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UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH CONFERENCE
ON SLAVIC AND EAST/CENTRAL EUROPEAN
STUDIES**

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Eric Draper

Major: History, UCLA

emd22687@ucla.edu

“Beards and Boyars: A Reformation of the Russian Nobility”

The Russian nobility at the close of the eighteenth-century was defined by completely different social and cultural norms than that of its Muscovite predecessors. Peter the Great has been credited with the drastic transformation of the Russian nobility in such an incredibly short period of time. This paper explores the extent to which Peter was truly responsible for the changes that came about and how well these changes reflected his initial intentions.

An analysis of Peter’s laws and contemporary accounts of eighteenth-century Russia provides an insightful view of this period. The accounts of foreigners in Russia especially serve as a barometer for the extent of the importation of western customs and fashions. Contrasting these accounts with Peter’s laws and actions gives rise to something of contradiction indicating that Peter had neither intended such an indiscriminate adoption of all things western nor a correlating contempt for native values. The roots of this process, however, can be found in Peter’s own reforms. In searching for an exact cause, Peter’s ending of the precedence-based *mestnichestvo* system cannot be overlooked. By forcing the nobility into an unstable environment in which its previous position of dominance was challenged, Peter forced the nobility both to adapt to his new system and also to redefine itself. It is in this redefinition that we see an increasing dichotomy in society between nobles and peasants based on the changing cultural values of the former.

Susan Freese

UCLA Flagship Fellow

sefreese@gmail.com

“Russian Identity: The Historical Role of Westerners and Slavophiles and Current Political Implications”

Throughout Russia’s history, its national identity has been torn between Russia being a European country, an Asian country, or something completely different. Following the 250 years of

Mongolian control, known as the Tarter Yoke, Russian development lagged far behind Europe. Peter the Great and Catherine the Great rushed to modernize the country using a European model. But after the War of 1812, Russians became disillusioned with France and began searching for their own individual identity apart from Europe. During this period two distinct intellectual movements developed: Slavophilia and Eurasianism (group known as the Westerners). The Slavophiles denounced Western culture and the westernizations by Peter the Great and Catherine the Great. They instead insisted that Russia was a unique country that should follow a more natural and historical path of Russian development emphasizing Russian qualities of collectiveness, community and spirituality. The Westerners, on the other hand, believed that Russia should follow the European model of development and should embrace the Western characteristics of individualism, acquisitiveness and materialism. This paper will examine these two positions. In particular it will look at leading figures on both sides including: Peter the Great, Chaadaev, Turgenev, Dostoevsky and Mussorgsky. Finally, it will analyze at the current historical implications of these movements by examining the Putin course and the role that these two movements play in current Russian national identity and political discourse.

Alice Lu

Major: Political Science, Minor: Russian Studies,
UCI alu2@uci.edu

“Citizen Manipulation of the Stalinist Purges”

The Stalinist Purges in the Soviet Union were a time of political repression, severe censorship, and large-scale persecution of Soviet citizens that took place from 1934-1938 throughout the First and Second Five-Year Plans. The purges were orchestrated by Soviet leader Joseph Stalin as a means to consolidate power, achieve total state control over society, and quash potential opposition to his authority. Under the purges, Soviet government and secret police repressed dissatisfied peasants, deported ethnic minorities, and made irrational arrests of millions of citizens who were then sent away to prison camps. Stalin justified his actions by labeling these victims as “anti-Soviet elements” and “enemies of the people.” During this time, the constant threat of an omnipresent secret police gave rise to a pervasive cloud of fear, suspicion and mass paranoia that hung over the general population. Meanwhile, ordinary citizens also participated in these campaigns, feeding off of each others fear and paranoia for their own gains. Although the original purpose of the purges was political repression to eliminate government opposition, Soviet citizens manipulated this system by turning the purges into a tool to further their own interests. Denunciations were made at the expense of others, for career advancement, to further a personal agenda, for revenge, in the interest of self preservation, or simply out of fear. Yet other denunciations were made by citizens who were convinced that dissenters should be reported in order to ensure the well being of the communist state.

Ken Martinez

Major: Slavic Languages and Literatures, UCSB

Kmartinez68@gmail.com

“Merit and Mobility in Russia and the Former Soviet Union”

The history of Russia has had many figures, reformers and traditionalists, tyrants and libertarians, who have had a considerable effect on the social and economic mobility of ordinary Russians. An interesting way to examine Russian history and mobility is in the context of merit, or advancement based on one’s abilities. Understanding what role merit has had to play in mobility helps give a special insight into current issues and concerns in Russia today, and helps explain some paradoxes of the “riddle wrapped in a mystery”. My presentation will begin with an overview of notable events in Russian history, including Peter the Great’s table of ranks, then transition to the mis-incentivized economy of the Soviet Union, and finally continue on to modern post-soviet Russia. Soviet and post-soviet Russia presents an incredibly interesting case to examine. The Soviet Union’s unique economic environment alone is a unique phenomenon worthy of consideration, but the focus of this portion of the presentation is on its relationship to the social and economic mobility in Russia. The post-communist transition and privatization that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in large part created the current state of affairs in Russia. The final portion of the presentation will discuss the relationship of merit and mobility in modern Russia and compare it to soviet conditions. This discussion will also be supplemented with interviews of university students based throughout Russia.

Brent P. Woo

Major: Linguistics, Minors: Russian Language and Philosophy, UCLA

bpwoo@ucla.edu

“Letters of Sergei Rachmaninoff: Between Symphonic Failure and Concerto Success”

Sergei Rachmaninoff’s Symphony No. 1 is notable for plunging him into a deep depression lasting 3 years, in which lethargy and apathy plagued his compositions and haunted his life, due to the Symphony’s utter critical failure. Subsequently, he wrote his Piano Concerto No. 2, which became one of his most loved and popular pieces, enduring still to this day. We are fortunate to have a large corpus of his letters preserved and through these much can be found about his relationship with contemporaries and his music. He wrote many letters in Russian to various correspondents, analysis of which reveals an intimate embodiment of his emotional disparity between debilitating depression and euphoric success. Through making linguistic comparisons between letters directly and indirectly related to the composition process of both his Symphony and the Concerto, I have found that he was emotionally, as well as physically, drained for a long period of time in which his creative and social motivations were stifled. Also, his letters show an emotional depth that helps explain several elements within the composition themselves, as he comments on the instrumentation and the melody or harmony. It is generally understood that the Symphony was the catalyst throwing him into depression, but he also writes about several other unfortunate incidents of the time that may have contributed. Although Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 2 is primarily famous for its soaring melodies and beautiful orchestration, it should

be recognized that the history and emotional charge behind it make its accomplishment that much more significant.

Rachel M. Casselman

Major: Russian Language and Literature, Minor: Political Science, UCLA

rookie36@ucla.edu

“Shostakovich and Soviet Censorship”

Dmitri Dmitrivich Shostakovich was one of the most controversial Soviet artists of the 20th century and of the Stalin era. Stalinism marks a time where the Russia’s souls became hopeless, lost, and frightened. Unfortunately, artistic freedom became drastically restricted under Stalin and thus one could not fully explore the sorrow of contemporary Russia in their work because of the risk of public humiliation or death. This censorship caused artists to produce new ways to incorporate their personal opinions into their work. Throughout the years, Shostakovich has been the topic of debate regarding his loyalty to the state. Some argue that he wove anti-Soviet messages into his music whereas others counter that his music represents genuine party loyalty. Regardless of these debates, Shostakovich was denounced by the government in 1936 and again in 1948 for possible anti-Soviet themes in his music. During World War II, which lies in between Shostakovich’s two denouncements, the composer played an important role in Soviet culture. Residing in Leningrad, he endured the pain and the horror that came from the blockade. It was during this time that he created his Seventh Symphony that he eventually titled *Leningrad*. My presentation examines the government’s position on Shostakovich starting from his denouncement, through WWII until his second denouncement in 1948. The progression of his career reveals the power of music as a form of expression during the Soviet Union.

Zachary Murphy King

Major: English, Minor: Music, Slavic Languages and Literatures, UCSB

zack_king@umail.ucsb.edu

“Dissident Tones: Dmitri Shostakovich's Political Music”

Russian composer Dmitri Dmitrievich Shostakovich has become one of the most popular composers of the twentieth century. Spanning from his first musical successes to long after his death, Shostakovich has been, in the West and in Russia, variously, a Russian hero, a Soviet hack, a secret dissident, a political coward, communist victim, and any number of epithets between. A small critical industry interprets his musical melodies as pro- and anti- Soviet. The argument over Shostakovich the musical symbolist now often eclipses that of the musicologist’s standard critical fare of motifs and modulations. The one collection of articles to draw up a wide range musicological responses to Shostakovich’s music, David Fanning’s *Shostakovich Studies*, begins with what is a kind of apology for the fact that this book is not another collection of speculative claims about Shostakovich’s music and politics. Moreover, there is little precedent in music history for the frantic search for “the real Shostakovich” and “the real meaning” of his

works. While, in critical articles, we still debate Stravinsky's or Wagner's obnoxious statements about their own music, in the concert halls the vast majority of other composers are spared of polemics, political and social debates regarding their music. And yet beyond the polemics of "Shostakovich the dissident", his music does seem to ask for interpretation in concrete moral and narrative terms. This tendency of his music to demand our interpretation, to hint at a form of meaning that cannot be represented in notes alone, is the topic I examine in this paper.

Daria Thomas

Major: Russian Studies, Pasadena City College

daria_thomaso5@yahoo.com

"Russian Cultural Influence on American Culture"

Russian cultural influence on the American culture began more than 150 years ago. During the last two centuries Russian culture has enriched, deepened, and even transformed American culture in important ways. It is impossible to think of cultural wealth of modern American music, dance, theater, film, and literature without thinking of the enormous contributions of Rubenstein, Tchaikovsky, Balanchine, Stanislavsky, Mikhail Chekhov, Eisenstein, and Joseph Brodsky. The artistic legacy of these great artists that came out of Russia and the Soviet Union is carried on in the arts of the 21st century America. Russian cultural influence on American audience began during the latter half of the 19th century. History of the Russian musical virtuosos in America started with Anton Rubinstein's arrival to the United States in 1872. Rubinstein's tour, which consisted of 215 recitals in 239 days, was important because, he brought the modern piano repertoire to small towns and regions where there would have been little opportunity for concerts of classical music. Rubinstein helped shaped American musical tastes because there was grandeur, an intensely passionate, spontaneous quality in his playing that captivated American audiences. His tour concluded with the Boston premier of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto in 1875. This was the first time Americans would hear Tchaikovsky's music. In 1891 Tchaikovsky was invited to participate in the grand opening of the Carnegie-Hall in New York. Following recitals in New York, Washington, Philadelphia and Baltimore, which Tchaikovsky had conducted himself, he wrote home excitedly: "В Америке я нашёл свою публику...".

Alyssa Marie Haerle

Major: Political Science, UCLA

ahaerle@ucla.edu

"Filling the Vacuum: Explaining the Persistence of the Large Informal Economy in Post-Communist Russia"

It is estimated that around half of Russia's gross domestic product is not produced in the formal sector of the economy. This informal sector of the economy, also termed as extralegal economic activity or the black market, has constituted a large part of Russia's economic activity since at

least the collapse of the Soviet Union and communism. In the 1990s, the predominant theory was that this informal economy, as well as the mafia and organized crime that “regulated” it, served as a temporary form of pre-capitalism, an intermediary step that filled the gaps left by the collapse of communism. But with the growth the Russian economy achieved under the presidency of Vladimir Putin, why did this informal sector not significantly reduce in percentage of GDP? Why does it still form a near majority? In exploring the political, domestic, and economic voids the informal sector has filled since the collapse of communism, I will also explore reasons as to why the informal sector still composes a large part of the Russian economy, including the mafia, the oligarchs, the government, the legacy of the communist economy, the current financial crisis, and the difficulty in attaining accurate data about the extent of the informal sector. Given the combined weighted influence of each of these factors, I believe that the government is the greatest factor in hindering the significant reduction of the informal economy in that it has failed to offer viable alternatives to fill the voids currently occupied by the informal economy.

Syuzanna Adamyan

Double major: International Development Studies and Russian Language and Literature, UCLA
suzyadamyan@ucla.edu

“Gender Parity and Disparity in the Former Soviet Union and in the Post Communist Russia”

This study analyzes gender parity and gender disparity in the former Soviet Union and in the post communist Russia. Furthermore, this research focuses from the period of post World War II through post Soviet collapse and examines the sources of gender equity and inequality during the reign of communism, yet compares with the post communist Russia. This paper’s focus will examine in depth gender and income disparities, and poverty rates among post-Soviet Russia. Particularly, it will focus and analyze the women’s position in the society and the role they play in that society. Furthermore, it will describe the women’s position during the political and economic reforms called “perestroika” introduced in the mid 1980s by the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. As a result, women were heavily affected by these restructuring programs. By providing fewer consumer goods and by keeping services such as housing, public health, and child care residual, perestroika brought a heavier daily burden for the working women. Being a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a member of the G8 club of the world’s leading industrialized nations on the one hand, Russia has one of the highest economic growth rates in the world. Yet, Russia still faces with the problem of poverty, particularly existing poverty in the regional areas. Moreover, this paper will present and evaluate the important targets of the Millennium Development Goals for the Russian Federation. Eventually, this study will propose alternative and more effective strategies that will design policies to address the critical issues to develop equality for Russia’s women.

Morgan Z. Menzies

Major: Linguistics, Minor: Slavic Studies, UCSB

mmenzies@umail.ucsb.edu

“Anna Politkovskaya: A Case Study of Russian Suppression of Freedom of Speech”

Anna Politkovskaya was an American-born Russian journalist and human rights activist. She went to incredible lengths to give a voice to those who had none, and in 2006, paid for this with her life. Politkovskaya’s honest reporting and strong opposition to Putin and the Kremlin was unfavorable to those in power in Russia. When Anna Politkovskaya was assassinated, Putin called her reporting insignificant. The Committee to Protect Journalists put it best, saying Putin’s comment “believes his commitment to justice.” Worst of all, Politkovskaya’s heroism has been condemned by the very people who should have been her champions; the Russians not in positions of power were also displeased with her vexatious reporting. The corruption she exposed struck a nerve with the people of Russia, a nerve that’s sensitivity dates back to the times of the KGB. Although modern day Russia is technically a republic, with elections and a supposed system of checks and balances, the Russian population lacks freedom of speech. The current Russian government has the Russian population stuck in a soviet mentality, where you must keep your mouth shut. Even though she was a prominent journalist, her voice was still stifled, scaring others into silence. Anna Politkovskaya is a prime example of what happens in Russia when your opinions misalign with those of the powerful.

Brandy Deminna

Major: English and Comparative Literature, Minor: Slavic Studies, UCSB

bdeminna@umail.ucsb.edu

“The Relationship of the Creditor and Debtor in *Crime and Punishment* Analyzed through Friedrich Nietzsche and Theodore Reik”

In my presentation I seek to prove that Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* is not a story set purely in the realm of “reality” but is a psychological description of the main character, Raskolnikov. Raskolnikov is a dichotomous character and has two contrasting identities. He encounters these identities in the novel as characters. These characters, Marmeladov and Svidrigaylov, are doppelgangers of Raskolnikov’s dichotomous nature and represent his masochist and sadist tendencies. In the psychological sense, Raskolnikov is both creditor and debtor as well as both sadist and masochist. In order to explain the creditor/debtor relationship in Raskolnikov’s opposing characteristic qualities and how it works in the novel as a whole, I employ the use of Nietzsche’s creditor/debtor relationship theory as presented in his work *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Dissecting Raskolnikov’s character in this manner shines a light on the reasons for his murdering the pawnbroker who, in his poverty, he relies on for funds. Not only do I employ Nietzsche’s theory as a mode of literary criticism but I also discuss psychoanalysis in that same manner with a special focus on Sigmund Freud and Theodore Reik. We will look to Theodore Reik’s *The Compulsion to Confess* to learn why a criminal may return

to the scene of a crime, like Raskolnikov does, and to Freud who would treat Raskolnikov as a victim of trauma.

Teodora Nikolova

Major: Philosophy, Minor: Slavic Literatures, UCSB teodora.nikolaeva@gmail.com

“The Transformation of Russian Literature via Translation”

When reading a text originally written in a different language, the common reader tends to overlook, even ignore the individual responsible for translating it. However, one should always keep in mind that translation plays a highly influential and important role in literature, in many cases shaping the way a work is interpreted, understood and experienced. The issue of translation is sometimes brought to attention if a translation is either particularly ‘bad’ or when a better one has been made, yet further attention to it seems to concern only those personally interested. My paper brings attention to the translation of Russian literature into English, specifically focusing on Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. It will present a historical chronology of some of the most noted individuals responsible for translating his novel into the English language. In addition, I will mention each translator’s positive and negative contributions to the way his work was interpreted as well as some of the biggest problems they faced due to the nature of translating itself. The importance of studying a Slavic language is highly relevant since passages serving as examples will be presented in Russian and in English, making the important differences between each much easier to discern if one has a sufficient understanding of the workings of the Russian language. Finally, I wish to present a translation of the text into Bulgarian in order to show how the shift from one Slavic language to another is much easier to make without losing as many of the original language’s natural nuances.

Yelena Teplitskaya

Major: English. UCI

teplitsy@gmail.com

“Breaking Through Creative Restraint in Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*”

Written during Stalin’s reign, Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita* alludes to many of the stifling restrictions placed on the Soviet people at this time. Bulgakov himself experienced one of these restrictions, literary censorship, while writing this novel, even burning the manuscript before ultimately rewriting it. In the novel, Bulgakov illustrates the absurd theatricality of the Soviet regime by analogizing it to the cheap tricks of Satan (Woland) and his gang. Through this metaphor, the atheist, anti-supernatural Soviet system is aligned both with evil and falsity. Ironically, Woland’s supernatural powers are far from wholly evil. Even though the Soviet regime is aligned with the more traditional, callous idea of Satan, Woland also proves to be one of the few characters in the novel, who recognizes honesty and condemns malicious or fraudulent behavior by using his powers against it. By interjecting magic and the supernatural into a society, which vehemently denies their existence, Bulgakov liberates his text and its

victimized characters from the contemporary literary censorship and restrictions of the Soviet Union. In the more apparent sense, the presence of Woland's supernatural gang helps Bulgakov's main character, the Master, and his lover, Margarita, achieve peace by rejuvenating his manuscript about Pontius Pilate. Woland poignantly neutralizes the criticism and negativity the Master and Margarita endure for the Master's non-conventional portrayal of Pilate and Christ with his incredible, supernatural powers. Even more significantly, Bulgakov infuses the characters in his novel with magical powers in order to break through the Soviet censorship, which forbids them and ultimately to retain his creative license.

Elena Kokhanovski

Double Major: Global Studies and Slavic Studies, UCSB

elena01@umail.ucsb.edu

“The Many Facades of the Matryoshka Doll”

The Matryoshka doll is Russia's most popular souvenir and cultural icon. The concept was influenced by a Japanese doll portraying a popular fairy tale, Fukurokuju. The Russian artist Sergei Maliutin first drew the doll and then it was first hand crafted by a popular wood maker, Vassiliy Zviozdochkin. Soon the doll was displayed at various art exhibits, which immediately gained the doll recognition worldwide. The doll itself goes through a complex series of processes to make the base dolls out of wood, taking precise skill to craft them before they can even begin to be painted. Throughout its conception, the doll has had many different designs, cultural influences, and meanings. The specific design and names of dolls is based on the city where the doll is made. Areas with the most popular styles include Sergiyev Posad, Semionovo, Polkhovskiy Maidan, and Kirov. But the most typical Matryoshka doll was done in the Semionovo style. The painters of Semionovo use aniline dyes, a colorless, oily, slightly water-soluble liquid, where a lot of unpainted space was left. The style included light touches of the brush mark the outlines of the face, eyes, and lips as well as rosy cheeks. The dolls had a drawn head and hands, a skirt, an apron, and a scarf, all surrounded by a simple floral design. Although only incorporated into Russian culture since the 1890s, it is still one of Russian's famous symbols for its culture.

Mariya Bunenko

Double major: Economics and Russian Studies, UCLA

bunenko@gmail.com

“The Dysfunctional Structure of the Ukrainian Government”

The Orange Revolution of 2004 brought many positive changes for both the Ukrainian people and the country's progress toward a more democratic society. A public outcry for the ousting of the former corrupt government symbolized the ushering in of a new era for Ukrainian politics, society, and civic engagement. Moreover, the result was viewed by many as an attempt to divorce Ukraine from the overbearing sphere of influence of its neighbor, Russia. However, one

major compromise of the Revolution has proven ruinous to the betterment and development of Ukraine: the limitation of presidential powers to solely the power of veto and the right to dissolve the parliament. In his five years in office, Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko dissolved parliament twice, in 2007 and in 2008. These dissolutions were an attempt to curb the absurd inter-parliamentary conflicts over power; however, the outcome was bleak, as little changed in the modus operandi of the Ukrainian government. In 2009, while negotiating gas contracts with Russia, the Ukrainian prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko gave the hope of governmental cohesion cause for alarm, and the dissonance between the words of the Ukrainian president and the prime minister became incredibly palpable. The “gas war” was just another manifestation of the discord within government, proving that a strong government is necessarily a united government; Ukraine, on the other hand, was and still is being pulled in two opposing directions. This struggle within the leadership is even more pernicious for Ukraine within the context of an economic crisis, when the country is most in need of a cohesive, decisive, and democratic government.

Krystyna V Shamova

Major: Neuroscience, Minor: Russian Literature, UCLA

kshamova@ucla.edu

“Chernobyl: World’s Most Tragic Nuclear Disaster”

The purpose of this presentation is to inform the audience about the explosion of a reactor at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant. This explosion became the world’s worst nuclear accident. After a brief discussion of Chernobyl before the explosion, we will examine the consequences of radioactive fallout. The World Health Organization estimates that 9,700 people will eventually die of the disaster’s aftereffects. Other organizations, including Greenpeace, predict that the total will be nine times higher. Furthermore, the event caused immeasurable ecological and environmental damage, the true effects of which will be experienced by future generations. Additional resources affirm that 200 times more radioactive contamination had been released into the air than the combined radiation released by the atomic bombs exploded over Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II in 1945. Other sources report that the nuclear meltdown resulted in the release of millions of the curies of radio nuclides such as iodine-131, cesium-137, and strontium-90. This radioactivity was spread by the wind over Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine and soon reached as far as France and Italy. The Soviet government tried to cover-up the accident that occurred in April 26, 1986. However, on April 28, Swedish monitoring stations reported abnormally high levels of wind-transported radioactivity and pressed for an explanation. Ironically, the exclusion zone that remains effectively free of modern human habitation has become Europe’s largest natural sanctuary, with recorded emergence of a rebounding population of deer, moose, and wild boar, among others.

Zane Michael Johnston

Double major: International Studies and Biology, UCSD

zane.johnston@gmail.com

“Doubling” and Abstraction of Rational Reality: Shakespeare, Gogol, and the Fate of the Soul

This paper will examine an apparent and striking commonality between Gogol's *The Inspector General* and Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, focusing on “doubling,” and the double layering of linguistic and stylistic elements within the texts of the plays. This “doubling,” creates comedy, moves the plot forward, and exposes striking and hidden truths about human nature. As a literary device, “doubling” adds to the hyperbole and absurdity of both plays and creates insightful art that transcends the simple social criticism interpretation. “Doubling” purposefully takes the rationality out of reality. The logical inconsistencies that both Gogol and Shakespeare love to employ connects and sets apart their plays and makes them everlastingly relevant.

To clarify, by “doubling” I mean a tragic sameness (everyone thinks and acts the same), the split or the double personalities of officials, double identities (one character may be perceived as being someone else), puns and words with double meanings, and the double layers of language. In his play, *The Inspector General*, Gogol puts the classical Latin elements of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* to work, drawing heavily upon the idea of comedy being dictated by rapid pace and of events progressing and spiraling out of control quickly from the very onset of the play. Similar themes include mistaken identity, situational absurdity, objects as plot devices, and a revelatory masking and un-masking of characters' true motivations and underlying insecurities. However, all themes point towards the dualism that exists within the human soul and how the internal battle between good and evil causes great confusion within human nature (due to the numerous corrupting elements of the modern world).

Jonathan Tram

Double major: English Literature and Chemistry, UCSD

jttram@gmail.com

“Bridging Gogol and Faulkner: An Analysis of Narrative Technique”

By comparing the narrative techniques (respectively, *skaz* and stream of consciousness) in Nikolai Gogol's two short stories, *The Overcoat* and *The Nose*, and William Faulkner's southern epic, *As I Lay Dying*, we observe two different methods being employed to achieve a similar effect. Nikolai Gogol's *skaz* immerses the reader in the plot and then obscures that plot. Faulkner's stream of consciousness immerses the reader in the characters' minds. Both narrative styles have a folksy quality that disarms the reader but also immerses the reader in the narration itself, so that the plot (in Gogol) or characters (in Faulkner) then impact him or her more strongly as weighty themes emerge. In terms of disarming the reader, Faulkner fluctuates between very different character voices, while Gogol's *skaz* itself intrudes on the plot. Faulkner and Gogol both layer these narrator voices on the one hand to present a plot, and on the other to obscure the plot itself (in Gogol) or the other characters' human emotions (in Faulkner). The narrators' character “objectifications”—wherein characters are foiled by inanimate objects—function to depict characters and plots as trivial and obscure the underlying human emotions, which

ultimately impact the reader. Paradoxically, the reader's immersion in the narration enables him or her to realize the unreliability of said narration. The result is that the immersion in the narration itself and the disarming effect it has on the reader ultimately enables the themes, despite and because of their obscured quality, to impact the reader in a serious way.

Tom Holloman

Major: Claire Trevor School of the Arts; Drama, UCI

tholloma@uci.edu

“Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard*: The Tragedy of Writing Comedy”

Anton Chekhov wrote *The Cherry Orchard* as a comedy, but when Konstantin Stanislavsky first produced the play in 1904, he wrote to Chekhov: “It is not a comedy — it is a tragedy no matter if you do indicate a way out into a better world in the last act...when I read it for the second time...I wept like a woman...for the ordinary person this is a tragedy.” Stanislavsky was not alone in feeling this way; most contemporary productions treat the play as a tragedy, which begs the question: what would cause Chekhov to believe he had written a comedy?

A comedy is typically defined as a type of play that is meant to entertain and inspire, typically starting in disarray and ending in harmony. Indeed, there are some comedic elements in the play, such as Gayev’s ranting about billiards, and Firs’s senile ramblings. But are these comedic sprinklings enough to define the play a comedy, or are they natural reactions that arise from the impending pressure of the situation? Any joke a character makes is an attempt to distract the others from their pain, a type of coping mechanism. Anyone who has endured hardship appreciates fully the notion of “you laugh to keep from crying.” Chekhov may have intended a comedy, but what resulted is one of the most tragic plays of the twentieth century; people who see this play appreciate that tragedy entirely. Stanislavsky himself said, “for the ordinary person this is a tragedy.”

Igor Hiller

Double major: Political Science and Slavic Languages and Literatures, UCSB

igorhiller@gmail.com

“Russian Anecdotes - Not Just a Laughing Matter”

Russian *anekdoty*, or anecdotes, are the most popular form of humor in Russian culture. Where in American culture, an anecdote means a recollection, in Russian and Slavic culture, an anecdote is a funny story or joke, which usually relies on wordplay, in addition to societal or historical knowledge. Many anecdotes can be seen as societal inside jokes. Their topics run the gamut, from Soviet society to New Russians, and from Lenin to Putin. They also vary in color, from family-friendly to extremely inappropriate. An example: A soldier runs up to Vasiliy Ivanovich Чапаев, the commander of the Red Army. «Василий Иванович, белого бзяли!» - «Молодцы! Сколькo бутылок?» (“Vasiliy Ivanovich, we got a white!” “Great job! How many bottles?”). This example highlights not only the wordplay and historical knowledge aspects of an

anecdote, but also the difficulty in translating them while keeping the humor intact. Ultimately, an anecdote is a window into the Russian soul. To be able to speak eloquently, especially at great length, is an important skill to have in Russian culture. At birthday parties or weddings, guests expect to hear long toasts, many of which will be peppered with anecdotes. When groups of friends come together, chances are many an anecdote will be heard, especially once the beer or vodka begins to flow. My presentation will highlight some major types of anecdotes, their significance in Russian culture, and what they say about the Russian sense of humor.

Erin M. Hutchinson

Double major: History and Global Studies, Minor in Russian, Arizona State University
erin.hutchinson@asu.edu

“Russian in Transition: Language Policy, Education, and Practice in Armenia”

This paper will examine the presence of the Russian language in Armenia and how Armenians have exploited it as a tool to their own advantage, as well as areas in which the pragmatic use of Russian for survival has come into conflict with the desire to preserve Armenian identity. The status of Russian in Armenia today is a complicated one. On one hand, the legacy of the Soviet period has given Russian a strong position in Armenia. At the same time, the backlash against years of pro-Russian policies was strong, resulting in the controversial decision to close all of Armenia’s Russian-language schools shortly after independence. Still, many Armenians continue to speak Russian as a native language. Overall, despite nationalist sentiment that encourages the use of the Armenian language, few of the Armenians I interviewed expressed great resentment towards Russian. Rather, they emphasized the economic, political, and cultural connections between Armenia and other CIS nations and the continued need to use Russian as an avenue to access global learning and culture. Speaking a language with only six to seven million speakers worldwide, Armenians simply cannot afford to relinquish the advantages of Russian, which is the eighth most spoken language in the world. The desire for national survival does not simply manifest itself in promotion of the national language. The Russian language itself is a tool to promote Armenian national survival.

Maryia Kryvaruchka

Double major: Linguistics and Psychology, Minor: Russian Language, UCLA
mkryvaruchka@ucla.edu

“The Russian Accent in America: Linguistics, Stigma, and Pride”

Almost everyone can pinpoint a person as having an accent in their native language, yet it is often difficult to objectively define what an accent really is. This presentation clarifies the definition of the Russian accent in adult American immigrants linguistically and sociologically, analyzing second language acquisition by using previous research and new data.

Examples of phonetic, syntactic and phonological errors commonly occurring in second language speech will be provided and its cultural stratifications in America discussed.

Difficulties of Russian speakers in learning idiomatic expressions and the occurrence of syntactic errors such as the omission of articles “a” and “the” in second language English will be explained by a Russian/English comparison and the discussion of language interference. The reason why a Russian accent is perceived in a certain way by the American listener and how its development progresses throughout language acquisition will be discussed through an explanation of second language development. Using a survey study of Russian-speaking adult American immigrants, data will be presented showing the particular difficulties reported in learning English as a second language, displaying statistics of second language acquisition and accent development. Comparing this data to previous research done on different types of accents, such as the phonetic versus the phonological, the Russian accent will be defined objectively through its different phases as well as discussed in terms of its perception in American society.

Fiona Hay

Double major: Linguistics and Psychology, UCLA

fhay@ucla.edu

“Learning Russian as a Second Language: Common Difficulties and Teaching Strategies”

Learning Russian as a second language is an extremely demanding task for the majority of English speakers. There are many intricacies of Russian that English speakers encounter: novel sounds, sequences of sounds (especially consonants), and more complicated syntax including word endings. Research on English speakers has found that there are many strategies that may help second language learners of Russian to more effectively learn, and possibly to more effectively remember vocabulary and syntax. Some language learning strategies that have been proposed over the years that language learners use while learning a second language include metacognitive strategies-used when planning or evaluating learning, cognitive strategies-used for manipulation of learning materials, and social-affective strategies-asking for help in a task or working cooperatively to learn. Other studies have shown that mnemonic techniques, reading strategies, and more can help reading comprehension in second language learners.

Learning the gender of Russian nouns is another common difficulty of Russian learners, especially for those nouns, which end in the soft sign (-Ь) where the gender is not transparent. One study has found that by learning diminutives of Russian nouns, which more transparently show the gender of the noun, students can more effectively learn the noun and how to match the preceding adjectives. These and other strategies can possibly make the task of learning Russian a more effective process and a less harrowing one for students.

Clara S. Popov

Major: Japanese, UCLA

uclaclara@ucla.edu

“Bronislaw Pilsudski and His Groundbreaking Study on the Indigenous Ainu Culture of Japan”

The Ainu people are an ethnic group indigenous to the Hokkaido island of Japan, Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. Currently there are less than a 100 members of purebred Ainu descent and in 1996, there were only 15 people remaining who spoke the Ainu language. Not much information has been gathered about the Ainu culture as a result of a long-standing Japanese policy of integration, and in today's process of globalization it is very important to preserve small ethnic groups like the Ainu in order to understand our own roots and beginnings and also to conserve the uniqueness of the world. One man who made it a goal to record every aspect of the Ainu life was Bronislaw Pilsudski, a self-made Polish ethnographer, whose involvement in this interesting culture is often left unknown. By utilizing primary sources left by Pilsudski himself, as well as other sources, I have been able to show how much we actually owe to this extraordinary man. As a result of his efforts, the endangered language, songs, legends and culture of the Ainu can be saved for posterity. By bringing to light the colorful culture of the Ainu, as well as the plight facing their survival in the world, it is hoped that an increase in awareness will lead to an increase in conversation efforts as well as an interest in a truly unique society of people.

Alex Wang

Double major: Slavic Languages & Literature and German, UCSB

alex01@umail.ucsb.edu

“Bilateral Cultural and Economic Relations between the Czech Republic and Taiwan”

The Czech Republic and Taiwan is currently enjoying flourishing ties between the two countries. The period of time of the transformation of the early 1990's with the fall of the Soviet Union coincided with Taiwan's rapid transition to a Democratic political system. This has resulted in both the Czech Republic and Taiwan having undergone both rapid and extensive changes. These changes have affected their respective sociopolitical and economic state, which has created opportunities for prosperity and mutual collaboration, but also challenges and obstacles that can offset such potential gains. In addition, factors including the stable economic and political environment, highly skilled labor force and central location within the EU market attract Taiwanese companies to the Republic. The Czech Republic in this respect serves as a gateway into the Eastern European market. Interests in cultural preservation for both countries as well as economic development has also led to numerous, cultural exchanges, festivals, events, historical art exhibitions, and business and technology symposiums.

This research endeavors to explore the economic and cultural relations between the Czech Republic and Taiwan, which will render insights on the Republic's transitional economy, efforts at cultural preservation and foreign policy.

Olga T. Dubrovskaya

Double major: Microbiology and Slavic Studies, UCSB odubrovskaya@umail.ucsb.edu

“Mendeleev and the Legacy of Russian Science”

Russian scientists can be attributed to some of the most important and groundbreaking discoveries ever made. In particular, one scientist stands above the rest with his contribution to chemistry. Dmitrii Ivanovich Mendeleev's work can still be found in every laboratory, classroom, and lecture hall even though it was developed in the 19th century. This of course is the periodic table. Mendeleev brought together the chemical properties of known elements and arranged them in a way that allowed them to be studied more to find new patterns and properties. This table united the science community more and allowed for better communication between chemists. This table shows onlookers the beauty of nature, and how natural elements contain intricate patterns and properties that can be predicted. One of the most amazing features of this table is that it has stood the test of time. Even with the discoveries of new elements, the table has been able to accommodate it and predict the physical and chemical properties. Even the elements that scientists have engineered that do not occur in nature have made their own niche in the table. Mendeleev's table is used everyday for a variety of reasons by physicists, chemists, biologists, and students. It is a student's best friend and a chemist's loyal assistant. Mendeleev produced a powerful tool that has unrivaled power in science. Mendeleev foresaw that new elements were going to be discovered and made the table flexible to new additions. Its strength comes from its versatility and its feasibility. A person can look at an element and find out unimaginable amounts of information just from Mendeleev's table.

Yevgenia Volfson

Double major: Political Science and Slavic Studies, UCSB

volfson@umail.ucsb.edu

“Russian-American Marriages: An Exploration of the Factors Which Attract American Men to a Slavic Beauty”

The topic I am going to research is concerned with the socio-economic and legal problems that arise in finding and marrying a “mail-order” bride from Russia. I am going to explore the various factors, which contribute to the desire for an overseas bride and why, since the opening of Russia's borders, it has become increasingly popular to take on a Russian bride. I will conduct my research and arrive at my conclusions with the help of several sources including a well-known documentary on the subject “In the Name of Love” and a famous book “Wedded Strangers”, which explore the issues that arise from such a marriage.

I will be examining the consequences of a Russian-American marriage through a societal perspective, taking the social and economic factors, which contribute to this arrangement from both involved parties. I will be examining specifically the effects that *perestroika* had on these marriages, as it evidently resulted in a heightening infatuation with overseas wives. Furthermore, I will evaluate the methods, which go into obtaining not only a Russian woman, but also the legal proceedings and consequently, loop holes, which must be conquered in order for such a marriage to occur. I will research this subject as objectively as possible, notwithstanding that the matter of such a topic would and should yield a degree of subjectivity due to its highly personal and individualistic nature.