

**FOURTEENTH ANNUAL UNIVERSITY OF
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UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH CONFERENCE
ON SLAVIC AND EAST/CENTRAL EUROPEAN
STUDIES**

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UCLA**

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Majors: Russian Studies, Political Sciences, Central and East European Languages and Cultures

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“The Threat of Russian Disintegration”

One major concern for Russia during the early 1990’s was a looming fear of massive territorial fragmentation and erosion of power. Moscow was presenting itself as being incapable of governing effectively and many regions within the Russian Federation felt disinclined to hand over their tax revenues to the central budget. Many regional leaders proclaimed a reluctance to invest in what seemed to be shaping into another failed Russian central authority. President Yeltsin found himself dealing with a very real and fragile situation, which could have easily ended in the complete disintegration of the Russian Federation. In modern Russia, Putin has moved towards a more centralized, authoritarian regime. However, the establishment of a “power vertical” has not been a cure-all remedy against the possible disintegration of the modern Russian state. Through a deeper analysis of Yeltsin’s and Putin’s regimes, this paper will challenge modern concerns of disaggregation of the existing Russian political system.

Nadya Dorsht

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“The Russian Energy State: An Economic and Legal Assessment”

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation was no longer the bastion of a superpower the world once feared. Plagued by economic troubles, ethnic movements, and mass immigration, Russia was to experience a myriad of phenomena, some novel and others perpetuated from the former regime, that would dictate Russia’s political and business landscape

for the next two decades. One side effect of the transition to capitalism was the rise of the protection industry, widespread corruption in law enforcement organs, and mass center-periphery divergence. Reforms made during the Putin administration centered on the consolidation of power within the country's administrative units, while simultaneously transforming various energy firms into a state-controlled operation. These factors created roadblocks for creating a transparent business environment and stable legal framework, and continue to do so today. The immense tension surrounding BP operations within Russia has further served to highlight the institutional weaknesses that limit the potential of this resource-rich country to build a more democratic society.

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Major: Global Studies / Minor: Russian and Spanish, UCLA

“Vladimir Vysotsky: Hushed Revolutionary and National Symbol”

Vladimir Vysotsky is a name that resonates deeply with any Russian. Although during his lifetime he was never acknowledged by the Soviet government, Vysotsky's level of underground success reached beyond the borders of the USSR. An actor, poet and singer, Vladimir Vysotsky, captures the essence of being Russian by artistically exposing the underlying sentiments of the country, ones that common people were too afraid to voice. With his immense musical repertoire, Vysotsky redefined national identity by honestly addressing the country's history, ideologies and tragic shortcomings of the Soviet system. Vysotsky's every word is filled with a painful passion, which bursts from his raspy throat to make his audiences aware of realities of the human condition in the Soviet Union. His charismatic wit, sarcasm and pointed commentaries continue to inspire a new wave of Russian artists, but there will never be someone quite like Volodya Vysotsky.

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“Immigration or Emigration: An Analysis of Leaving the Soviet Union for the United States”

As a result of the détente between the Soviet Union and the United States throughout the 1970s, a considerable percentage of Soviet citizens relocated to the United States. As a result, the immigrants had to adapt to a unfamiliar capitalistic social landscape. This paper will focus on whether the Soviet citizens who relocated consider themselves emigrants, who left the Soviet Union, or immigrants, who came to the United States. While exploring the reasons behind this population shift, this paper will examine the conditions of living in post- Stalinist Soviet Union. Since the Soviet Union was one of the world's most closed countries, the paper will address the means by which emigrants actually left for the United States. This entails the process emigrants underwent to acquire proper documentation and the rare opportunity to start a new life in the

West. The paper will then analyze how the Soviet immigrants acclimated to a more open but unfamiliar American society. In addition to the circumstances and factual details of the large scale emigration from the Soviet Union, the paper will deviate from mere numbers and figures by focusing on several firsthand accounts. Through multiple interviews, a portrait of the entire process will be outlined with individual reflections on the decision to leave a familiar home for a foreign country to start a new life. In order to provide a broad range of perspective on the emigration from the Soviet Union, the interviewees will vary in age, gender, and class.

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UCSD Major: Human Biology / Minor: Russian Literature, UCSD

“Bakhtin the Theorist, Bulgakov the Novelist, and Their Views on the Soviet State”

In this paper I will explore the ideas presented in Mikhael Bakhtin’s *Discourse in the Novel* and Mikhael Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita* to argue that while Bakhtin was a theorist and Bulgakov a novelist, both authors found the Soviet application of Marxism problematic and expressed this dissatisfaction through their writing. At a time when the regime supported socialist realism as the ideal form of artistic expression, one that portrayed socialist society in a clearly positive and optimistic manner, the works of these authors are considerably more complex. In *Discourse in the Novel* Bakhtin outlines his distaste for the monologic discourse, the importance of heteroglossia, and the integral processing involved between the speaker and the listener. I will argue that while Bakhtin’s *Discourse in a Novel* does have pro-socialist elements, such as his theory of heteroglossia, these also by definition function against the presence of a rigid regime and that an authoritarian government in general is counter to Bakhtin’s idea of an active interaction between the speaker and the listener. I will further illustrate that in his novel *The Master and Margarita* Bulgakov applies these same concepts, utilizing parody and satire to argue against the monologic and poke fun at socialist realism.

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“Margarita Uncovered: Sexuality, Power and Gender in Bulgakov’s *Master and Margarita*”

The focus of this essay centers on the issues of gender and sexuality with regard to the main female character Margarita of Mikhail Bulgakov’s novel *Master and Margarita*. This paper takes as its central claim the fact that the central figure of Bulgakov’s *Master and Margarita* is a reformed prostitute figure much like Mary Magdalene and that the power she possesses in the novel is largely a sexual one, precisely because there is no explicit sex in the novel and everything is merely hinted at. Trapped in a loveless marriage to a rich husband, Margarita takes on a lover, the Master, and his novel becomes her baby. She acts as an ideal submissive partner to the Master, but despite her intelligence and interest in spiritual life, she is denied the same status

as him and other male characters in the novel, due to the narrator's fear of her sexuality. It is conjectured that Margarita was already a witch prior to her transformation brought about by Woland's ointment. It is furthermore problematized whether or not she engages in sexual contact with Woland at Satan's Ball. It is argued that for Margarita, using her sexuality is the only way of subverting or using the patriarchal system to her advantage. Margarita's plight demonstrates the difficulty of female fulfillment in a totalitarian society, where even the supernatural and magic operate within the same patriarchal system as the satirised Soviet government does.

Alyssa Haerle

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Majors: Political Science and Russian Studies, UCLA

“What Skolkovo and Russia's Modernization Could Mean for the West”

Over the past decade, Russia has laid out the foundations of a modernization effort, especially in the realm of technology. The presidency of Dmitry Medvedev has given this modernization effort added impetus and has pushed the idea of a more modern Russia onto the world stage. The Skolkovo Project has become the hub of modernization activity and investment in the business and technological spheres and has more recently attracted much international attention and investment. Conceivably, if the Skolkovo Project bears fruit and the efforts at modernization lead to further opening of the Russian market, the West could benefit greatly from investing and increasing trade with Russia and not only economically but also politically. Russia's eagerness to expand into the technological sphere means it will need to increase cooperation with countries with developed technological spheres and attract large investments from tech companies and investors. This cooperation has the potential to influence political decisions and therefore has the potential to strengthen the recent rapprochement efforts and draw Russia and the West closer diplomatically. This potential can already be seen in cases such as the recent crisis in Libya and the world financial crisis. While the current problems of doing business in Russia and the uncertainty of what will follow the 2012 election casts skepticism on potential benefits to the West of Russia's modernization, it is still reasonable to say that Russia's modernization has and can further serve as an opening for Western businesses and politicians.

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“Real Men-Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Ballet and Masculinity”

Ever since its emergence in 15th Europe, ballet has been reverently regarded as graceful and elegant. A competitive domain, ballet requires that its participants not only be passionate with their craft, but also meticulous, often sacrificing other aspects of their life in order to gain eminence within the field. In Western society, some of these sacrifices might include time, money and even friendships, but what about an identity? Are men in tutus entitled to the same

societal privileges of other men?” A cross-cultural examination of the relationship between ballet and masculinity, we aim to delve into the social intricacies behind this art form. In America, many sports are gender coded. Could the lack of male participation in this discipline be attributed to gender anxiety? Does the same essentialist attitude towards ballet pervade in the East? If so, are there any historical or socio-cultural reasons responsible? How do Russian attitudes towards danseurs compare to their American counterparts? By surveying Russian and American college students alike, we will shed light on the social implications of being a ballerina in the respective countries. Similarly, we will compliment our study with an analysis of how and why the intersectionality of gender and identity are germane to the way in which others treat and perceive these male ballet dancers.

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“No Room of One’s Own: Private Space and the Construction of the Female Artist in the Poems of Anna Akhmatova”

Virginia Woolf’s 1929 essay “A Room of One’s Own” emphasizes the necessity of private space for the creation of the female artist, although spatial restraints made a physical “room of one’s own” impossible for female writers of the Soviet era. Galina Rylkova’s book *The Archaeology of Anxiety: The Russian Silver Age and Its Legacy* frames Silver Age poet Anna Akhmatova’s autobiographical information within Woolf’s thesis of private space as a necessity for female intellectual development. Rylkova notes that themes of asceticism, voyeurism, and collective vs. individual conscience within Akhmatova’s life and works are the result of Akhmatova’s manipulation of physical private space into an intellectual construct. I will expand beyond autobiographical information and the information presented in Akhmatova’s memoirs to analyze her later poems within the framework of space and feminine identity. Most criticisms on Akhmatova concern only her major poems such as “Requiem” and “Poem Without A Hero”, so I plan to examine some of her lesser-known poems that have been translated into English through close reading. Although my knowledge of Russian is still rudimentary, I also plan to look at the original Russian texts of her poems and compare how these ideas are expressed and manipulated through translation.

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“The Sharper Side of the Pen: Political Poetry of War Torn Poland”

1945 marked the end of World War II and the beginning of a new period in literature-postmodernism. This new literature often concentrated on a dystopian view of the world with science fiction themes and images of continuous vigil and oppression. More specifically

postmodern poetry used these images to highlight tones of tension and uncertainty caused by the Cold War. In Post-War Poland, however, the citizens did not feel the uncertainty of this tension because of the ever present reality that the Soviet-Communist government had imposed their laws and censorship upon the people of Poland. Hence, Polish poetry after-1945 did not show the same fantastic views as the postmodern poetry abroad, and instead depicted realistic scenes of quotidian routines. Additionally, although the Soviet censorship did not prevent Polish writers from expressing what they knew best – a love for a country burdened by occupation, Poland like the rest of the World saw a shift in the images and themes of their literature, specifically in their poetry. In this new epoch of contemporary Polish poetry, poets shifted their metaphors from expressing doubts of being granted the ability to live one more day to expressing doubts about the future of literature and freedom. Furthermore, as time passed and the tension between the people of Poland and the Soviet government reached a climax with martial law and the Solidarity movement, Polish poetry saw a climax of rebellious poems with the rise of the New Wave (Nowa Fala) poets. Therefore, it can be said that post-1945 Polish poetry and the political state of Poland formed a reciprocal as well as building relationship, where poets such as Stanisław Barańczak, Miron Białoszewski, Zbigniew Herbert, Ewa Lipska, Czesław Miłosz, Wisława Szymborska, and Adam Zagajewski both grew and drew off of one another.

Irina Mkhitarian

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“Sonka – Zolotaya Ruchka (Sonka the Golden Hand)”

Sheyndlya-Sura Lejbovna Solomonnik was a legendary Russian criminal, “The Queen of Crime” of Saint Petersburg in the second half of the 19th century and was known as Sofia Ivanovna Blyuvshteyn, or “Sonka - Zolotaya Ruchka” (Sonka the Golden Hand). Being the mastermind of a whole number of robberies and murders, Sofia Ivanovna was called “devil in a skirt.” Living a lie, her whole life was and is continuing to be covered with mystery. However, she was not only a brilliantly talented criminal, but also highly intelligent and educated woman with aristocratic manners, who was proficient in several European languages and was easily mistaken for a countess, baroness, or princess.

After her arrest Sofia Blyuvshteyn became the first and only woman in the history of the criminal Russia to spend three years in the solitary cell on the island of Sakhalin with her hands and legs fettered with chain.

Michelle Morley

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“Gogol’s Favorite Muse”

In Nikolai Gogol’s *Dead Souls*, the protagonist Chichikov travels through Russia to purchase the dead serfs of landowners in an attempt to swindle the government. Through a series of

misadventures punctuated by immense and seemingly meandering descriptions, Chichikov's plan ultimately fails. However, the grand poem is cut short as a result of Gogol burning two of the three parts of his manuscript before he died, leaving the reader uncertain of the story's end. These elements of Gogol's masterpiece suggest the Existentialist concept of the Absurd. A complex concept, the Absurd eludes sufficient definition. But it may be described, as Arnold Hinchliffe, author of *The Absurd* has described it, as recognition of the mechanical nature of existence which leads one to question the meaning of his life, value, and purpose in existence (Hinchliffe 36). The mechanical nature of existence is linked to the banal, a concept which leads to conclusions of the relative meaningless state of one's existence, all of which are demonstrated *Dead Souls*. As Chichikov interacts with more and more banal and mediocre individuals and the more the reader is met with Gogol's massive and at times bizarre descriptions, the more the reader questions his own significance, which is precisely what Gogol had in mind. Banality and the sense of the Absurd one receives from seeing it are integral to Gogol's work, and may have influenced those who would more formally formulate the concept of the Absurd. We will examine examples of how meaninglessness are demonstrated in *Dead Souls* through Gogol's writing style and the banalities he presents which contribute to the Absurd not only for Chichikov, but for the reader as well.

Katja Nelson

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Majors: Political Science and Russian Studies, UCLA

“International Relations of Russia and the European Union: A Constant Impasse”

The relationship between the European Union (EU) and Russia is declining due to differences in regime type that prevent political relations based on common interests and values. This has created a more general problem in international diplomatic relations. So, both sides must agree on suitable arrangements in order to maintain world political order. After the fall of communism in Russia, the EU and Russia sought to develop a 'strategic partnership' that would allow for mutually beneficial relations through the establishment of treaties, minor trade agreements, and Russia's entrance into the World Trade Organization (WTO). Throughout the 1990s the relationship continued to grow, although there remained certain areas of tension because of inherent differences between Russia and Western Europe that did not change with the progression of the 1990s. Herein lies the difficulty in their relationship: the European Union has tried to promote Russian integration with Europe by proposing various agreements that Russia sees as Westernized, and therefore anti-'Russian'. By resisting integration with the EU, the EU feels their political power and authority to be undermined, just as Russia feels that its nationalism and power are being suppressed by the EU's attempts to democratize the Russian government. Since the 1990s, Russia has become an increasingly authoritarian power that challenges the democratic values of the EU, and in the past five years, relations have further declined, worsening the main problems. These problems include disagreement over the 'common neighborhood', differences in political views over Kosovo and Kaliningrad, and the EU enlargement, since the EU has admitted many former satellites of the USSR. It is now unclear

where this relationship is headed, but it is clear that in order to establish a peaceful and constructive relationship, they must make a compromise. Because Russia is still a weaker state in the world, as opposed to the EU, which makes up a strong 'state', it is likely that Russia will be forced to adopt at least a minor level of integration with the European Union in the form of increased democracy. This would be the best international solution, as it would allow for the continuation of strong trade in a free market, political transparency, and a decrease in international violence.

Yannely Perez

Majors: Applied Ecology and Psychology and Social Behavior, UCI

“An Image Analysis of the Communist Party’s Early Visions to Build Socialism and the Repressive Measures Subsequently Implemented to Achieve and Preserve this Fundamental Revolutionary Goal”

The revolutionary platform of granting more land to the peasants and greater factory control to the urban workers as well as the promise to bring about an end to Russia’s involvement in The Great War and thereby to its resulting pervasive food shortages was highly appealing due its hopes of improving the livelihood of the Russian masses. Yet, in order for the fledgling Bolsheviks to secure their grasp on power amid immense instability, they had to ultimately resort to violently repressive measures. This was a tactic that was later repeated during *dekulakization* and The Great Purges, which mainly targeted *kulaks*, or those peasants with larger landholdings believed to be a threat to the collectivization effort, and any real or alleged “enemies of the people”, respectively. The shared goal to both these efforts was to enforce policies of exclusion aimed at preserving not only the existing power structure, but its vision of building socialism as well.

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“Gender Roles in the Countries of the Former Yugoslavia: the LGBT Experience and Gay Rights”

This presentation gives an overview of the past and present situation of the homosexual experience in the countries of the former Yugoslavia and the different laws regarding same-sex activity that exist in the various countries. Heterosexuality has traditionally been seen as the social norm and therefore, homosexuality has been seen as in conflict with this standard. Although much has been done in the way of legal protection, a fundamental shift in the culture must first be seen if the homosexual population is to hope for better times to come. While the living conditions of the homosexual population vary from country to country, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Kosovo are conservative and anti-gay attitudes are deeply ingrained despite laws legalizing same-sex sexual activity, discrimination protection, adoption by same-sex couples, and right to change legal gender. However, the transition from

nationalistic regimes to members of the international community for these countries has meant great progress for the homosexual community. In Serbia and Croatia in particular, there is a small enclave of gay-safe spaces in Rijeka, Zagreb, and Belgrade. The story of the homosexual experience is certainly one of contradiction; despite the progress in these areas it is important to note that homosexuality only just stopped being classified as a disorder by the Serbian Medical Society in 2008 and six Molotov cocktails were thrown into a crowd during a recent Gay Pride Parade in Croatia. Therefore, navigating the homosexual experience in these countries is a difficult one as progress and decline often occur simultaneously.

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“The Female Protagonists of Lyudmila Ulitskaya”

Focusing on the critically acclaimed Russian novelist, Ulitskaya, three female protagonists can be derived from Ulitskaya’s three individual pieces of work: *Tsu-urih*, *Medea and Her Children*, and *Sonechka*. The three works consist of the protagonists as follows: Medea, Lidia, and Sonechka, respectively. Three individual female protagonists possess certain characteristics that can be compared and contrasted among one another, notably characteristics that range from individualistic personas, life perspectives, and personal manners and propensities for particular motives. For instance, protagonist Lidia is the sneakiest and most selfish of the three. Virtually nothing stands in her way of attaining her goal and she possesses the type of character that would resort to even selfish means to attain such a specific goal. However, Medea and Sonechka, individuals of much more virtuous nature, would never resort to such malicious trickery. However, Lidia’s selfish means turn into love and in such, a unifying theme becomes more evident amongst the three women: values of love and devotion. Furthermore, another protagonist is Sonechka, the feeblest and whose genuine and utter kindness renders her under-estimated and used by those around her. Sonechka’s ability to put everybody else’s happiness and well-being above her own results in her own self-deprecation, as her husband of twenty years leaves her for a very young, beautiful woman. Sonechka seemingly puts everybody else’s needs, wants, and happiness in front of hers, a selfless nature that is certainly not present within Lidia. Medea, however, belongs to a large family and possesses a house, which is the heart of her family’s reunions. While not manipulative like Lidia and not as feeble as Sonechka, Medea is not only the eldest out of the three (thus debatably the most experienced and wise), but is also the least talkative and most reserved. She is the observer. She sees all and knows all, surveying all of her family members, like the all-knowing, wise sage/grandmother.

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“Addiction in Russia: How the Science of Alcohol Addiction can Lend Insight into Russia's Alcoholism Pandemic”

Russia is currently facing a health epidemic. Crises are not a new occurrence to the last four or five generations of Russians. But this most recent health pandemic entails an aspect not yet dealt with: Alcoholism. Drinking vodka is as much ensconced in Russian culture, as vodka drinking is ensconced in the American's stereotypical image of a Russian. Rarely does the stereotype match reality so well. The endothermic flush- the chemical reaction, where heat is released via the metabolic break down of alcohol- is a staple to the Russian, and a long welcomed reprieve from the North's legendary cold; but this comfort comes with a toll. Alcohol abuse has been implicated in increased rates of homicide, cardiac disease, decreased life expectancy, and socio-economic decline. Sociologists and other cultural theorists have been the preponderance of researchers to report this issue outside of Russia. Their methods and perspective have been, almost by definition, limited in that sociological reports implicate Russian history and culture as the primary culprits of increased alcoholism. These are of course factors, but to study alcoholism is to study an abnormal physiology. Omitting biological models of alcoholism- essentially the science of alcoholism- leaves critical dimensions of the phenomenon opaque. Russia's history is its own, but alcoholism is a human plight. And the lessons learned and the science developed can lend necessary insight into Russia's brand of alcoholism.

The purpose of this paper is to synthesize sociological findings with biological models of addiction, in order to provide a complete perspective of the contemporary issue of Russian alcoholism.

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“Montenegro: A separate State Developing a New Independent Identity”

In May of 2006, with just over 55% of the popular vote, Montenegrin government had officially declared itself an independent state. After generations of existing under what was practically Serbian dominance, a majority had decided Montenegro was ready to exert its own sovereignty. We will focus on the political and economic motivations and reasoning behind the split of an independent state of Montenegro from the former joint state of Serbia and Montenegro. We will examine historical events, as well as contemporary events, that contributed to the movement. This will be supplemented with popular opinion regarding the desire to break away from the Serbian nation. We chose this topic because Montenegro's desire to be an independent state differed in comparison to other states that were originally part of former Yugoslavia. Montenegro's separation was not a direct result of clashing ethnic identities as it had been in other states like Croatia, Bosnia etc.; in fact, Montenegrins had traditionally accepted a dual ethnic identity that tied them to Serbia. Now as an independent nation they have the opportunity to break away from former Serbian ties and reconstruct a separate Montenegrin identity. We will evaluate whether this push for a new ethnic identity is an effort to legitimize its authority as an

independent nation. Furthermore, this evaluation will address whether the development of a separate ethnic identity is an elitist movement or popular, national movement.

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Major: Italian Literature / Minors: Mathematics and Linguistics, UCSD

“Yevgenia Ginzburg’s Personal Inferno”

Throughout my paper, I discuss the parallels between Yevgenia Ginzburg’s memoir *Journey into the Whirlwind* and Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno*. The novel *Journey into the Whirlwind* recounts the author’s eighteen-year ordeal in the Soviet Gulag system. Divided into two parts, the novel depicts Ginzburg’s transformation from a well-respected communist and university professor to a political prisoner indicted under Article 58 of the Russian SFSR Penal Code. The author explains how, after having been falsely accused of harboring Trotskyist sentiments, she was imprisoned and sentenced to ten years of hard labor. The novel ends with a description of her chance encounter in her last prison stay with a sympathetic doctor who appoints her to a nursing position, thus relieving some of the harsh conditions she faced as a prisoner.

A common motif that appears throughout the novel is the continuous references to numerous other works of great literature and renowned authors. Some of the most frequent are her explicit and somewhat subtle references to Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno*. After close inspection, it is clear that Ginzburg’s entire novel alludes to this famous piece, as she refers to specific passages from Alighieri’s work a few times within her own novel. Through this paper, I examine specific textual similarities between Ginzburg’s novel and Alighieri’s *Inferno*. In order to do this, I compare Ginzburg’s three initial interrogators and their resemblance to Alighieri’s three beasts along with certain parallels between Ginzburg’s experiences in prison and Alighieri’s descriptions of *Inferno*.

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Major: African-American Studies / Minors: Russian Literature, Near Eastern Languages and Cultures and Women’s Studies, UCLA

“Back in the USSR”

My research paper analyzed the process of penetration of the Western rock music into the musical culture of the Soviet Union of the late 60s, its development as an independent genre and formation of the Soviet and Russian rock bands. Rock music along with hippie movement paved its way into the hearts and souls of the Soviet youth with great difficulty and in severe conspiracy, since it was considered destructive and degrading phenomenon for the growing generation. The young generation, however, found internal freedom and relaxation in rock music along with the opportunity to freely express their physical and emotional feelings. And though it was met with great hostility by numerous musical authorities (including the Ministry of Culture

of the USSR) and critics, it is still alive and has victoriously occupied its position in the cultural life of Russia.