukraine dates back to the first decade of the Putin era—whether about the Orange Revolution of 2004, in which Putin's favored candidate Yanukovich lost after protests in Kyiv and Western pressure led to a revote to correct fraudulent vote-counting; or the April 2008 NATO announcement that Ukraine "will become a member of NATO"; or the natural gas pricing crisis in early 2009 that prompted a Russian shutdown of natural gas through Ukrainian pipelines, leaving several European countries without gas. Collectively, these thorny issues boiled down to one core question: Would Ukraine be aligned with Europe or be integrated within Russia's sphere of influence?

Since Russia's first invasion in 2014, we've seen a renewed interest in the 1994 decision by Kravchuk to return to Russia nuclear missile systems situated in Ukraine. In the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, Kravchuk agreed to bring Ukraine into the Non-Proliferation Treaty; in return, Kyiv received "security assurances" from the U.S. and UK, financial aid to help transfer the missiles, and most importantly, Moscow's agreement to observe Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

At the time, CIA analysts working on Ukraine had seriously debated what Kravchuk would do. The consensus was that with the right incentives, Kravchuk would ultimately send the nuclear systems back to Russia—a view that I shared. (The division chief—my direct boss—was the outlier, arguing that no rational state leader would give up nuclear weapons.) That debate has been resurrected since Putin's invasion. Some Ukrainian officials and scholars argue that a nuclear



capability would have deterred Putin; others believe Kravchuk had little choice but to give them up, since the command-and-control systems resided in Moscow and Ukraine had no nuclear fuel enrichment facilities. These factors would have made it extremely difficult for Kyiv to make the systems operational. Moreover, the political costs of going nuclear would have been great: Kyiv might have been shunned as a proliferator state akin to North Korea and likely would have lost access to Western economic aid and access to the IMF and the World Bank.

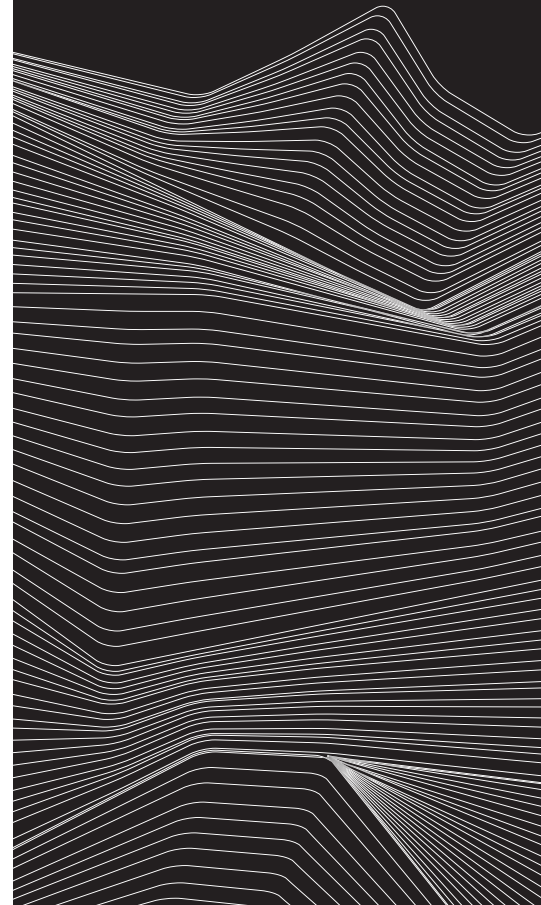
Throughout all this, my analyst colleagues and I consistently drew upon the expertise of the academic community. Each year, we not only invited outside experts to conferences sponsored by the intelligence community or by the CIA but also attended ones hosted by leading academic associations. By attending such events regularly since the late 1970s, I was able to meet many top Soviet and regional experts, who shared valuable knowledge and insights that helped me along in my own intellectual development on Eurasian issues. At one of these conferences in the mid-1980s I met Columbia professor Elizabeth Valkenier and drew upon her excellent book *The Soviet Union and the Third World: An Economic Bind* (Studies of the Harriman Institute, 1983) in my own analytic work.

Occasionally, I continued to travel to Russia and many of the newly independent republics for work. There I was able to meet with my foreign analyst counterparts, exchanging information and identifying areas where we held different views. As a senior manager

in the 1990s, I came to appreciate more fully the reality facing all intelligence analysts: our substantive work often gets mired in U.S. domestic politics. On the one hand, it was rewarding to think that our analytic work on Eurasia could help inform the deliberations and debates among U.S. policy makers—through various briefings and analytic articles in the President’s Daily Brief (PDB) and other intelligence publications. I also had a ringside seat, as a CIA representative, at senior policy maker meetings of successive U.S. administrations as they formulated policy toward Russia and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union.

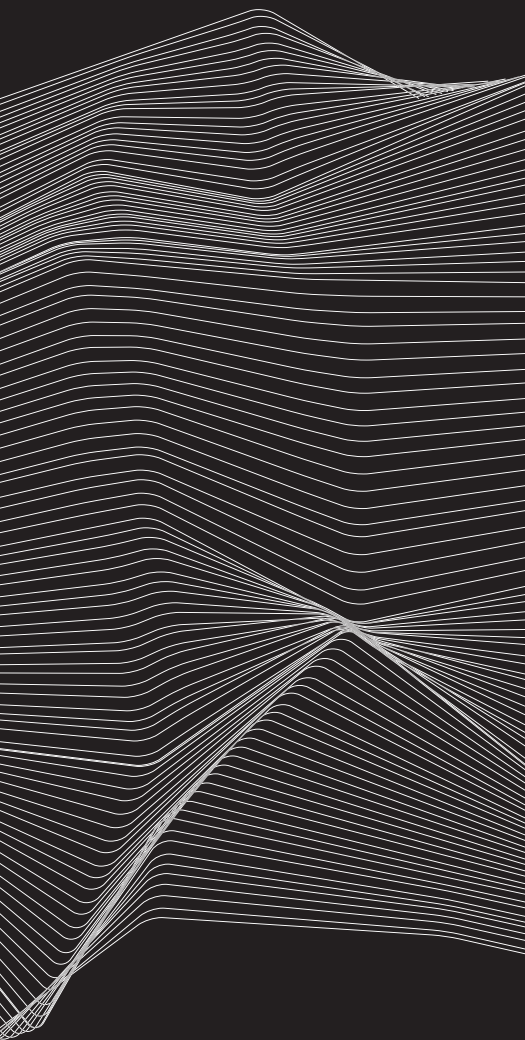
On the other hand, analysts on any substantive account—Russia, China, Iran, and so on—sometimes get caught in the crossfire of intense political debates over policy, or simply U.S. domestic politics. Occasionally, our analytic assessments would be used to support the positions of one political party or the other, leading to requests for “clarification” of one’s findings or critical commentary aimed at undermining the analysts’ judgments.

On the Russia account, such challenges have existed since the early days of the Cold War: How far ahead were the Soviets in the production and deployment of missiles, a.k.a. the “missile gap”? How much were the Soviets spending on their military and nuclear arsenal? Was Gorbachev a serious reformer who sought improved relations with the West, or was he engaged in a *maskirovka* (cover-up), using his reforms of perestroika and glasnost to cleverly deceive the West while quietly rebuilding the USSR’s strength? (More recently, during the Trump



Above and opposite page: Peter Clement during his first-ever trip to Moscow as a young analyst (March 1985).





Yeltsin's gambit sparked a huge new crisis when Duma deputies refused to disband and Yeltsin ordered the military to shell the White House Parliament building.

administration, Russia—and Ukraine—had become deeply enmeshed in U.S. domestic politics once again.)

Such challenges aside, it was always exciting to come to work and wrestle with the never-ending series of analytic problems posed during the Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Putin years. Just a few examples from the Yeltsin decade help explain that excitement and frustration. The 1990s under Yeltsin were a roller coaster of uncertainty and intrigue. Of course, no one could be surprised at Russia's trials and tribulations, considering that Yeltsin had to navigate Russia through a three-tiered revolution: Transitioning Russia from Soviet dictatorship to a democratic system; an unprecedented attempt to dismantle a massive planned economy to one based on market principles; and, perhaps as important, a psychological revolution in which Russians faced an intriguing identity crisis: What did it mean to be Russian again after 75 years as "Soviet citizens" in a multinational Soviet system? Indeed, this latter "identity" issue remains central to so much of President Putin's

narrative; he often decries what he calls the forced "statelessness" of some 24 million ethnic Russians who found themselves living in foreign countries the day after the dissolution of the USSR. Ukraine is central to his narrative, as ethnic Russians in Ukraine were the biggest portion of the millions he refers to. Putin's fixation on ethnic Russians outside of Russia's borders became even more obvious since 2014, as he cites the protection of ethnic Russians as largely justifying his invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022.

During Yeltsin's first years as president, there was a daily sense of excitement about what might happen next. And, of course, the intelligence community faced the usual challenge: divining the intentions of foreign leaders and their political adversaries.

In that regard, the summer of 1993 was especially tough. We Russia analysts at Langley sensed Yeltsin was reaching the limits of his patience with the recalcitrant and hardline opposition in the Supreme Soviet, which had been nearly successful at impeaching him that February. Based on old-fashioned Kremlinology, we drew upon Yeltsin's public hints and other clues in the Russian media to publish a forward-leaning analytic assessment that judged there was a strong possibility Yeltsin would dissolve the Supreme Soviet. For several weeks, until Yeltsin did dissolve it on September 23, we faced serious criticism from other Russia watchers in the U.S. government. Yeltsin's gambit sparked a huge new crisis when Duma deputies refused to disband and Yeltsin ordered the military to shell the White House Parliament building. Who says Kremlinology is dead?!<sup>2</sup>



Throughout the Yeltsin era, I interacted with senior U.S. officials often. I must confess, I did not envy them. This was especially true in the fall of 1993. At the time, U.S. policy makers were concerned about the growing influence of Russian communist and ultranationalist hardliners in the Duma and worked to fashion a Russia policy that supported Yeltsin even as he shelled the Parliament building. This lasted a few years.

A short tour as the acting director for Russia at the National Security Council (NSC) during the Clinton-Bush transition in 2000–2001 offered me a different window into Washington’s Russia policy. Apart from observing the handover of duties from one U.S. administration to another, that NSC post allowed me to meet and set up sessions with Russian Ambassador Yuri Ushakov and senior Russian officials, notably a close Putin associate, Sergey Ivanov.

As much as I enjoyed being a senior Russia watcher, the events of September 11, 2001, affected many of us deeply and spurred me to rethink my Agency career. It was already clear

The Arab Spring, too, was an incredible roller coaster, which reminded me of the late Gorbachev era—not fully parallel developments, to be sure, but with some strikingly similar variables.

that analyzing Putin and post-Yeltsin Russia would continue to be fascinating and intriguing, so I considered staying on, perhaps in a broader intelligence community post, as the national intelligence officer for Russia. A voluntary tour serving as an editor for the President’s Daily Brief (PDB), however, exposed me to many other analytic challenges, such as ongoing plotting by Al-Qaeda, North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs, Iran’s missile program, Saddam Hussein’s maneuvering in the Middle East, and Mexican drug cartels, among other issues. Following this tour, I volunteered to serve as a daily PDB briefer and was selected to brief Vice President Cheney and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and her deputy Stephen Hadley.<sup>3</sup>

That yearlong tour proved to be an exhilarating and educational experience, reinforcing my belief that U.S. policy makers work terribly long hours and deal with a thicket of issues with few, if any, easy answers; I subsequently took another briefing assignment at the U.S. Mission to the UN. This tour ended quickly—and unexpectedly—as I was asked to take on duties as a deputy director of intelligence. The next eight and a half years on the Agency’s “seventh floor” (CIA senior management) provided a unique window not only into the entire Directorate of Intelligence but all the CIA’s other Directorates in existence at the time: operations, science and technology, and support. My tenure there is a story for another day. However, I do want to share a few observations related to the importance of regional studies in the Agency’s analytic work.

During my review of the President’s Daily Brief memos and an occasional





Peter Clement in the main lobby of CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, on his last day at the agency (January 2018).

research paper covering all countries of the world, I worked with many analysts with deep regional knowledge; they helped me become a bit more conversant on key issues in a particular region and to draw insights through comparative analysis across regions, such as identifying common and disparate tactics and strategies evident in dictatorships, market economics, and military programs, among other issues. In working with political analysts on Iran, for example, I was struck by some parallels in Iran's theocracy and the old Soviet system of governance. Both contained formal government structures, as well as a parallel power structure, be it the CPSU and its Politburo or Iran's Guardian Council; the CPSU had its KGB, while Iran has its Iranian Revolutionary Guards Force—both serve as the fearful enforcer beyond the conventional police entities.

The Arab Spring, too, was an incredible roller coaster, which reminded me of the late Gorbachev era—not fully parallel developments, to be sure, but with some strikingly similar variables: the sudden collapse of authority and an emboldened populace.

By the end of my tour as a deputy director of intelligence (DDI), I began thinking a bit more about my personal plan. I had spent some 30 years at the Agency, and yet I still wanted to teach. I was in luck. The Agency has a small Officer-in-Residence program, which provides for two years at a teaching institution. Through my DDI duties, I had come to know Professor Bob Jervis, who was a cleared outside reader for several sensitive and controversial intelligence community estimates, including the flawed National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). He kindly brokered introductions to faculty and administrators at Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) who approved my request to teach there from 2013 to 2015.

My two years at Columbia were an incredibly enriching experience. I have learned much from our talented students, who bring diverse experiences and perspectives to class discussions. Similarly, Bob Jervis's many faculty brown-bags and formal seminar sessions with such smart faculty pushed me into areas unexplored in my own studies as a history major. Equally exciting was the chance to return to my roots as a scholar of Russia, by teaching my "Contemporary Russian Security Policy" course and getting involved in a range of Harriman Institute activities.

Teaching that course when Putin annexed Crimea in February 2014 made me feel as though I were back at Langley, furiously trying to keep up with daily events in Kyiv, Moscow, Crimea, and the Donetsk-Luhansk region. There were days I missed my access to classified information, but I felt there was sufficient open-source material to make informed analytic judgments. I was convinced Putin's stoking of

In the past few months, I have been wrestling with the same question vexing everyone: “What does Putin really want?”

separatist sentiments in eastern Ukraine was significant for two reasons: greater autonomy for these regions inside Ukraine’s institutions would provide Moscow a critical tool to pull Kyiv away from NATO and the EU. Moreover, NATO rules about ongoing territorial disputes meant Ukraine could not be considered for membership.

Following my two years at Columbia, I returned to the CIA, to the surprise of my analyst colleagues, who had assumed I would retire and teach at a local college. In early 2015, I was asked to help set up a new “Mission Center” on Europe-Eurasia and serve as its deputy director—part of the biggest reorganization in CIA history. CIA Director John Brennan broke much bureaucratic and cultural china by integrating officers of the Agency’s four Directorates into some 10 Mission Centers. This, too, is a story for another day, but I should mention one last big Russia episode from my two and a half years at the Mission Center: the January 2017 publication of the Intelligence Community Assessment “Russian Interference in the U.S. Election.” Mission Center analysts helped draft this assessment, which provided me a

bird’s-eye view of the production and review of the assessment. Accumulating evidence showed that Russia had been interfering throughout 2016, but President Obama was reluctant to have the Intelligence Committee write on this subject, fearing it would be perceived as a means of supporting Democratic Party candidate Hillary Clinton. Once the election was over, Obama felt it was important for the full story of Russia’s interference to be told; so on December 5, 2016, he tasked the CIA, FBI, and National Security Agency to produce a highly classified assessment—and an unclassified version as well.

A month later, the unclassified version of that Intelligence Community Assessment appeared. The paper speaks for itself, but I would add one important note: When analysts drafted the paper, they were not aware of Russia’s use of social media—using fake American personas on Facebook, for instance, or orchestrating rallies by nonexistent partisan groups to fuel anger and polarize the U.S. electorate. Had we known, the judgments on the extent of Russia’s interference would have been even stronger. Those activities

Peter Clement with Mikhail Gorbachev in Washington, DC (circa 1997).



Opposite page: Peter Clement receiving a distinguished career intelligence medal at his retirement ceremony at CIA headquarters (June 2018).





were more fully documented in the March 2019 “Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election” (the Mueller report). Much of my last year at the Agency revolved around the Intelligence Committee’s core mission: informing U.S. policy makers as they wrestled with myriad issues related to Russia and other key players in the region.

I retired from the CIA and returned to teach at SIPA in 2018. As I look back on the central role Russian issues played in my Agency career, I realize that I inhabit a parallel universe here at SIPA and the Harriman Institute. It is my good fortune, as it was during my years as a Russia watcher at the CIA, to be surrounded by SIPA and Harriman scholars and practitioners, and Harriman’s regional experts, to help me think through issues about Russia and its foreign policy. In the past few months, I have been wrestling with the same question vexing everyone: “What does Putin really want?”

As I try to answer this question, many threads of my CIA-era analysis of Russia and Putin have come into play. For example, I distinctly recall wondering in 2000 why Putin found time in his

first year as president to visit Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the famous Soviet-era dissident who later won a Nobel Prize for his writings about Stalin’s forced labor camps. How ironic, I thought, that a former KGB officer—the same KGB that hounded Solzhenitsyn into exile for his subversive writings—was now paying homage. Perhaps Putin was being a shrewd politician, identifying himself with a popular Russian literary giant. Maybe . . . but did that fully explain Putin’s continued fascination with the dissident writer? Putin granted Solzhenitsyn the Russian State Prize (the highest civilian honor), named a Moscow street after him, attended his 2008 funeral, and later personally unveiled a Moscow statue to him. I am now convinced that Ukraine is key to understanding this curious affinity. In his 1990 short book *Rebuilding Russia*, Solzhenitsyn argued that parts of Ukraine were intrinsically Russian—a central argument in Putin’s startling July 2021 treatise, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians” (though Putin, of course, went even further than Solzhenitsyn, asserting that Ukraine never really existed until the Bolsheviks created it in 1918). I was worried about the gradual buildup of Russian forces on Ukraine’s border throughout 2021, but it was Putin’s July

treatise that convinced me that Putin actually would invade Ukraine.

Putin’s affinity with Solzhenitsyn, his age (he turned 70 in October), and his near obsession with Russian history suggest a fierce desire to secure his place in that history. These factors help explain his risky invasion of Ukraine this year—one far riskier than his interventions in Georgia and Syria. This focus on legacy also suggests that Putin is unlikely to settle for anything less than major territorial gains in Ukraine.

As Russia’s horrific war on Ukraine continues, I am grateful to be at Columbia, in the thick of these challenging analytic debates. I couldn’t have asked for more from my career. The return to SIPA and the Harriman Institute in 2018 represents a life come full circle, with my initial graduate school goal realized, albeit circuitously—I did become an academic of sorts through decades of studying and analyzing Russia and Eurasia, and more, only I did so at the CIA. ■

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<sup>1</sup> Apart from these regional offices, the Directorate of Intelligence also housed important functional offices whose analysts were expert in nuclear programs, missile systems, CW/BW, nonproliferation, counterterrorism, global issues, counterintelligence, counternarcotics, etc. These talented officers brought incredible knowledge to their accounts. One of my favorite memories was a meeting with several technical analysts explaining North Korea’s missile program; their briefing became quite technical and at one point I asked, “Wait, are all of you rocket scientists?” to which they all nodded, “Why, of course—that’s what we do.”

<sup>2</sup> I wrote a full account of our daily work during the 1996 election for *Michigan State Alumni Magazine* (Fall 1996), 22–25.

<sup>3</sup> For a fine history of the PDB and the work of the PDB staff, see David Priess, *The President’s Book of Secrets: The Untold Story of Intelligence Briefings from Kennedy to Obama*; and John Helgerson, *Getting to Know the President: Intelligence Briefings of Presidential Candidates and President-Elects 1952–2016*, 4th edition.

# The First Russian Institute Students to Get to the USSR, 1954

By Francis B. Randall

*"The past is another country. They do things differently there."*

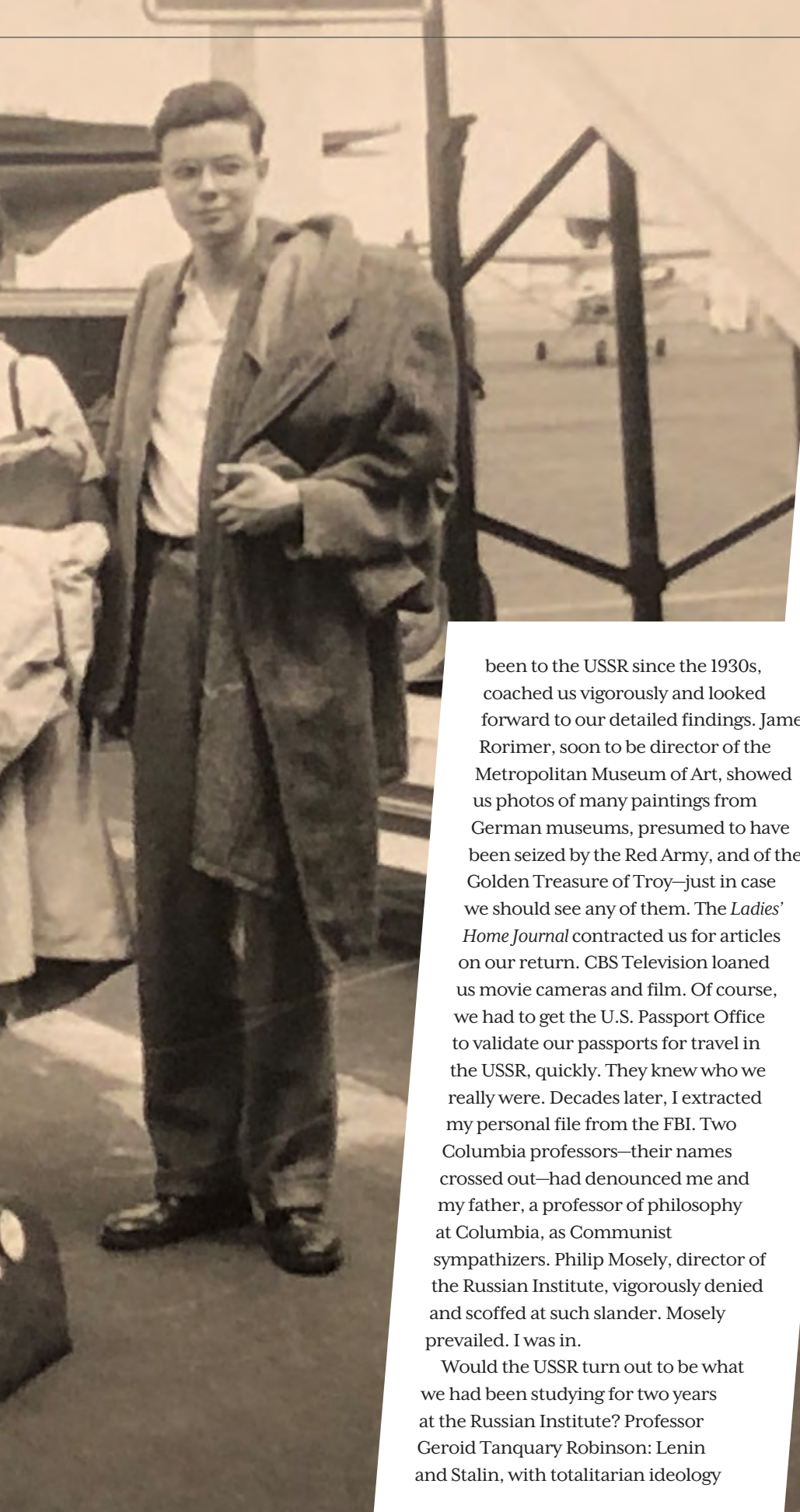
—L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between*

Sixty-eight years ago, in 1954, four students at the Russian Institute, me included, traveled to the Soviet Union that we had been studying so hard at Columbia. We were the first students to do so. That winter, eight of us, snacking at the Russian Tea Room next to Carnegie Hall, reflected that none of us had been within a thousand miles of magical, baleful Moscow. We resolved to apply for visas to enter the Forbidden Empire. The Soviet Embassy in Washington sent us application forms, on which we confessed to being students at Columbia but never mentioned the Russian Institute or that any of us knew a word of Russian. That would have ended things right there. After six months of silence, four of us received brief notes granting us visas for a month's travel in the USSR!

That was big news among Russianists then. Aside from diplomatic personnel, we were to be Americans 16–19 to get to the USSR legally after the end of World War II. Our professors, who hadn't

*From left to right: Theodore Curran, Gay Humphrey (Matthaei), Jeri Lidsky (Laber), and Francis B. Randall.*





been to the USSR since the 1930s, coached us vigorously and looked forward to our detailed findings. James Rorimer, soon to be director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, showed us photos of many paintings from German museums, presumed to have been seized by the Red Army, and of the Golden Treasure of Troy—just in case we should see any of them. The *Ladies' Home Journal* contracted us for articles on our return. CBS Television loaned us movie cameras and film. Of course, we had to get the U.S. Passport Office to validate our passports for travel in the USSR, quickly. They knew who we really were. Decades later, I extracted my personal file from the FBI. Two Columbia professors—their names crossed out—had denounced me and my father, a professor of philosophy at Columbia, as Communist sympathizers. Philip Mosely, director of the Russian Institute, vigorously denied and scoffed at such slander. Mosely prevailed. I was in.

Would the USSR turn out to be what we had been studying for two years at the Russian Institute? Professor Geroid Tanquary Robinson: Lenin and Stalin, with totalitarian ideology

dictating totalitarian practice, built a prison house of peoples, who were coerced to proclaim their happiness to be prisoners. Professor John Hazard: These are the intricate ways, from agitation and propaganda to the vast concentration camps, by which Stalin controls every aspect of life and death in the USSR. Professor Philip Mosely: Stalin wants to destroy us by any means possible and ideologically assumes we are equally belligerent and treacherous. Professor Ernest Simmons: Stalin has castrated classic Russian literature and has slaughtered its 20th-century successors. Then on March 5, 1953, Stalin died. All our professors predicted that some modest relaxations and cosmetic concessions might be granted, temporarily, but that nothing of significance would change in Stalin's gigantic, totalitarian, concentration camp.

So off we flew on Finnair to Helsinki: I, future historian of Russia; Theodore Curran, future foreign service officer; Gay Humphrey, future founder of an interior decorating firm; and Jeri Lidsky (Laber), future director of



Human Rights Watch. At the Soviet Embassy in Helsinki officials had not been told about us and were astonished to see our valid visas. They phoned to Moscow and then put just the four of us on a plane to Leningrad. The officials at Leningrad airport had never heard of us, so they fed us a greasy meal, while they phoned ahead to Moscow, and then put us on another empty plane. We were met at Moscow's Vnukovo Airport by "Alex," the manager of Hotel National. On the long, bumpy ride into Moscow, we passed our first Soviet billboards, with their brandless advertising, "Drink champagne"; "Build peace"; "Use soap." Alex put us up in two huge, princely, Victorian rooms in his hotel, with fairy-tale views of the Kremlin across the street. Alex asked who we were—"just students"—and what we wanted to see—well, everything. He worked hard for us, for in the next two days he managed to get for us the necessary Intourist coupons for sightseeing tours and tickets to operas, ballets, and soccer games—and airplane tickets to and reservations in Uzbekistan and Georgia, back to Moscow, and then on to Leningrad.

So, yes, we saw the Kremlin and the Moscow Metro, the Hermitage and tsarist palaces of Leningrad, the snowy peaks of the Caucasus, and the tiled mosques of Central Asia—which no other young American then had ever seen. But now, almost 70 years later, almost every reader of this magazine has seen them all, and much more, so this will not be a travelogue.

We genuinely wanted to find out if our professors had taught us soundly; that is, what were the Russians and other peoples of the USSR really like? How well off? How able and willing to meet and talk to us? How free or constrained? What would

they say about their own country and communism and about their own lives? What did they know about the outside world? I will make use of my journal notes and my publication in the *Amherst Alumni Magazine* for much of what follows.

By our fifth day in the USSR, we knew that although nothing important had changed since Stalin's death, there had been many trivial modifications. To us, the most important was letting the U.S. in and letting us travel all over the country, whereas earlier U.S. diplomats and reporters were mostly confined to Moscow and Leningrad. We were astonished at how easily—how wholesale—Russians, Georgians, and Uzbeks flocked in the streets to talk to us. Some meetings were bizarre, as when airplane pilots came out of their cockpits to meet the Americans. They said they had never seen any, except the pilots they had shot down in Korea. But from the first day to the last, once we hit the streets, first one, then three, then a crowd would gather around us. They were simply goggle-eyed when staring at our two ladies—young, pretty, slim, taller than most Soviet men—dressed in elegant American clothes. At operas and ballets, the operators of spotlights, skilled at finding German airplanes in the clouds, would zoom in on the women of our group.

Someone, usually a university student, would tap me or Mr. Curran on the shoulder and ask, "Where are you from?" We would ask them to guess. "Estonian? Polish? Czech? Egyptian?" And sometimes, "Chinese?" When we answered, "No, American," the crowd shrank back 10 or 20 feet and looked to see if there were any policemen about. But then one or more students would return to talk to us.

On an excursion to Trinity Monastery (Zagorsk). Randall and Curran flank their excursion guide and a priest from the monastery.



The people were really interested in learning about America. First of all, they would ask about American Blacks. Can Blacks go to universities in America? Do they ride in separate subway cars in New York City? Would I marry a Black woman? Does Chiang Kai-shek have an estate in the South with Black slaves? And, three times, was I Black? This last revealed that the Communists had not bothered to tell the masses anything other than that Blacks are an oppressed class of workers in America.

There were a lot of questions about politics. Why did we start the Korean War? Why do we build air bases to threaten the Soviet Union? Why do we use atomic energy only for war and never for peace? Many women wanted to know about the status of women in America. Children wanted to know about jazz, and about Tarzan, the hero of the only American movies they had ever seen....

Our conclusions? First of all, the USSR struck me as a very poor country. There were long lines at meat and dairy stores; and fruits and vegetables were small, hard, scarce, and expensive. And Soviet housing IS wretched!

Second, we quickly discovered that the USSR is a police state, for we suffered 16 arrests in that one month. We would be taking pictures of something, when a policeman would step out from behind some passing truck and march us off to a nearby police station for illegal photography. Photography was newly legalized for foreigners, but not of "military installations," which could be nothing more than a soldier in a crowd. Sometimes the samovar was already boiling when we were brought in, and our places set for tea. The police captains were usually polite. We came to suspect that this was the only dignified way a police captain could meet the exotic Americans in town. They, too, asked us about America.

After pleasant tea and conversations, they might take our film and present us with confessions of espionage for us to sign. We always declined, as we had been strongly advised to do. "The secretary has gone to SUCH trouble to draw up the document."

We remained hard-hearted and rude. One police captain, in Samarkand, had the arresting officer take the film out of the camera to see if there were any illegal photographs in it. Both were comically puzzled to see only a black strip. They had no idea what a camera and film were like. The captain yelled at the arresting officer. We defended the poor fellow. This captain and others eventually wrote "refuses to sign" on the confessions, wished us a happy stay, and had us driven back to the place of the arrest. Our first arrests were alarming, the middle ones were comical, the later ones were annoying.

Finally, I understood that the Iron Curtain really works. The Soviets we met had false ideas about the outside world that the regime wanted them to

have. Enjoying an ignorance so total, they were proud of what the great socialist future has in store for them. Communist agitation and propaganda have succeeded completely. "*Pravda* can't tell lies," a Soviet told us, "because the word, *pravda*, means truth (*istina*)."

Back in Finland, we felt the constant watchfulness and oppressive weight of the atmosphere melt away. We gorged on drinkable water, milk, and Coca-Cola. Back in New York, distinguished experts on the USSR, not only from Columbia but also from Harvard to California, picked our brains. The *Ladies' Home Journal* printed our article. CBS Television aired an excerpt from our movies. (They are now all in the Matthaei-Randall Archive in Butler Library.) We enjoyed the lecture circuit for some months. The FBI called us in to see if we had seen any wanted fugitives. We were (mildly) famous for more than 15 minutes and then returned to our doctoral research at Columbia. ■

*Francis B. Randall (Russian Institute, 1954) is a historian, retired from Sarah Lawrence College.*

**Editor's note:** Professor Francis Randall, inspired by reading Elizabeth Valkenier's account of her first trips to the Soviet Union, which appeared in the Fall 2021 issue of Harriman Magazine, sent Director Alexander Cooley his own reminiscences of a monthlong stay in the USSR that he undertook with three other Russian Institute students in 1954. It was the first such trip by any member of the Institute since the end of World War II.



# A Profile of Valentina Izmirlieva

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE HARRIMAN  
INSTITUTE'S NEW DIRECTOR

BY THE EDITORS

Valentina Izmirlieva. Photo by  
Jeffrey Schiffman.

Valentina Izmirlieva became director of the Harriman Institute on January 1, 2022. By then, Russia had amassed more than 100,000 troops on the Ukrainian border, and U.S. intelligence had already warned of Russia's plans for a full-scale invasion. A few weeks later, the

U.S. Embassy in Kyiv urged U.S. citizens to consider leaving Ukraine. Unlike many who thought Vladimir Putin might be bluffing, Izmirlieva believed the warnings. "I was pretty certain that it was going to happen," she says, months later, in her office at the Harriman Institute.

When Russia invaded on February 24, it was evening in New York. Izmirlieva didn't sleep all night, tossing, turning, and thinking about what the Harriman Institute could do to help Ukrainians and opposition-minded Russians who would inevitably be displaced by the war. The next day, she sought advice from her predecessors and colleagues, but there was no playbook, no advice to give: Russia's full-scale invasion was uncharted territory. At the office, the mood was predictably somber. "That night we ordered pizza for the students," she recalls. "It was a silent occasion. Everyone just sat and ate pizza, and we didn't talk."

Right away, Izmirlieva started planning the Institute's response. First, two panel discussions that would address the invasion: a scholarly response to Putin's February 21 speech claiming that Ukraine was a Bolshevik creation, and an expert discussion about the unfolding war. Then, she brainstormed ways to help the displaced. Izmirlieva got in touch with Mark Mazower, Ira D. Wallach Professor of History and director of Columbia's Institute for Ideas and Imagination (II&I) at Columbia Global Centers | Paris. Together they came up with a plan for four Harriman residencies at II&I that would bring displaced Ukrainian artists and writers to Paris for a year. The Harriman residents, who started this fall, include a poet, a filmmaker, and a musicologist. There is also a special journalist residency sponsored by our Paul Klebnikov Fund. But Izmirlieva's work to help the displaced didn't end there: she worked with the Slavic Department and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences to help evacuate Serhii Tereshchenko, a doctoral candidate in Columbia's Slavic Department who was in Kyiv when Russia invaded; and with the Climate School, Columbia Global Centers, and the Heyman Center to bring Julia Lajus, a Russian environmental historian displaced due to her opposition to the war, to the Department of History for a year. She also partnered with the Institute for Human Sciences in







Vienna and the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute in Cambridge to establish nonresidential fellowships for Ukrainian colleagues, with the Harriman funding eight scholars.

Izmirlieva's quick and creative response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine is not surprising; she is known by friends and colleagues for her ability to foster collaboration among diverse groups of people and unexpected partners and to transform difficult situations into rewarding ones. And she gets people around her to think critically. "Intellectually, Valentina has always been exceptional; she always has a unique perspective," says political scientist Ivan Krastev, permanent fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna. Krastev has known Izmirlieva since high school, and his enthusiasm when talking about her is palpable. One of her remarkable qualities, he says, is her ability to fall in love with the work of other people. "If she reads something that impressed her very much or is taken by somebody else's idea, she can talk about it for hours," he says.

*Above:* Izmirlieva at age 3 with her father, Boris Izmirliiev, in Sofia.

Born in Communist Bulgaria, Izmirlieva graduated first in her class in Bulgaria's elite English-language high school and dreamed about studying American literature. There was no such discipline in Bulgarian universities, however, and she chose instead to major in medieval Bulgarian studies. Medieval texts attracted her as an intellectual puzzle: they were strange and opaque to the modern eye and required a new interpretative key, an entirely different type of knowledge.

The religious context that supplied them with meaning appeared exotic and exhilarating against the official atheist backdrop of Bulgarian society in the 1980s. Advancing quickly in her studies, Izmirlieva entered so creatively into the current scholarly discourses that she was offered a researcher's position at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences immediately upon defending her undergraduate thesis. That position could easily have become a lifelong career, but, as Izmirlieva joked, quoting John Lennon, life happened while she had other plans. She had wanted to study American literature—a path closed to her in her native Bulgaria—but it was Old Bulgarian literature, the path she chose by default, that opened to her the road to the United States.

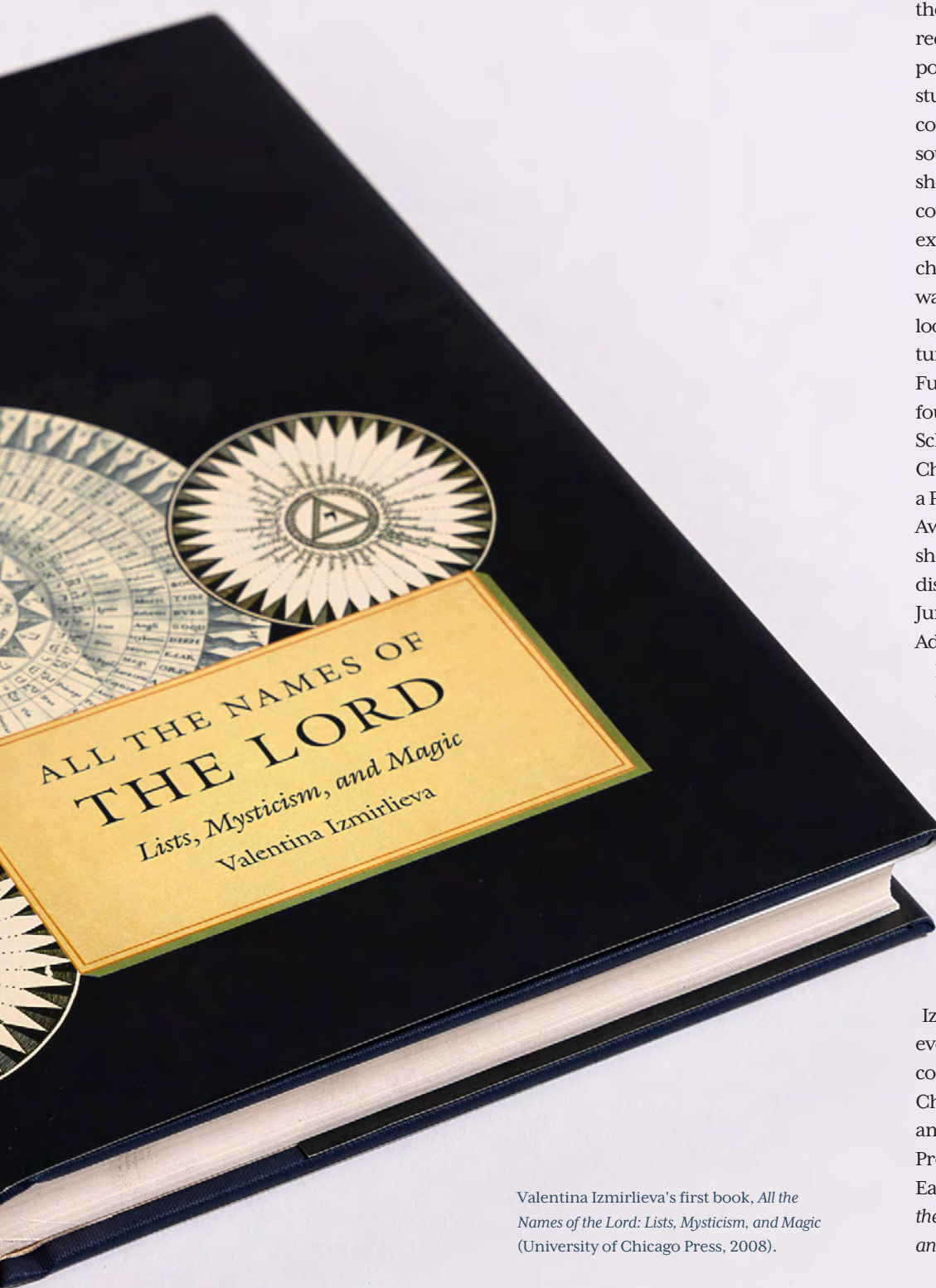
When Bulgaria's long-term Communist leader Todor Zhivkov fell from power in November 1989, the Fulbright competition opened in the country for the first time to candidates beyond those normally handpicked by

the Party operatives. Her colleagues at the Academy of Sciences and scholars in West Germany, who had published and promoted her work, campaigned for her to apply. The result was life changing. Izmirlieva became the only woman in the first cohort of

Bulgarian Fulbright scholars after the collapse of Communism, chosen from a pool of more than 400 candidates. She left on the day she cast her vote in Bulgaria's first democratic elections in June 1990.

Leaving was difficult. She had a life in Sofia, and the initial period





Valentina Izmirlieva's first book, *All the Names of the Lord: Lists, Mysticism, and Magic* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

of the country's transition to democracy was an exciting time. "Bulgaria was exploding with enthusiasm, with all the rallies and all the changes," she recalls. Exchanging this new world of possibilities at home for a graduate student's life in the United States, a country in which she did not know a soul, felt like a gamble. But she thought she was going only for a year, and she could not resist the opportunity to expand her horizons as a scholar, to challenge herself in new and creative ways. And she found what she was looking for. The one year of studies turned into nine. The original one-year Fulbright scholarship got extended into four and augmented by a Centennial Scholarship at the University of Chicago, where Izmirlieva pursued a Ph.D. in medieval Slavic studies. Awards continued to accumulate: she received a prestigious Whiting dissertation scholarship, followed by a Junior Fellowship at the Institute for the Advanced Studies of Religion in Chicago.

For her dissertation, Izmirlieva chose to focus on a short text ("the size of a postcard," she says), titled "The 72

Names of the Lord." The choice initially baffled her advisers.

No one really knew what this strange list of names was supposed to do or where it came from. The assumption was that it had Byzantine origins, but no one had discovered any Byzantine traces of it.

Izmirlieva's curiosity and persistence eventually paid off. She proved, conclusively, that this Slavic text was a Christian adaptation of a Kabbalistic amulet and constituted a rare case of Provençal influence on Balkan and East Slavic cultures. Her first book, *All the Names of the Lord: Lists, Mysticism, and Magic* (University of Chicago Press,



2008), grew from this discovery to encompass much more expansive intellectual landscapes, from Orthodox theology of divine names to an original theory of list-making as a tool for producing visions of comprehensive order. The book has been influential beyond the fields of Slavic and medieval studies, in such diverse disciplines as theology, linguistics, and art history. Significantly, the Harriman Institute had a big share in its success: the book is part of the series *Studies of the Harriman Institute*, whose editor, Ronald Meyer, was instrumental in securing a contract with University of Chicago Press.

The same qualities that had pushed Izmirlieva beyond Bulgaria and had won over her skeptical advisers in the U.S. showed through again in the job market. Her brilliant performance even compelled Columbia's Slavic Department to reframe its own search for a literature professor, which was initially intended for a Dostoevsky specialist. "Her ability to think on her feet was obvious already at the initial interview," recalls Irina Reyfman, professor of Slavic languages, who was on the search committee, but Valentina really "dazzled" the audience with her campus job talk. "It's a rare thing for a candidate to create this kind of effect when people start spontaneously thinking and expanding," says Reyfman.

During her 22 years as a Columbia faculty member, Izmirlieva has further diversified her research and emerged as an effective and popular teacher. Her courses range from medieval literature and history of religion in Russia to critical theory, gender studies, Slavic modernism, and Balkan cultural politics. Marijeta Bozovic, Izmirlieva's former student

and dissertation advisee, now an assistant professor at Yale University, says that she took as many of Izmirlieva's classes as possible during her studies at Columbia. "Valentina's a very provocative seminar leader with extremely high standards for her students. Instead of handing over answers, she pulls the solution out of the classroom so that there is a collective sense of conjuring and seeking revelation. There's something a bit magical and extremely satisfying in that approach," she says.

Izmirlieva has also actively worked to improve existing opportunities for graduate students and to create new ones. In 2001, she established a course competition in the Slavic Department that allows graduate students to teach an undergraduate course of their own design. This initiative was so successful that the competition was adopted as a model for all departments in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Columbia. The students return her devotion. In 2017, Izmirlieva

received a Lenfest Distinguished Columbia Faculty Award, largely on the initiative of her graduate students. The award recognizes her as a "brilliant teacher and mentor" and "a pioneering scholar whose work has sparked a shift away from the study of monolingual cultural traditions to a broader, interdisciplinary approach that encompasses the full cultural and linguistic complexity of Eurasia."

The book *Izmirlieva* is completing now is an excellent case in point. It puts on the map the virtually unstudied transnational phenomenon of the Christian "hajjis" in the Ottoman Empire and explores their role in building Balkan national elites. This unique group of Eastern Orthodox pilgrims to Jerusalem—Greek and Bulgarian, Serb and Wallachian, Moldovan and Albanian—all modeled their journey on the Muslim Hajj to Mecca. In the process, they transformed the old Christian tradition of devotional travels into a new tool for social mobility. This book is quite a departure from Izmirlieva's first,





Valentina Izmirlieva. Photo by Jeffrey Schiffman.

shifting the focus from the Middle Ages to the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century and from Judeo-Christian mystical traditions to institutional and cultural structures within an Islamic empire. At their core, however, both books pivot on the same concern for the complex and creative ways in which different religious communities interact when forced to live together in conflict and compromise.

With her initial plan for the book nearly realized, Izmirlieva discovered information in Bulgarian historical archives that made her rethink the entire project. While the Christian hajj to Jerusalem is traditionally understood as a strictly male endeavor, new documents revealed that women not only went on the journey but also were crucial to its success. “While men were in charge of logistics, the ritual aspects of the Christian hajj were fully controlled by the women,” Izmirlieva says. Her colleague Mai Ngai, Columbia’s Lung Family Professor of Asian American Studies and History, who was a fellow resident with Izmirlieva at the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers of the New York Public Library in 2012, was greatly impressed by her research. “Valentina’s work on the women hajjis is absolutely brilliant,” Ngai says. “She has uncovered something that nobody has seen before.” And Ivan Krastev commends her decision to rewrite the book so close to its completion as a mark of integrity, courage, and flexibility of thought: “I felt that this is what academia should be about. And yet it’s a rare thing. I’m not sure many scholars, myself included, would choose to do the same.”

The wide scope of Izmirlieva’s research and her innovative approach



Izmirlieva with 2022 Harriman Writer in Residence, award-winning Bulgarian writer Georgi Gospodinov, at the New York Public Library, September 2022.



Izmirlieva at a conference in West Berlin reading an article by Klaus-Dieter Seeman during her first trip to the West, August 1989. Photo by Klaus-Dieter Seemann.





were a perfect fit for the Harriman Institute from the beginning of her time at Columbia, and her involvement in the Institute deepened during her tenure as chair of the Department of Slavic Languages (2016–2019). Over the years, Izmirlieva has organized numerous lectures, panel discussions, and conferences at the Institute; has repeatedly served on the Executive Committee; and has helped forge new partnerships for the Harriman community with other units at the University, especially Columbia Global Centers. The formats of her engagement have been as varied as the topics: the panel discussion “Lolita in New York 50 Years Later” at Miller Theatre, with Jason Epstein and Orhan Pamuk (2008); international conferences on healing practices in Central Asia, hosted by the Global Health Center for Central Asia at Columbia’s School of Social Work (2012); a speaker series, “Women and Resistance in Russia (2019),” which brought to campus the high-profile Russian journalist Yevgenia Albats.

Still the most prominent vehicle for Izmirlieva’s involvement with the Harriman Institute is her global initiative Black Sea Networks (BSN), which she launched in 2016 with a two-year grant from the President’s Global Innovation Fund at Columbia

and matching Harriman funds. As a scholar, Izmirlieva has always aspired to expand the purview of her field beyond the Cold War logic that so often defines it. “All these places that are so culturally different—Central Europe, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia—are lumped in together with the Soviet Union and Russia, which provides only one context for understanding their distinctive histories,” she says, noting that she has devoted her career to researching other relevant contexts. BSN, a groundbreaking global initiative anchored in the Black Sea as a hub of cultural, political, and historical interest, is her most ambitious project yet. The new framework proposes to reorient Slavic studies from a shared Slavic identity imagined as homogenous toward shared spaces, where Slavs and non-Slavs are bound together by durable links of conflict and competition, cooperation and creative compromise. “Shared lands are heavily contested, which makes land-based studies ideologically fraught,” she says. “Focusing on the sea decenters the Slavic field in a way that reveals new heuristic advantages.”

Under the BSN umbrella, Izmirlieva has brought scholars from multiple disciplines and locales together in several research streams, each generating conferences, publications, and exhibitions. Currently, the most active stream investigates what she calls

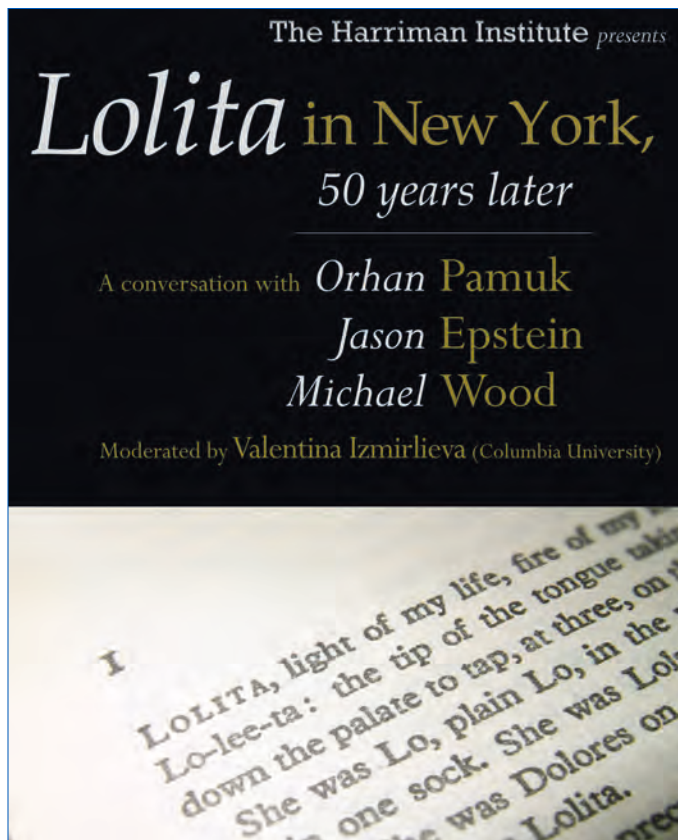
*Left: Izmirlieva with medievalist Klimentina Ivanova, at the Tenth International Congress of Slavists in Sofia, Bulgaria, September 1988.*

“the Black Sea Exodus,” the migration wave across the sea from Crimea to Constantinople in the wake of the Russian Empire’s collapse after the Bolshevik Revolution. A symposium in Istanbul in June 2022 and a planned exhibition at Istanbul’s Pera Museum aim to explore the influence of the empire’s refugees on cultural life in the Ottoman capital. Other streams have studied the contested history and symbolism of Crimea, the cultures of post-socialism around the Black Sea littoral, and the legacies of ancient Black Sea myths in modern Europe.

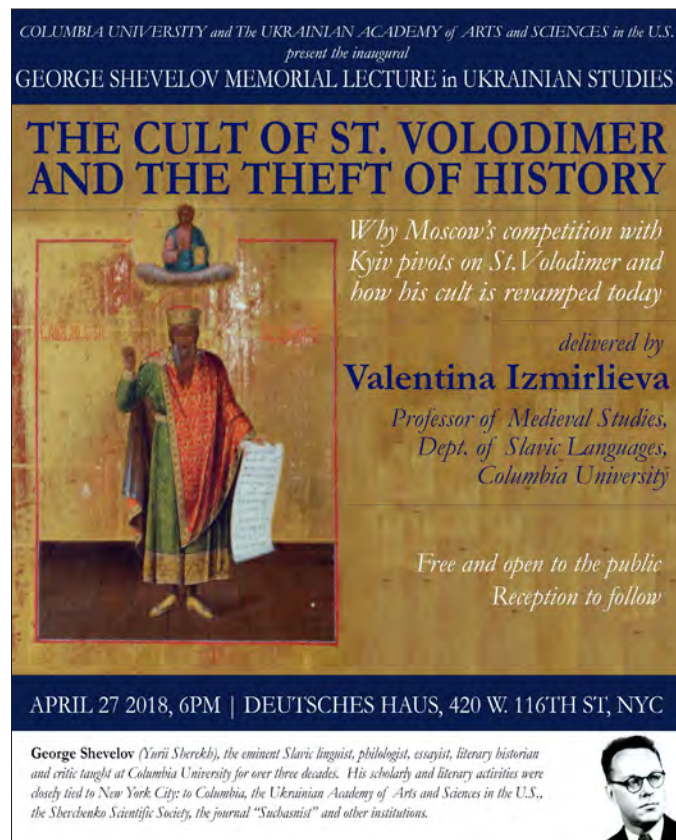
The Harriman Institute has been a close partner since the project’s inception, and much of Black Sea Networks’ current activity continues under its auspices. Former Harriman director Alexander Cooley, who serves on the Advisory Board of BSN, commends Izmirlieva for her ability to bring together such diverse communities of scholars and institutional partners. “It is



*Left: Izmirlieva at the Kyiv National Opera House, September 2018. Photo by Antonina Berezovenko. Izmirlieva was in Kyiv to deliver the keynote lecture, “Solidarity of Strangers, or Orthodoxy as It Should Be,” for the international workshop “Religion, Migration and Social Change in the Eastern Orthodox World.”*



Poster for the "Lolita in New York, 50 Years Later" event organized by Izmirlieva at the Harriman Institute in 2008.



Poster for the Inaugural Memorial Lecture of Ukrainian Studies in Honor of Professor George Shevelov, Columbia University, April 2018.

one thing to embrace diversity and interdisciplinarity in theory, but far more challenging to effectively promote, as Valentina has, new opportunities for local interactions, communications, and mutual learning," he says.

With no end in sight to the war in Ukraine, Izmirlieva has not stopped thinking of new ways to bring continued attention to the

plight of Ukrainians and the global consequences of Russia's unprovoked war. Since she became Harriman director, Izmirlieva has wanted to create an environmental program at the Institute. By bringing displaced Russian scholar Julia Lajus to the Harriman, she has laid the groundwork: the Institute will work with Lajus and Columbia Climate School on a yearlong workshop series about the

dire environmental consequences of Russia's war on Ukraine. "It's so easy to get overwhelmed by the chaos of the war, so easy to get discouraged by the scale of damage and destruction," says Izmirlieva. What's kept her going is a phrase from the Talmud: "Whoever saves one life saves the world entire." She has adopted it as her mantra. "I keep repeating to myself: One person at a time. Just help one person at a time." ■



# Maria Stepanova

## *Aporias of the Self and History*

By Mark Lipovetsky

In February 2020, with no inkling of the coming pandemic, the Harriman Institute and the Slavic departments at Columbia and Barnard, together with the Moscow-based NLO Publishers and the Mikhail Prokhorov Foundation, organized the Super-NOS Russian Literary Festival in New York. The open debate conducted by expert critics, scholars, and graduate students in choosing the best book of the decade proved to be the festival's highlight. Candidates were drawn from the winners of the annual Russian NOS Literary Prize, created 10 years earlier by Irina Prokhorova, who cohosted the debate with yours truly. To make a long story short, the finale of the debate came down to a very close competition between two major books: Vladimir Sorokin's *The Blizzard*, winner of the prize in 2010, and Maria Stepanova's *In Memory of Memory*, which won in 2018. *The Blizzard* won Super-NOS by a small number of votes. It is now clear, however, that Stepanova's book defines the future of Russian letters—and not only in the domestic context but in the global one as well. (And this is said by an ardent admirer of Sorokin.)

Maria Stepanova.  
Photos on this  
and facing  
page by Andrey  
Natotsinsky.

Translated into English by Sasha Dugdale (New Directions, 2021) and presently being translated into several other languages, *In Memory of Memory* garnered major literary honors, including being shortlisted for the International Booker Prize and longlisted for the National Book Award for Translation. Selections of Stepanova's poetry and essays have been collected in the volume *The Voice Over*, edited by Irina Shevelenko, and translated by a team of brilliant translators (Columbia University Press, Russian Library, 2021). In Russia, Stepanova is also known as the editor-in-chief of Colta.ru, "Russia's only independent and crowdfunded cultural magazine, sitting somewhere between the Huffington Post and *New York Review of Books*" (*Guardian*, February 11, 2021).

Praised by the *Guardian* as "Russia's next great writer" and "a writer who will likely be spoken about in the same breath as Poland's Olga Tokarczuk and Belarus's Svetlana Alexievich in years to come," Stepanova in fact persistently eludes any attempt to pin her down to a "trend" or typology. She is at once classical and experimental, modernist and postmodernist. She is equally intuitive and rational and is gifted both intellectually and emotionally. A dazzling stylist, she is at the same time open to voices of popular culture and street speech. An amazingly erudite cultural analyst, she constantly compares, or rather *tries on* the experiences of other writers, thereby turning an analytical interpretation into a lyrical self-exegesis. She speaks about herself through other voices, rather than vice versa. Mikhail Iampolski aptly characterizes the fluidity of Stepanova's poetic subject:





*A dazzling stylist,  
she is at the  
same time open  
to voices of  
popular culture  
and street speech.*

“Stepanova’s ‘personalities’ are unstable, they reflect one another and flow into one another [...]. This indeterminacy transcends similarities based on kinship and transforms them into almost Ovid-like streams of metamorphosis.” Curiously, the critic wrote these words years before Stepanova’s most recent poetic cycle, *The Sacred Winter 20/21* (2021), in which Ovid becomes one of the central voices and the logic of metamorphosis dominates overwhelmingly.

In one of her programmatic poems from the collection *Spolia* (2015), Stepanova writes:

где твое я, почему его не видно  
почему за тебя говорят посторонние  
люди  
или ты говоришь  
голосами шутих и трусов  
выйди из себя  
поставь этот словарь на полку

она не выходит  
это у нее не выходит

where’s your *I*, where is it hidden?  
why do strangers speak for you  
or are you speaking  
in the voices of scolds and cowards  
get out of yourself  
put that dictionary back

she won’t come out  
it won’t come right  
(trans. Sasha Dugdale,  
*The Voice Over:  
Poems and Essays*, 137)

However, in the beginning of the cycle, she warns:

у кого нет я,  
может позволить себе не явку,  
хочет отправиться на свободу.

Anyone without-an-I  
is permitted a non i-pppearance  
wants libert-I  
(trans. Sasha Dugdale,  
*The Voice Over:  
Poems and Essays*, 114)

Stepanova’s original, immediately recognizable voice endlessly oscillates between two opposing strategies. One is defined by the quest for

freedom through escape from narrow and debilitating “identity” into the multitude of performed selves; while another suggests that the voices (or even “truths”) of others would remain mute if she did not ventriloquize them. Her freedom turns out to be a dependence, almost an addiction, to diverting selves, and vice versa. This is one of her many aporias.

Stepanova has a knack for aporia, which is her primary method of exploration. Her aporias dwell on the impossibility of what is deemed necessary and the vital necessity of the impossible; she cannot avert her eyes from the yawning abyss between what we see in reality and how we interpret it; and there, in this baffling gray area, she detects a glimpse or rather a hope for light.

Her recent book of poems, *The Sacred Winter 20/21*, explores the lasting condition of living-within-death—whether temporary or final, nobody knows. This condition relates both to the COVID pandemic and the Russian political winter—both may very well last longer than one’s own, individual life. The metaphors inhabiting this wonderful book include Kai from Hans Christian Andersen’s *Snow Queen*, Sleeping Beauty, and frozen sounds from Baron Munchausen’s tales. But at its center we see (or rather hear) Ovid in exile, complaining about the eternal cold and night in passionate poems defying death and despair. With Ovid’s help, Stepanova launches a stream of metamorphoses, blurring the borderlines not only between the self and others, but also between life and death, between defeat and triumph. Her vision is simultaneously pessimistic and utterly optimistic. There is no reason to hope for a thaw (or the Thaw); there will be no release



and no escape from our historical condition. When this pandemic ends, another one will begin. When this dictator dies, another one will replace him. But this condition is not incompatible with creativity and metamorphosis—in other words, with life. We simply must learn to live *within* death, or what seems to be death.

Nowhere is Stepanova's aporia-based method more tangible than in her book *In Memory of Memory*. The prominent historian Yuri Slezkine wrote an exasperated review under the title "Arias in the Archive" about Stepanova's book (*New York Review of Books*, November 18, 2021). The source of his irritation is precisely Stepanova's aporias. In Slezkine's words, "having established that 'telling these histories' is both impossible and objectionable, she tells us her family history anyway." Slezkine cannot conceive how "any story about her ancestors is in fact a story about her." He sarcastically summarizes the book's central thought: "The dead need to be saved from oblivion [...]. The decent thing to do would be to save everyone indiscriminately, but that cannot be done because it obviously cannot be

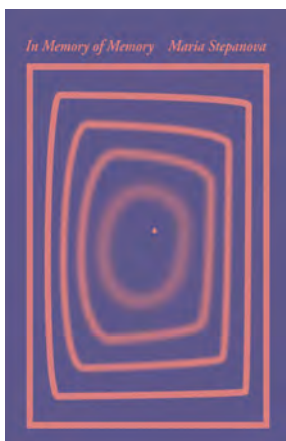
done and because the natural human desire, 'involuntary as a muscle spasm,' is to choose the very one." This is mostly true, and Stepanova does not conceal these contradictions; on the contrary, she highlights them. The problem with Slezkine's reading is that he treats *In Memory of Memory* not as a literary text but as a scholarly work and is bewildered by its artistic, that is, aporia-based, logic, claiming that "sentence by beautiful sentence, Stepanova seems to have written herself into a corner." But that is not the case—and the success of *In Memory of Memory* is the proof.

In their rebuttal to Slezkine's article, Irina Paperno, Stephanie Sandler, and Irina Shevelenko—all scholars who have written about Stepanova's poetry and prose—draw attention to Stepanova's reinvention of the poetic subject, suggesting that "her poetry explores the limits and lures of a lyric self and implicitly teaches us how to read *In Memory of Memory*." But in his response to his critics, Slezkine assigns merely a decorative function to Stepanova's style, treating it as a veneer, and continues to scold her for her lack of rationalism—basically, for not writing

*In Memory of Memory* as a dissertation in history or in memory studies.

Curiously, other critics in their approaches offer contradictory, but paradoxically, coexisting and equally resonant interpretations of Stepanova's book, while also reflecting its aporia-based logic. In his book *The Park of Culture: Culture and Violence in Today's Moscow* (2018), Iampolski locates the importance of *In Memory of Memory* in Stepanova's attempt to confront the cult of family memories, which, he argues, devalues the meaning of history in contemporary culture. On the contrary, in the Russian edition (2021) of her book *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams*, Paperno insists on the ethical import of *In Memory of Memory*, suggesting that it overcomes the impression of the "nightmare of history" created by perestroika-period memoirs and restores the historical significance of the family story.

Indeed, Stepanova uses her family archive to reconstruct a thread in the history of the Jewish intelligentsia in Soviet Russia (incidentally, Slezkine's *The Jewish Century* was one of the most important attempts to write just such a history). But Stepanova's book, certainly, cannot be reduced to the reconstruction of family history; that's merely one element, which Slezkine deems its center, unfairly accusing Stepanova of "tribalism" and representing "some traumas and histories as more authentic than others." Most importantly, while fully acknowledging the illusory and elusive character of memory and especially "post-memory," Stepanova builds her own imaginary community, consisting of writers, artists, and visionaries from different cultures and historical periods, from Osip Mandelstam to W.



*In Memory of Memory (A Romance)*  
 Maria Stepanova;  
 Sasha Dugdale (Translator)  
 New Directions (2021)  
 ISBN-10 : 0811228835,  
 ISBN-13 : 978-0811228831

*Most importantly, while fully acknowledging the illusory and elusive character of memory and especially “post-memory,” Stepanova builds her own imaginary community, consisting of writers, artists, and visionaries from different cultures and historical periods, from Osip Mandelstam to W. G. Sebald.*

G. Sebald—all those whose experience of writing, imagining, or re-creating history prefigure her own attempts to express unbearable traumas, among which the heaviest is the trauma of alienation from history.

The pain shared by those who have confronted the tragic impossibility of making sense of catastrophic history is made even more relevant by the current attempts that flood the Russian cultural and political mainstream—attempts to resurrect historical metanarratives that would justify not only the war but all the suffering and violence perpetrated by the state in the name of its own supposedly superior ends. The recent “liquidation” of Memorial in Russia demonstrated this all too clearly and cynically. Contrary to the new Russian “official” metanarratives, Stepanova seeks to liberate history from totalitarian ambitions, restoring its personal dimension, connecting it with the creative process, and disconnecting it from any pretenses to “ultimate” historical truth and from any shadow of grandeur.

The aporias that cement the logic of Stepanova’s book are, by default, anti-

teleological, and as such they resist any application for political ends. Instead, they create a protective mechanism against the appropriation of private and highly individual encounters with the pain of historical memory by any impersonal, nationalist, or statist narratives. (Many may recall how Russian “patriotic” propaganda hijacked the grassroots movement The Immortal Regiment and turned it into a state ritual.)

What’s more, the aporias in Stepanova’s *In Memory of Memory* serve as the foundation for a new—artistic rather than scholarly!—vision of history. In her book she not only constructs a decentered, historical narrative that draws equally on personal memories, documents, wordplay, and fiction; she also convincingly and even pedagogically illustrates how the individual can take responsibility for that which has been crippled and destroyed by the grand narratives of the “Great Epoch.” Stepanova constructs from the ruins of life a new narrative and history in which one can live with dignity. Only such a narrative can accommodate those who lived their unique, ordinary, and sometimes

even happy lives through the tragic circumstances of their history—and our history as well. ■

January 2022

*Mark Lipovetsky is professor of Slavic languages at Columbia University. His recent publications include A History of Russian Literature, coauthored with Andrew Kahn, Irina Reyfman, and Stephanie Sandler (Oxford, 2019); and a critical biography of Dmitry Prigov, coauthored with Ilya Kukulin, A Guerilla Logos (NLO, 2022). He is the author of several monographs, including Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos (1999) and Modern Russian Literature: 1950s–1990s, coauthored with his father, Naum Leiderman (Academia, 2001).*



# HARRIMAN INSTITUTE TRANSLATION CONTEST

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## TWO POEMS BY MARIA STEPANOVA


A black and white portrait of Maria Stepanova. She has dark, curly hair and is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. Her hands are resting on her cheeks, with fingers spread. She is wearing a dark blazer over a light-colored top. Several rings are visible on her fingers. The background is dark and out of focus.

Photo by Andrey  
Natotsinsky.

**T**he Harriman Institute held its first Translation Contest to celebrate the Harriman residency of Maria Stepanova in Spring 2022. The 48 entries were judged by Ainsley Morse (Dartmouth College), Matvei Yankelevich (World Poetry Books), and Ronald Meyer (Columbia University). Contestants were given the choice of two poems from Stepanova's *Holy Winter* (2021). The judges awarded first prize for the best translation of each poem; namely: (A) Я просыпаюсь на белом, пустом и белом; and (другая А) Огни гаснут, наши девочки расходятся по палаткам.

Nareg Seferian (Virginia Tech) and Alexander Droznin (Harvard University) were awarded first prize.

### Nareg Seferian

*Virginia Tech*

*School of Public and International Affairs*

I get up on the white – empty and white – island, the bed you left me in.  
And I get it – you left me. And I get it – I am myself the island.

Whoever said no man is an island was not left alone in an empty bed,  
Where white linen marks winter, falling in between the lines,  
Where there is simply white between you and me –  
    tracks of invisible gaps running underneath,  
    boulevards with no one strolling about,  
    empty parks,

And where there is no linen uniting us together,  
    nor silken threads to hold on to,  
    nor shots of words gently passing between us.

Whoever is wrapped up in his own skin and whoever else has run  
away from confinement

    – not desiring to be a part  
        of the archipelago  
        of the federal republic  
            seizing the embrace  
                of the zone  
                of territorial union –

they bare their island nature like something to be ashamed of.  
I see the cliffs on their coast.

The god of love pierced me with his stake,  
The god of dreams did not hold on to me in his cradle.  
Coming to the rescue – the god of alcohol,  
Hugging from the inside, tilling his vineyard.

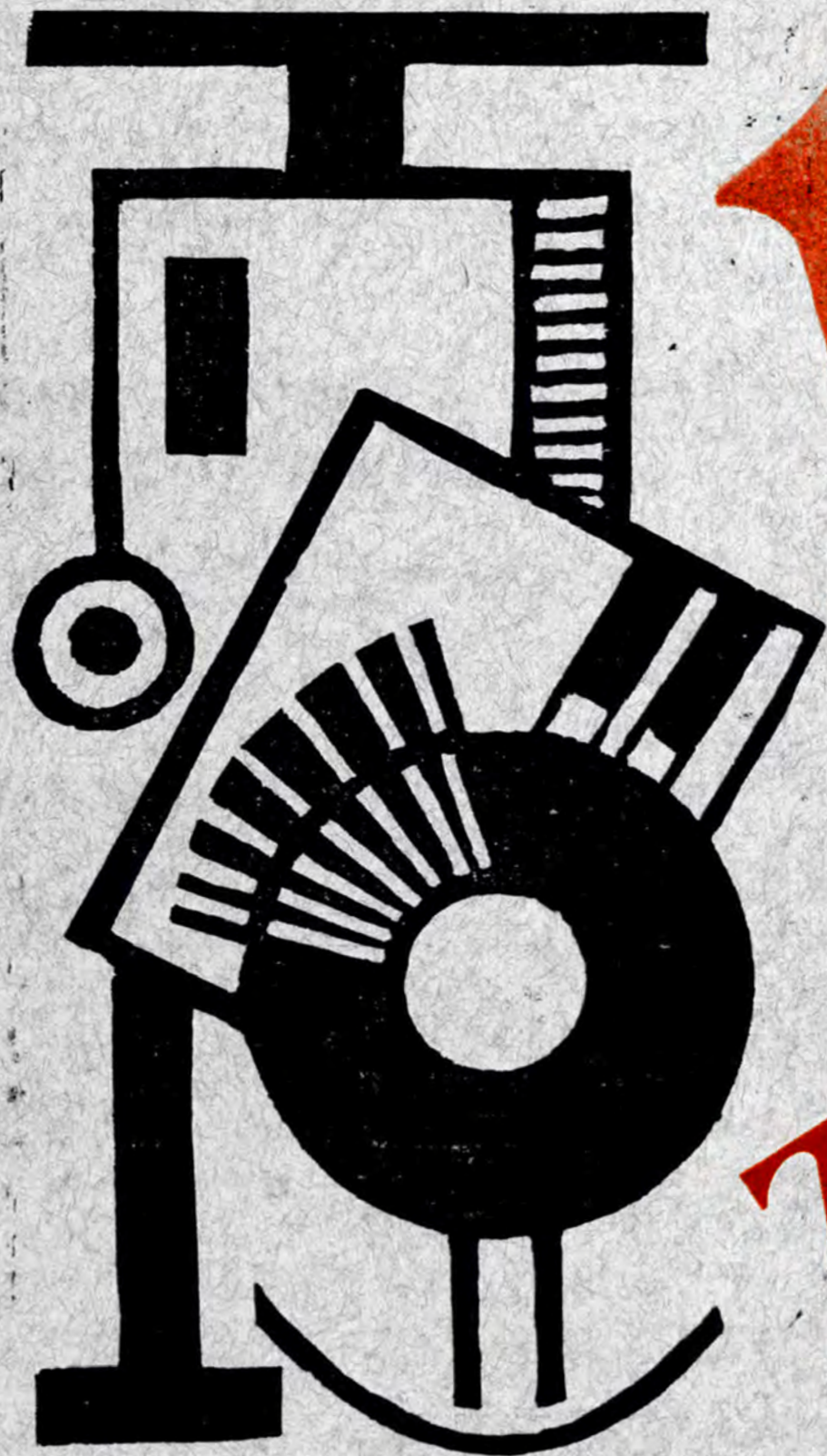
### Alexander Droznin

*Harvard University*

*Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures*

Lights out, our girls part ways to their tents,  
Clean the weapons, check the ammo,  
All as it should be. You ask me how I am —  
I am fine, ready for battle.  
What's the point in crying: over spilled milk,  
A pierced shield, a life suspended  
Like a plush monkey on a string  
Bouncing up and down and back and forth.  
Your place is empty, dark; your sleeping bag  
Folded, gathering dust, like you were never there.  
You say that soldiers also weep —  
Like that one in Asia Minor who wept for his boy  
Who went alone to spy on Greek ships  
And came back with his head cut off?  
You ask me how I am? I have forgotten about you.  
I don't bother asking how you are — a young husband, a young son,  
A new country, a new passport, a new war,  
Past experience in a war zone,  
Snipers firing on your past friends.  
As a young girl, you seemed awkward to me.  
Now both those girls have other troubles.  
Faster than it takes to assemble and disassemble a rifle,  
The memory of me will gather and disperse  
Under your severed right breast  
Tomorrow morning, when we take our positions  
And you will earn your posthumous medal.  
And I will enter into our posthumous immortality. ■





L. Kassák — Wien

Linorez

# ZENIT

UREDNIK DIRECTEUR  
LJUBOMIR MICIĆ

# ЗЕНИТ

**Sadržaj:** V. Poljanski / Nihilon I. Goll / Der Eiffelturm — Lj. Micić / O estetiци purizma — Хлебников / Песма — N. Walden / Gedichte — S. Živanović / Zdravo Savremeniče — Bršadino mlo Ilgno Vleno — Esperanto — E. Dundek / Dekonfuzijada — Teheng-Loh / Le Cheval — Lj. Micić / Protiv jugosl. antirusizma — L. Dymeš / Horká píseň v čimě — Lj. M. / O elektro-geniju Nikoli Tesli — Marinetti — Micić — V. Poljanski / Fahrt nach Brasilien — A. Čebulač / V Parku V. Jugosl. izložba u Beogradu — Pozorište Pomičnih lutaka — D. H. K. Društvo Hrvatskih Pisara — Prosvećna politika i progon Ljubomira Micića — Iz Zenitističkog kriminala — Od uredništva.

**Reprodukcije:**

Robert Delaunay / La Tour 1910 — Lajos Kassák / Linorez.

ZAGREB - S. H. S. - STARČEVIĆ TRG 10



# Zenithism

## A 1920s Yugoslav Avant-Garde Movement

By Aleksandar Bošković and Steven Teref

Opposite page: *Zenit* magazine (June 1922). Images on pages 60 and 63 from *Zenit* as well.

### Introduction

This selection of poems and prose for readers of *Harriman Magazine* is from a group of writers known as zenithists. Zenithism, an avant-garde movement in the former Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, flourished from 1921 to 1927. The movement was a melting pot of the various avant-garde movements circulating in Europe at the time; namely, futurism, expressionism, Dada, constructivism, and proto-surrealism. The zenithists not only embraced a pan-avant-garde aesthetic, which was remarkable for the time, but they also embraced the promotion of cross-genre or hybrid writing. Their cross-genre work comprised cinépoetry (the application of film techniques, such as montage, to writing); poetry-prose hybrids; and conceptual writing. The Barbarogenius, a Balkan version of Nietzsche's Superman, is the movement's archetypal figure.

The key representatives of zenithism are founder Ljubomir Micić and his brother Branko Ve Poljanski; the French-German poet Yvan Goll; the sailor Marijan Mikac; and the enigmatic Mita Dimitrijević, who

wrote under the nom de guerre MID (pronounced *mead*).

The primary publishing engines of zenithism were the magazine *Zenit* (Zenith) and the Biblioteka Zenit (Zenith Library), but the zenithists also published numerous one-off periodicals and pamphlets to circulate their work.

Transgressive by nature, the zenithists often ran afoul of the authorities. Micić faced obscenity charges for his book *Damn Your Hundred Gods*; a censored version of it was later published as *Rescue Car*. On account of the controversial material often found in its pages, *Zenit's* Zagreb office was closed due to political pressure in 1923, so the magazine moved to Belgrade, where its operation was eventually shuttered for good by the authorities in 1926.

The pieces featured here are by Micić, Mikac, Poljanski, and MID. Readers will note the eclecticism of the work. Zenithism was a movement in spirit, but not a monolith in style.

Ljubomir Micić's poems "barbarian omelet" and "syphon-soda-blood" are driven by the image and philosophy of the Barbarogenius. Marijan Mikac's poem "prayer of the blessed curse" features the emotive imagery of

expressionism fused with the cut-up logic of Dada. His poem "man's tango with a flea" could serve as a modernist send up of John Donne's "The Flea," in which the love interest of the latter is swapped out for a streetcar. Branko Ve Poljanski's "The Panopticon Passes through a Mirror" is an exemplar of the poetry-prose hybridity at which he excelled. The excerpt from *The Metaphysics of Nothing* and "Form Devours Spirit [I]" capture MID's pseudo-philosophical conceptual treatises on the nature of *nothing*.

This work is a mere sliver from our book *Zenithism (1921–1927): A Yugoslav Avant-Garde Anthology*, forthcoming from Academic Studies Press in 2022.

—Steven Teref and Aleksandar Bošković

*Aleksandar Bošković is a lecturer in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian at Columbia University. He is the author of The Poetic Humor in Vasko Popa's Oeuvre (in Serbian, 2008) and the exhibition catalog Temporary Monument: Photomontages for Mayakovsky's Poem "To the Workers of Kursk" by Yuri Rozhkov (2015); and coeditor of The Fine Feats of the "Five Cockerels" Gang: A Yugoslav Marxist-Surrealist Epic Poem for Children (2022, with Ainsley Morse).*

*Steven Teref's books of translation include Ana Ristović's Directions for Use—shortlisted for the National Book Critics Circle Award, Best Translated Book Award, and the National Translation Award—and Novica Tadić's Assembly. His translations have appeared in the New Yorker, Columbia Journal, Brooklyn Rail, Vestiges, and elsewhere. He is currently translating the poetry of Milena Marković, an award-winning poet, playwright, and screenwriter.*





### barbarian omelet

We will drink up nine barrels of stars  
And eat a thousand wagons of Serbian sky  
If Balkan eyes do not peck at the brain of western culture  
If eastern rainbows do not lap up European blood

What are we going to do with blood alone  
Blood alone is a pest  
And a pest is to everyone—genius

Yes  
In pure blood we'll drown the eyes of your watery ideas  
On the embers of our gaze we'll fry the brains of genius

#### *BARBARIAN OMELET*

Here comes the barbarogenius  
Crazy zenithist barbarogenius  
Barbarogenius: a beautiful image and an opportunity of  
tempestuous thought  
Barbarogenius: a rescue pilot of barbarian ideoplanes.

—Ljubomir Micić

*translated by Dragana Obradović*

### syphon—soda—blood

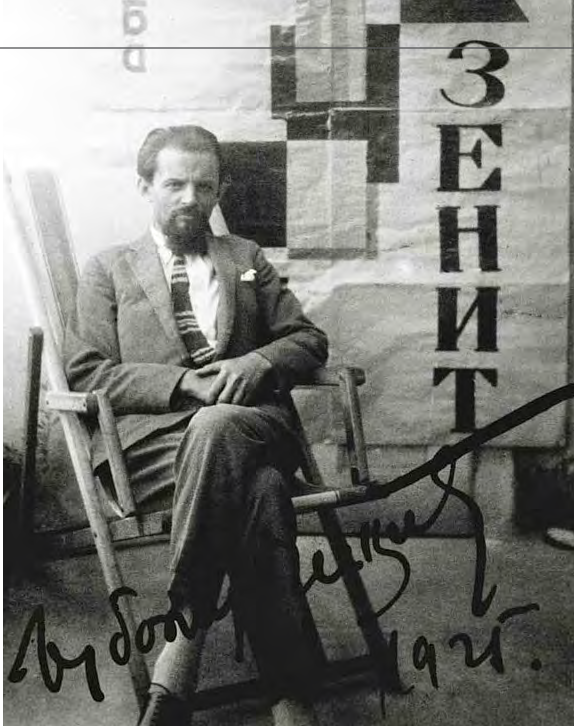
An excellent moussaka  
Not to mention the sausages  
Smoked ham and brandy just wonderful, eh  
The centipede of a lie crawls in ministers' attics  
And everything is empty in the books of European poets  
Words are just greased wheels of ichor and marrow

Eyes bark the truth

Blood is the healthiest bathroom.  
Syphon—soda—blood  
In bottles of sweet wine and yogurt  
In peasant shoes, the secrets of war and graves are kept.

—Ljubomir Micić

*translated by Dragana Obradović*



Portrait of Ljubomir Micić,  
founder of Zenithism.

### prayer of the blessed curse

Hey children  
 Fingers are not toothpicks  
 Our ears fill with the foam of the dying  
 We are eternally suspended in the air  
 A girl with deflowered legs cries  
 Sharks howl  
 I still think (modestly)  
 My hat is sweeter than my heart  
 I am not to blame  
*STARS BRING SALVATION*  
 Folly marks your victory  
*THE SPIRIT* doesn't trail the airplane  
 The spirit rides on the airplane  
 Or: the spirit creeps on sandaled feet.

—Marijan Mikac

*translated by Vesna Jevtić*

### man's tango with a flea

In a box an owl on a string  
 A hunchbacked fortuneteller points from over her glasses:  
 A flea under the streetcar—how can it be!  
 The flea takes a ride on a man  
 The man takes a ride on a streetcar:  
 All right  
 When you talk about man  
 You should put a flea on display  
 How did you sleep last night  
 “Good day” always sleeps well  
 When “Good night” had a romantic duel  
 All night long  
 Today a man could be under the streetcar  
 Tomorrow a streetcar might be on the back of a flea  
 Fleas jump  
 Hey joyful!  
 A flea is not quite the last thing in the world.

—Marijan Mikac

*translated by Vesna Jevtić*



## The Panopticon Passes through a Mirror

“Don’t worry, shoe, I’ll slip you on. Isn’t it nice seeing a bullfight and the boldness of the picador? That is real.”

It’s unclear from whose lips these words fell or for whose ears they were meant.

The day before yesterday they hanged a man for reasons quite just. On the one hand! But everyone has two hands unless they lost one fighting for their homeland and a just cause, and they now have a prosthesis. A person with two healthy hands would seek to know the reason they hanged the man, on the other hand. However, the one who shares the point of view of the hangmen, doesn’t have an “on the other hand.” It was cut off by Mr. Surgeon, who foresaw an evil future for it. Now, it doesn’t have any rights because it’s no longer a hand; it is—a prosthesis.

A hypothesis!

•

Many people, dogs, horses, etc. strolled in the afternoon.

Everything entered the bright surface of the mirror. Everything transformed in the imagination and everything was dying.

Through the bright surface of the mirror entered:

churches and nuns  
cars and grisettes  
kings and invalids  
newspapers and bricklayers  
suns and moons  
stars and notorious prostitutes  
magazine editors and kangaroos.

Once they passed through the mirror they turned to stone.

Boom! Something cracked open.

It was the noggin of an American potato king.

•

Great is the song of the whirlpool. The whirlpool is the first and the last sense of the nonsensical. If anyone can spit out the word

### Nonsense

Then sense exists!

What is the sense of the nonsensical? Nonsense!

And what is *nonsense*?

It is a very nice notion of something, of which even the hellish human brain can’t conceive.

The point is that it occupies such a superb place in the world of our notions.

What exists beyond notions?

Beyond notions is that which cannot fly through the surface of the mirror.

What is a mirror?

A mirror is an object without which the notion of the object would be incomprehensible. The object exists just as long as it can reflect.

In the stone city of San Francisco there is an opium den. To experience another world which can’t be penetrated by an ordinary citizen, you need to expose the body to agonizing cramps—for the revelation of a new world where one can live disembodied—fluidly.

### A trance! A trance! A trance!

Oh, how insanely boring it must be for one who is unfamiliar with the pleasures of life beyond concrete forms, beyond sausages and *čevapčići*.

Tangible forms are ground in the mill. The grinding continues into an ethereal rebirth. And then every object attains its true face:

### IT ISN’T

That **isn’t** is precisely the shortcut for Mr. Donkey to reach the hay.

Isn’t = Is.

Is = Isn’t.

(Don’t be ashamed by confusion, dear reader!)

•

In your eyes, my dear, flickers the strangest spell of the gods, who lost their invaluable believers today.

Nobody believes in anything anymore!

We only believe in negation

*Modern-day fornicators* believe **in negation**

*Negation is the source of all goods*

### Amen!

—To live through tomorrow, today must pass. If that doesn’t come to pass—ah—then the horrifying, peaty, and stinking swamp of time would emerge.

**Always tomorrow**

**Always tomorrow**

**Always tomorrow**

**Eternity has 777 eternities.**

—Branko Ve Poljanski

*translated by Maja Teref and Steven Teref*

## From *The Metaphysics of Nothing*

The world has always been largely divided into two factions: those who find and determine the path and those who *CLEAR* it. In times when it's been hard to see the path and when there has been no one to illuminate it, humanity has walked down a blind alley (Ribarska Street) and culture has fallen into a downward spiral.

The feeling and appearance of impoverishment in the face of history was greatest at a time when yesterday's goals and ideals were exhausted and tomorrow's not yet found. Our own age is consumed by such a fever.

The road to truth has been *CLEARED* on yesterday's paths; humanity has struggled to exhaust all possibilities marked by the previous generation's milestones.

But there, among those who must reveal the further path, it does not look promising. Listening carefully, a man hears a heavy, perhaps desperate, sound, like that of souls possessed by a secret, unintelligible fear. As if they were confronted by a primordial *SCREAM* which, as in the paralysis of a dream, cannot be *ARTICULATED* but instead transfixes the pained, despairing grimace and the cold *LAUGHTER OF HORROR*. Is this the birth of a new pain or a new poverty for which there is still no appropriate word?

Or is it just a *REFLECTION* of the void which froze the horrified human soul? Or perhaps both?

Literature, philosophy, arts of all kinds speak into this night, mauled by the language of scared wild animals who, surrounded by hunters, do not know where to run and how to save themselves!

—MID [Mita Dimitrijević]

*translated by Aleksandar Bošković  
with Andrea Bogojević and Jennifer H. Zoble*

## Form Devours Spirit [I]

Astonished and horrified—I inform you—that—the whole—world—issue of validity—is taking big steps—to meet me.

To the greatest extent for the whole country in general, as a superorganic being, there is an increasing headlong reduction of all positive authorities. It is the embryo of future progress which is negative because the spirit does not need authority since it is itself authority.

It is still true, one-sidedly twofold, that Death is important as the ultimate authority for the dead living spirit, for its unrecognized, negative right; but as to the progress of the spirit, death is only the *FIRST FORM*. The spirit is negative and as such the opposite of positive death. Death, therefore, plays before the progress of the spirit, changes its form (“the Earth is round”), decreases positively, to appear to the spirit as more charming, negative, smaller. Thus, there is *NOTHING* where death, through its play, shows itself to be less than the spirit, which is *BEHIND NOTHING*, and which, negatively, is most concentrated in *NOTHING*.

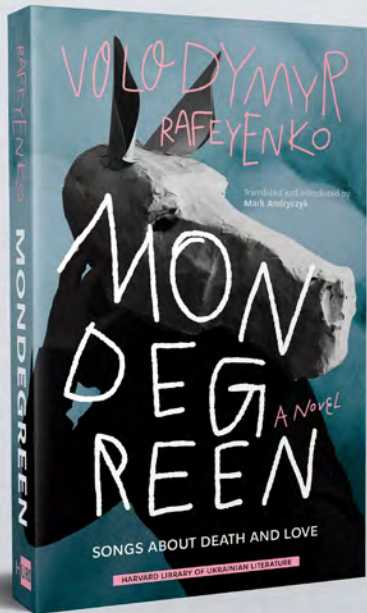
The spirit, which encompassed the beings of the Earth, does not lose sight of the Earth's nature and its positive interest to be lost in its own visibility, so that with its positive metamorphoses, it confuses the progressive spirit with the feminine, and devours what is positive from itself: *NOTHING*. That is why the diminishing positive authorities, in their solemn manifestations, are more and more nervously denouncing, annulling the word *NOTHING*. The whole cosmic obviousness of the spirit, therefore, they represent in the game of renunciation: “it is *NOTHING*,” and they are afraid of *NOTHING*.

—MID [Mita Dimitrijević]

*translated by Aleksandar Bošković* ■

# ZENIT





## TRANSLATING MONDEGREEN: SONGS ABOUT DEATH AND LOVE

AN INTERVIEW WITH  
MARK ANDRYCZYK

By Masha Udensiva-Brenner

In the previous issue of *Harriman Magazine* we published an excerpt of Volodymyr Rafeyenko's novel *Mondegreen: Songs about Death and Love*. Rafeyenko is an award-winning Russophone writer who was living in Donetsk when Russia invaded Donbas in 2014. He evacuated to Kyiv later that year; learned Ukrainian; and wrote *Mondegreen*, his first Ukrainian-language novel, about a displaced person from Donetsk who moves to Kyiv. It was published in 2019 and Mark Andryczyk, head of the Ukrainian Studies Program at the Harriman Institute, translated it into English.

The translation was published right after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Harvard Library of Ukrainian Literature, 2022). At that point, Rafeyenko was again trapped by war. I interviewed Andryczyk about the book and Rafeyenko's experience in May, for our "Voices of Ukraine" podcast. What follows is a brief excerpt of our conversation, edited for clarity.

**Masha Udensiva-Brenner:** How did you become aware of this novel, and what was your original reaction to it? Why did you decide to translate it?

**Mark Andryczyk:** A lot of my writer friends lived in a region northwest of Kyiv, in towns such as Bucha and Hostomel, which are unfortunately known now because of the war. Every time my family and I would visit Ukraine, we'd go and stay with them, and everybody who lived in that region would come over to my friend's house and hang out. We've done this for years. And several years ago, when we were in Hostomel, one of my friends was telling us that a refugee from Donetsk was living in their Kyiv apartment. "He's a writer and he's writing this amazing novel, and

we're going to let him stay there until he finishes and gets on his feet." So I had heard about this novel way ahead of time.

Then, when I visited Ukraine in 2019, I saw that this novel had been published and purchased it and read it while in Ukraine that summer. I decided that it is indeed a fantastic novel and that I needed to translate this so that my students could read it when I teach my course on contemporary Ukrainian literature.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** What struck you the most about it? Why did you feel it needed to be translated?

**Andryczyk:** It was very interesting to have this perspective on Ukrainian identity from somebody from Donbas. The fact that it dealt with an internally displaced person was important. It was a topic that was key in Ukraine at the time; it touched on the Russian-Ukrainian war in Donbas and just the whole idea of language in Ukraine.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** There's a very powerful scene toward the beginning of the novel, where Haba, the protagonist, describes two Ukrainian men in Donetsk who spoke Ukrainian to each other. Whenever he would try to speak Ukrainian with them, they would immediately switch to Russian. Can you talk about that dynamic and the dynamics of language in that region?

**Andryczyk:** I've never been to the Donbas region, but what I noticed over the years, even traveling to Kyiv in the early- to mid-nineties, was that there was a conscious switch to Russian by Ukrainian speakers in public. There was this inferiority complex whenever they left their own little circle. You needed to switch to Russian to have more prestige, more of a footing. So if you were a

HE WAS LIVING  
WITH HIS WIFE  
JUST NORTHWEST  
OF BUCHA AND  
HOSTOMEL. THE  
RUSSIAN ARMY  
HAD SURROUNDED  
THE AREA, AND HE  
WAS STUCK IN A  
SECLUDED AREA  
NEAR THE WOODS.

Ukrainian speaker, that was reserved for your closest circle. That's probably what he's explaining in the novel.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** You mentioned in your introduction that it was a really difficult novel to translate. Can you talk a little bit about the process of how you dealt with a lot of the challenges presented in the book?

**Andryczyk:** It was quite unique compared to other things I've translated in that the author was writing his first novel in a new language; and you could tell that there was this kind of freshness, this fascination, like taking a car out for the first ride. There are a lot of language games and illusions to language, which are very important to the theme of the novel. It was important to try to convey that in English.

There are a hundred footnotes in my translation. I didn't explain all the language games, because that would have been too burdensome. But in addition to the language games, there are so many intertextual references to Russian culture, to Ukrainian culture, both pop culture and high culture, that are important to really

appreciate the novel. I think in a text that deals with Ukraine there are so many gaps, so much missing knowledge about Ukraine.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** You finally met Rafeyenko in person last summer. What was he like?

**Andryczyk:** Rafeyenko is a very sensitive, very thoughtful, very delicate person. He's kind of shy, keeps to himself. But just speaking with him was almost like translating his novel. We'd get into these pretty profound discussions, even in the short time that we hung out, less than two hours. He's a very gentle soul.

After sitting in somebody's head for two years, translating this complex work, it was just really nice. The book hadn't come out yet. And when you're translating, you try to imagine the author, how his face changes when he speaks, how he uses his hands. So when you finally meet them in person, and you have a chance to observe that, it's always interesting. Because this is probably the first living author I translated without meeting them beforehand.



Mark Andryczyk (left) with Volodymyr Rafeyenko shortly after meeting for the first time at the home of a friend in Hostomel, Ukraine (August 2021). Tragically that home was looted and badly damaged during the first days of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.



From left to right: Maria Genkin, Mark Andryczyk, and Eugene Ostashevsky at "In Translation: Voices from Ukraine," Center for Fiction (April 20, 2022, Brooklyn). Photo by Ronald Meyer.



**Udensiva-Brenner:** Right as you were gearing up to publish the English translation, and working on bringing Rafeyenko to the U.S. for a book tour, it was becoming clear that Russia might invade Ukraine. Can you describe what happened?

**Andryczyk:** He was actually already set up for an interview for his visa at the U.S. Embassy when the embassy was evacuated, just before the war. So we were setting up a visa meeting for him in Warsaw, and that was when the war just exploded.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** And what happened to Rafeyenko during the war?

**Andryczyk:** In the first weeks, he was living with his wife just northwest of Bucha and Hostomel. The Russian army had surrounded that area, and he was stuck in a secluded area near the woods. As he said recently in an interview, Russian soldiers were coming in and taking over people's

homes, looting them and doing all these horrific things, but his area was spared. He thinks it was because they didn't have electricity, they didn't have water, they were cut off from these things.

He finally got in touch with another writer and asked if he could get them out of there because it was an extremely dangerous part of the world to be in. They coordinated with the Ukrainian army when there was a chance to get him out. They bring aid for those that aren't leaving and try to grab anybody they can, who are ready to go.

So through various attempts and by using a network of people—my wife was involved in coordinating one small part of this network from the U.S.—they sent in two guys willing to go in and get him. When he was finally out, my wife was sent a photo of the two heroes who got him out. You wouldn't believe it. It was these two hipsters. I think they were actors. Ukrainian actors who had a car.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** All of this must have been terrifying for Rafeyenko.

**Andryczyk:** Yeah. And to have experienced this twice, you know, within eight years. He's dealing with the same force that he described in this novel, but obviously to a greater extent. And as he did with this novel, he's writing about it.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** And is he writing about it in Ukrainian?

**Andryczyk:** When I finally met him last summer, he told me that he planned to go back and forth between writing in Russian and Ukrainian. He even joked that it was hard to write in Russian after *Mondegreen*, because it's as if he had cheated on her by writing in Ukrainian. But I read in this recent interview that after what he's experienced, he's not going to publish anything ever in Russian with his name; he just can't see it happening. So it'll be in Ukrainian. ■

# Book Notice



Mark G. Pomar



**M**ark G. Pomar (Russian Institute, 1976; Ph.D., Slavic Languages, 1978; Harriman National Advisory Council) is the author of *Cold War Radio: The Russian Broadcasts of the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, published by Potomac Books, an imprint of the University of Nebraska Press, in October 2022.

*Cold War Radio* is a fascinating look at how the United States waged the Cold War through the international broadcasting of Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). Pomar served in senior positions at VOA and RFE/RL from 1982 to 1993, during which time the Reagan and Bush administrations made

VOA and RFE/RL an important part of their foreign policy.

VOA is America's "national voice," broadcasting in more than 40 languages, and is charged with explaining U.S. government policies and telling America's story with the aim of gaining the respect and goodwill of its target audience. During the Cold War, the VOA Russian Service broadcast 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

RFE/RL is a private corporation, funded until 1971 by the CIA and afterward through open congressional appropriations. It broadcast in more than 20 languages of Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia and functioned as a "home service" located abroad. Its Russian Service broadcast news, feature programming, and op-eds that would have been part of daily political discourse if Russia had free media.

Pomar takes readers inside the two radio stations to show how the broadcasts were conceived and developed and the impact they had on international broadcasting, U.S.-Soviet relations, Russian political and cultural history, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. He provides nuanced analysis of the broadcasts and sheds light on the multifaceted role the radios played during the Cold War, ranging from instruments of U.S. Cold War policy to repositories of independent Russian culture, literature, philosophy, religion, and the arts.



# Alumni Notes

## Students, Postdocs, and Visiting Scholars



Jerry Kisslinger

The Harriman (well, Russian) Institute left a formative mark on me. Undergrad years were memorable, with Professors Belknap, Maguire, and Malmstad in literature; Juviler, Hazard, and Bialer in politics; and Fitzpatrick and Raeff in history. I wrestled every tetrameter of *Eugeny Onegin* under the kind, discursive tutelage of William Harkins. Zbigniew Brzezinski was off in Washington, as was Marshall Shulman. Decades later I had the pleasure of reconnecting with Catharine Nepomnyashchy, whom I knew from student days, while editing her profile of Shulman for the volume *Living Legacies at Columbia*, published for Columbia's 250th anniversary.

Graduating into the Reagan-Brezhnev freeze, I took other paths. Still, I translated accounts of early Alaskan natural history from Russian sources, taught Russian a bit, wrote a book for high schoolers on Serbian Americans and reviews on Balkan issues for *The New Leader*. I perform traditional dance music from Slavic lands and for more than 30 years have taught at workshops run by the East European Folklife Center. One of my bands, Zlatne Uste (meaning Golden Lips in no precise language . . .), hosts the annual Golden Festival in New York.

While directing communications for alumni relations and development at Columbia, I have attended numerous Harriman events and courses taught by Valentina Izmirlieva and Aleksandar Bošković. I continue to look for ways to raise awareness in the Columbia community of the Institute's historic past and highly relevant present. Happy Anniversary to us all!

— **Jerry Kisslinger** (Columbia College, 1979; GSAS, 1982)

When I entered graduate school, it was still the Harriman Institute for the Study of the USSR, and the notion that I'd be able to engage with the Soviets directly seemed remote at best. It was hard to imagine how my Harriman training on Soviet nationalities, economics, trade, security, demography, and geology would help me build a career.

After a few years as a contractor, I joined the Defense Nuclear Agency supporting arms control treaty implementation, and I was able to visit the USSR for the first time in 1990. With the dissolution of the USSR a year later came opportunities to engage with Russians beyond what I'd imagined. I started working with the Russian Ministry of Defense to help secure its nuclear warheads under the Cooperative Threat Reduction program. Over the course of the next 21 years, from 1992 to 2013, my Harriman knowledge was an indispensable foundation for over 80 trips to Russia, including visiting dozens of nuclear warhead storage sites.

I'm fortunate now to serve as a Nonresident Fellow with the Stimson Center, which has supported my efforts to author a series of Field Notes on nuclear security cooperation with Russia. My experience and training have helped me publish studies on "Initiating a Cooperative Denuclearization Effort with North Korea" for the *Nonproliferation Review*, and "Beyond Arms Control: Cooperative Nuclear Weapons Reductions – A New Paradigm to Roll Back Nuclear Weapons and Increase Security and Stability," for the *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*. I'm now a consultant supporting two studies on nuclear warhead verification for NATO and the State Department; and I'm writing a chapter on nuclear security cooperation with Russia for

an upcoming Nuclear Security Handbook for Kings College, London.

—**William Moon** (M.I.A., Harriman Specialization, 1983)

Hunger was the proximate cause of my arrival at Harriman as a Columbia undergrad in 2003. As I wolfed down pizza at the Open House, the Harriman's business manager, Frank J. Bohan, popped into 1219 to recruit work-studies. I was obsessed with “all things Russia, and then some”—and I had a penchant for office work. Hired!

That fall, as we processed honoraria and travel expense reimbursements for the Petersburg 300 Festival, I impressed Frank with my ace spelling of the Slavic speakers' names. When I designated an orange folder to “hold [event flyers] in abeyance,” he lauded my “anticipatory skills.”

Frank called me KK (my then-initials), Aide-de-Camp, and sometimes, Assassinette. He called my Russian boyfriend “the Swain.”

I took “pictures on bypass [paper],” typed memos on “fine fiftieth anniversary,” mailed them interoffice in “Susan Holmes [envelopes].” Frank would only sign with “superior pens,” stashed in a box labeled “Communist Affairs.” He griped about carpal tunnel (“too many clicks”) and editorialized about AP/CAR (“they gave me the shuffle off to Buffalo”).

Alla Rachkov (who was program coordinator at the time) tried to steal me from Frank: once she dialed his extension, posing as “Jenny.” One drawer of her file cabinet is still captioned “Kasialand.”

Over lunch in the Arena, we did trivia. Frank told stories—how he'd walked out of class on a Jewish holiday (“Bohan—like Cohen”).

Frank taught me world-building; Harriman became family.

Fifteen years later, the Swain and I run Redbeard Bikes in Brooklyn. I am writing my first book; read my work at [www.tinyletter.com/kasianikhamina](http://www.tinyletter.com/kasianikhamina).

—**Kasia Nikhamina** (Columbia College, 2007)

From the perspective of more than half a century, I can safely say, today, that it has been my association with the Institute's Program on Soviet Nationality Problems, chaired in the 1970s by Edward Allworth, that has produced the strongest impact on my research interests and on the course of my teaching career. The diverse background of my colleagues in the Program's seminars enriched the class discussions and deepened our understanding of the questions we were investigating. It was under Allworth's editorship that our first written works were published (*The Nationality Question in Soviet Central Asia*, Praeger, 1973). My dissertation, prepared under his guidance, would later appear under the title *Russian Nationalism and Ukraine: The Nationality Policy of the White Movement in the Russian Civil War* (University of Alberta, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1995). When a few years before retirement as a professor of history at Kingsborough Community College (CUNY), I began to think about writing a new book, it was again the nationality question that captivated my attention. This time, however, my research did not focus exclusively on the nationalities in the Russian Empire, but included the peoples of East Central Europe as well. The book, *Giuseppe Mazzini's Young Europe and the Birth of Modern Nationalism in the Slavic World* (University of Toronto Press,



William Moon



Kasia Nikhamina





Anna Procyk



Christopher Smart



Susanne Wengle

2019), benefited greatly from my encounters with people I befriended at Columbia many years ago and continue to meet at the Institute today.

—**Anna Procyk** (M.A., Political Science; Russian Institute Certificate, 1967; Ph.D., History, 1973)

It's 75 years for the Institute, and roughly 30 since I secured my certificate. With the Soviet Union collapsing as I was spell-checking my dissertation, I got a most unlikely job offer from (pre-Columbia) Jeffrey Sachs to lead a group of economic advisors working in the Russian Finance Ministry. That provided a back door into an unexpected career in Emerging Markets investing, starting with Russia's nascent stocks, then expanding to Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America. In 2009, I joined the Obama administration, realizing a long-standing ambition since my classes with Zbigniew Brzezinski and Marshall Shulman. I spent four years at the U.S. Treasury, where the Russian "reset" was quickly overshadowed by events in Greece, and then moved to the National Security Council, where Russian issues dominated all too much and the Donbas events triggered a systematic effort to unwind three decades of bilateral rapprochement. Currently in Boston, I run the Barings Investment Institute, a policy and analysis team that focuses on long-term forces that shape financial markets. Clearly, the U.S.-Russian relationship tops most lists these days. I am also lucky enough to have lunch with Bob Legvold from time to time and exchange tweets with @TimothyMFrye (I'm @csmart) to refresh my understanding of a subject that fascinates us all.

—**Christopher Smart** (M.I.A., 1988; Harriman Certificate, 1989; Ph.D., Political Science, 1993)

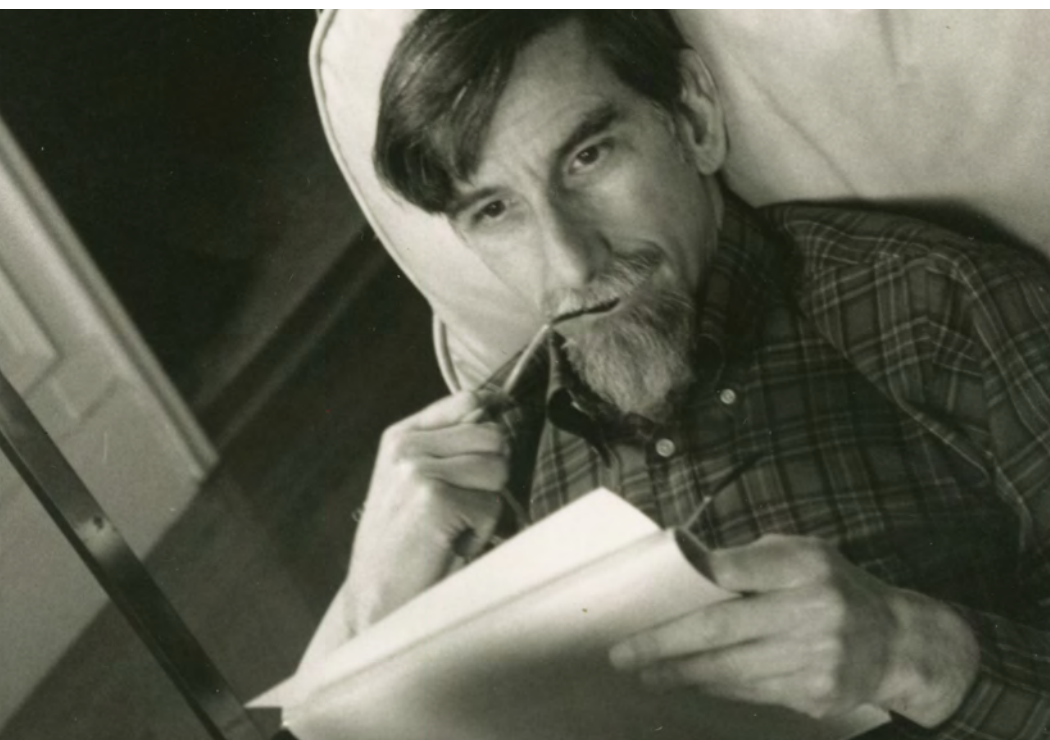
Between 2000 and 2002, I benefited greatly from the generosity and open-minded teaching at the Harriman Institute; I was a recipient of a Harriman Institute Junior Fellowship and a Harriman Institute/PepsiCo Foundation Fellowship, both awarded to students for their commitment to Russian and post-Soviet studies.

I recently published a new book, entitled *Black Earth, White Bread: A Technopolitical History of Russian Agriculture and Food*. Like all facets of daily life, the food that Russian farms produced and citizens ate—or, in some years, didn't eat—underwent radical shifts in the century between the Bolshevik Revolution and Vladimir Putin's presidency. The modernization of agriculture during this time is usually understood in terms of advances in farming methods. *Black Earth, White Bread* documents a far more complex story of the interactions between political projects, technological improvements, and daily life. Examining governance, production, consumption, nature, and the ensuing vulnerabilities of the agrifood system, the book reveals the intended and unintended consequences of Russian agricultural policies since 1917. Ultimately, the new history of Russian agriculture calls attention to ways in which states shape quotidian practices. The book is available at any bookseller and on the publisher's website, [uwpress.wisc.edu/books/6051.htm](http://uwpress.wisc.edu/books/6051.htm).

—**Susanne Wengle** (SIPA/Harriman Certificate, 2002)

# In Memoriam

Photo courtesy of  
the Jervis Family.



## Robert Jervis (1940–2021)

Robert Jervis, Adlai E. Stevenson Professor of International Politics and faculty member of the Harriman Institute, died at his home on December 9, 2021, in the presence of Kathe, his wife of 54 years, and his daughters, Alexa and Lisa.

Jervis's productivity was legendary, as was his support of younger scholars. He mentored hundreds of visiting international scholars throughout his career at Columbia from the time he joined the Department of Political Science in 1980.

In 2000–2001, Jervis served as president of the American Political Science Association. He was co-editor

of the Cornell Studies in Security Affairs, a series published by Cornell University Press, and a member of numerous editorial review boards for scholarly journals. His publications include *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, 1976); *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* (Cornell, 1989); *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton, 1997); *American Foreign Policy in a New Era* (Routledge, 2005); *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Fall of the Shah and Iraqi WMD* (Cornell, 2010); and several edited volumes and numerous articles in scholarly journals. His most recent book, *How Statesmen Think: The Psychology of*

*International Politics*, was brought out by Princeton University Press in 2017.

His professional accomplishments and scholarly influence are too vast to summarize, but one should mention the Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order (1990), election to the American Philosophical Society, and election to the National Academy of Sciences. His doctoral dissertation is still in print. He received the National Academy of Science's award for behavioral sciences contributions to avoiding nuclear war. He was also a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, the American Philosophical Society, the National Academy of Sciences, and the British Academy. Jervis chaired the Historical Review Panel for the Central Intelligence Agency for 10 years and served as an Intelligence Community associate.

Thomas J. Christensen, the James T. Shotwell Professor of International Relations at Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), and Keren Yarhi-Milo, dean of SIPA, co-authored "The Human Factor: How Robert Jervis Reshaped Our Understanding of International Politics" (*Foreign Affairs*, January 9, 2022).

See also the tributes posted to the websites of Columbia's political science department and the Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies.

Photo courtesy of  
Randall Butler.



#### Deborah Anne Martinsen (1954–2021)

After a courageous battle with cancer, Deborah Martinsen (Ph.D., Slavic Languages, 1989; associate dean of alumni education, Columbia College; adjunct associate professor of Russian and comparative literature, Columbia University) died peacefully at her home in Upper Manhattan on November 28, 2021.

Martinsen began teaching Literature Humanities at Columbia when still a graduate student. In the decades that followed, she carried on teaching it, trained others to teach it, and served as associate dean of the Core Curriculum. She worked tirelessly to ensure that the tradition of the Columbia Core continues and evolves. In 2011,

she received the Wm. Theodore de Bary Award for Distinguished Service to the Core Curriculum.

Martinsen was past president of the International Dostoevsky Society and former executive secretary of the North American Dostoevsky Society; author of *Surprised by Shame: Dostoevsky's Liars and Narrative Exposure* (OSU Narrative Series, 2003); editor of *Literary Journals in Imperial Russia* (Cambridge, 1997); co-editor, with Irina Reyfman and Cathy Popkin, of *Teaching Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Belknap* (Academic Studies Press, 2014); and co-editor, with Olga Maiorova, of *Dostoevsky in Context* (Cambridge,

2016). In 2016, she received the Donald Barton Johnson Award for best essay published in *Nabokov Studies* that year: “*Lolita* as Petersburg Text.” In 2012, she was awarded the *Lehrpreis zur Förderung von Innovationen in der Lehre* from the University of Leuphana for her Skype class “Love and Madness: Reading Nabokov’s *Lolita*.”

During her illness Martinsen worked on completing two book manuscripts. Her *Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment: A Reader's Guide* was published by Academic Studies Press in February 2022. The book builds on her decades of teaching Dostoevsky’s novel in the Columbia Core and teaching others how to teach the novel. It should come as no surprise that Martinsen, the consummate teacher and scholar, would pen the ultimate reader’s guide, a book for teachers and readers. The second book, *A Very Short Introduction to Dostoevsky*, will be published by Oxford University Press.

In addition to her scholarly and professional accomplishments, Deborah Martinsen will be remembered particularly for her generous mentorship and her rare gift for friendship. She was a long-standing and vital member of the Harriman faculty.

The North American Dostoevsky Society ([dostoevsky.org](http://dostoevsky.org)) has set up a memorial page. The Harriman Institute, in cooperation with the Society, held a virtual book panel on April 1, 2022, to discuss Martinsen’s book on *Crime and Punishment*. The video is available on the Harriman YouTube channel.





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