
11 APRIL 2026 SATURDAY 11:30 am - 6:00 pm

11:30-12:00 SNACKS/WELCOME

12:00-1:00 KEYNOTE

George Gasyna

Narrating the Hybrid Self: Nation and Memory in Modern Polish Literature

1:20-2:20 Panel 1: Freedom of Expression and Identity

Discussant: David Cooper

Chair: Megi Tedoradze

Mariana Kellis (UIUC)

Reading Freedom in Serf Memoirs: Emancipation as Lived Experience

Eryn Cannon (University of Kansas)

Sports Citizenship and Athlete Identity Among Elite Figure Skaters in Russia, East Europe, and Eurasia

Yana Koza (University of Washington)

Redefining the Role of Women: Wartime Gender and Identity Transformation in Ukraine

2:20-3:30 LUNCH

3:30-4:30 Panel 2: Literature and Reception in Poland and Abroad

Discussant: Marek Sroka

Chair: Aleksandra Khuzina

Zoey Grant (UIC)

Towards Music: From Witold Gombrowicz's *Ślub* to its Spanish-language Work *El casamiento*

Sofia Osokina (UIC)

Revolutionary Poet or Imperial Voice? Pushkin in Polish Discourse of the 1930s

12 APRIL 2026 SUNDAY 9:00 am - 12:30 pm

9:00-9:30 SNACKS/WELCOME

9:30-10:30 Panel 3: Ukrainian Cultural Identity throughout History

Discussant: Valeria Sobol

Chair: Mariana Kellis

Joseph Mosse' (UIUC)

Reimagining a Ukrainian Past: Natalena Koroleva's *Old Kyivan Legends*

Kateryna Lytvynenko (University of Wisconsin)

National Identity and Cultural Memory in Feder Krychevskyi's *Life Triptych*

Tala Naumovska (UIUC)

From “Bilingualism” to Linguistic Moral Choice: War as a Postcolonial Catalyst of Linguistic Self-Identification in Ukraine

10:40-11:00 Slavic Reference Service Presentation

11:00-12:00 Panel 4: Identity and Memory in Historic Times of Crisis

Discussant: Peter Wright

Chair: Mack Noxon

Aleksandr Perchatkin (University of Wisconsin)

The Tapestry of Testimony: Defining Alexievich's Ecological Thought in *Chernobyl Prayer* through Literary Allusions

Ekaterina Petrenko (UIC)

Mediating AIDS Crisis: Late Soviet and Post-Soviet Society in AIDS Films in 1987-1992

Emma Baldwin (University of Michigan)

Narrative and Memory at Home and in Exile in 20th C. Czechoslovakia

ABSTRACTS

George Gasyna, keynote speaker

Narrating the Hybrid Self: Nation and Memory in Modern Polish Literature

Drawing on works by three prominent Polish authors (Joseph Conrad, Witold Gombrowicz, and Andrzej Stasiuk), my talk investigates the phenomenon of textual “small homelands”— mythopoeic, oneiric private realms located in zones that formerly belonged to what Hannah Arendt referred to as the “belt of mixed populations.” In their narratives, these small homelands function as both sites of homesteading in the strict sense and spaces of expatriate engagement with and within peripheral modernity. The representation of such spaces, in turn, derives its affective power from a kind of tender conjuring and interrogation of multiple, sometimes conflicting, local and national pasts. In the presentation I outline key strategies through which the narratives in question curate a performative “texture” of both fantasy and myth which both relies on and renegotiates the multiple Polish pasts as a refracting mirror of identity and of cultural possibility. I show that in so doing, they engage in an algorithmic multiplication of *personal* fate in the context of displacement and complex memory work – in slightly different forms in each of the three cases under analysis.

Panel 1: Freedom of Expression and Identity

Marianna Kellis

Reading Freedom in Serf Memoirs: Emancipation as Lived Experience

Historical research on emancipation in the Russian Empire has largely focused on political debates and elite perspectives, leaving serf voices underexplored. This paper examines four serf memoirs to ask how serfs themselves imagined emancipation and freedom. It argues that serfs understood freedom more personally and broadly than the Russian state: not merely as legal liberation from serfdom, but as economic stability, the pursuit of personal aspirations, and integration into Russian society through education, political rights, and improved social status. By analyzing these memoirs, the paper highlights serf perspectives on emancipation, demonstrates the value of memoirs as sources, and suggests that serfs showed greater intellectual creativity and adaptability than often assumed, reinterpreting elite ideas of freedom in light of their own experiences and hopes.

Eryn Cannon

Sports Citizenship and Athlete Identity Among Elite Figure Skaters in Russia, East Europe, and Eurasia

This paper studies the relationship between sport, nationality, and identity among elite figure skaters in the context of sports citizenship in the former Soviet space. It considers questions of equity, access, and the role of sport in decolonization and weighs the identification as an ‘athlete’ versus national or ethnic identity. Figure skating, as a multi-disciplinary sport with high barriers to entry, poses a challenge for countries developing programs without widespread existing infrastructure for the sport, including elite-level coaches. A growing emphasis on quadruple jumps in the discipline of women’s singles means that the sport increasingly relies on early specialization and talent identification, which favors programs with existing talent identification and progress pipelines. These advantages often favor athletes from Moscow and St. Petersburg who, benefiting from the access and opportunities afforded to them through Russia’s inheritance of many former Soviet sports structures, often go on to compete in and dominate less established markets.

Yana Koza

Redefining the Role of Women: Wartime Gender and Identity Transformation in Ukraine

This research analyzes the transformation of women's gender identity in Ukraine in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian War. Prior to 2022, although women were widely employed in education, healthcare, and public administration, they were primarily framed as caregivers, while men were associated with defense and economic provision. The outbreak of war became a catalyst for rapid change. Male mobilization created labor shortages, enabling women to enter sectors such as transportation, heavy industry, and the military. Women's labor has been redefined as essential to national resilience. At the same time, the invasion has intensified unpaid care burdens, psychological stress, and gender-based violence. Thus, the war has simultaneously advanced empowerment while deepening preexisting inequalities. The research also examines initiatives aimed at strengthening women's economic participation and leadership as a foundation for Ukraine's post-war reconstruction.

Panel 2: Literature and Reception in Poland and Abroad

Zoey Grant

Towards Rhythm: From Witold Gombrowicz's *Ślub* to its Spanish Work *El casamiento*

Though known as a Polish author, Witold Gombrowicz (1904-69) spent twenty years in Argentina, where he published several works, like *Ślub* (1953/57) and its Spanish-language counterpart, *El casamiento* (1948). However, many neglect this period, treating Gombrowicz's Spanish-language works as merely translations. The significant differences between *Ślub* and *El casamiento* make the Spanish-language play more than a translation. These differences mark the moment when Gombrowicz's experience in Argentina affected his existential dilemmas in his literature. This talk, part of a larger project, will highlight one portion of these differences' dilemmas, namely, in the crisis of language and autonomy, as they are largely expressed through music. Moments in *El casamiento* will be read alongside later writings, like Gombrowicz's *Diary* (1953-69).

Sofia Osokina

Revolutionary Poet or Imperial Voice? Pushkin in Polish Discourse of the 1930s

The paper examines representations of the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin in the Polish press during the 1937 centenary of his death. The anniversary opened discussions about Pushkin's legacy in Poland due to his attitude toward Polish independence and the November Uprising. The paper argues that Pushkin's figure became a site of ideological conflict, revealing competing models of memory in interwar Poland shaped by tensions between national trauma, calls for purely aesthetic readings, and modernizing perspectives.

Panel 3: Ukrainian Cultural Identity throughout History

Joseph Mosse'

Reimagining a Ukrainian Past: Natalena Koroleva's *Old Kyivan Legends*

Controversial in her own time and obscure today, the Czechoslovakia-based diaspora writer Natalena Koroleva occupies an ambiguous position in the canon of early and mid 20th century Ukrainian literature. A close reading of her short story collection, *Легенди Старокиївські* [*Old Kyivan Legends*], reveals a rich text, rooted in an intertextual synthesis of a vast collection of disparate sources. Her work intertwines Greek and Slavic mythology, Kyivan chronicle legends and her own Catholic faith to create an image of Ukraine indelibly linked to the Black Sea, the Classical world and to Europe. The work's cultural synthesis parallels Koroleva's own complex and heavily self-mythologized identity as a Ukrainian writer by choice, a Catholic by faith, Spanish-Polish by birth, French by upbringing. Analyzing Koroleva's work as a Kyiv text provides an illustrative example of chosen Ukrainian identity, and clarifies Koroleva's position as a Ukrainian author deserving of greater study and attention.

Kateryna Lytvynenko

National Identity and Cultural Memory in Feder Krychevskyi's *Life Triptych*

This paper examines the representation of Ukrainian national identity in the art of Fedir Krychevskyi (1879–1947), focusing on his triptych *Life* (1925–1927), created during the early Soviet period. It argues that *Life*, often overshadowed by the internationally visible Ukrainian avant-garde, represents a distinct modernist trajectory that integrates national tradition, historical memory, and modern form. Rather than pursuing radical abstraction, Krychevskyi developed a culturally grounded modernism that reinterpreted Ukrainian heritage during a moment of political and social rupture. Synthesizing European modernist aesthetics—particularly Art Nouveau and the Vienna Secession—with Byzantine and Orthodox visual traditions, Krychevskyi transformed scenes of peasant life into an allegory of cultural endurance and collective identity. The triptych's narrative arc—from harmony to rupture and mourning—echoes themes central to the poetry of Taras Shevchenko, whose work served as a foundation for Ukrainian cultural revival and the transmission of national memory.

Tala Naumovska

From “Bilingualism” to Linguistic Moral Choice: War as a Postcolonial Catalyst of Linguistic Self-Identification in Ukraine

In classical sociolinguistic models, bilingualism is usually understood as a neutral communicative resource or an individual competence that allows speakers to switch freely between languages depending on context. Within such approaches, language choice is treated as a pragmatic or cultural gesture, largely devoid of a clear ethical dimension. In postcolonial societies shaped by long histories of structural inequality, however, languages rarely function within a symmetrical field. This paper proposes to interpret the linguistic shift of Ukrainians after 2014 - and especially following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 - not just as a gradual “Ukrainization” or an adjustment of language behavior, but also as a process of forming a linguistic moral choice.

Panel 4: Identity and Memory in Historic Times of Crisis**Aleksandr Perchatkin****The Tapestry of Testimony: Defining Alexievich's Ecological Thought in *Chernobyl Prayer* through Literary Allusions**

Svetlana Alexievich's *Secondhand Time* introduces the concept of "homo sovieticus," the Soviet kind of human whose experiences and traumas she documents through interviews. Across her work, Alexievich records the voices of these "red men," revealing how they grapple with the collapse of the Soviet world and its historical catastrophes. Awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for her "polyphonic writings," Alexievich develops a documentary form that weaves together multiple voices. In *Chernobyl Prayer*, this polyphonic approach preserves testimonies of witnesses to the Chernobyl disaster while illuminating connections between individuals, culture, and the environment. This paper argues that Alexievich's ecological thought emerges through this polyphonic structure and is mediated by witnesses' frequent references to nineteenth-century Russian literature. These cultural frameworks shape how survivors interpret ecological catastrophe. Examining these references reveals how cultural memory both enables and limits the witnesses' attempts to comprehend and articulate the environmental trauma of Chernobyl.

Ekaterina Petrenko**Mediating AIDS Crisis: Late Soviet and Post-Soviet Society in AIDS Films in 1987-1992**

This paper analyzes two late-Soviet and one early post-Soviet film about AIDS within the socio-political context of those periods. Situating the analysis within a broader discussion of changes in Soviet and post-Soviet subjectivities, I show that films released between 1985 and 1992 depict a decrease in human agency and an increase in the agency of AIDS. This shift reflects a broader transformation in the forms of subjectivity: from a short-term activation of the subject to disorientation and subsequent fatalism and the loss of faith even in the possibility of agency, leading to political disengagement. Thus, I argue that the political and media transformations during the transition from the USSR to Glasnost and later to the post-Soviet Russian state make the topic of AIDS an arena and a specific lens for discussing Perestroika, the state and society as a whole, and a way to articulate anxiety and uncertainty about the future.

Emma Baldwin**Narrative and Memory at Home and in Exile in 20th C. Czechoslovakia**

Surveying the literature of Central and Eastern Europe during the Soviet years (I focus particularly on the Czech context), one notices a clear divide between the output of the émigrés and the remaining residents. I am particularly interested in how each of these camps — which are by no means homogenous — construct memory in their narratives, memories of a homeland lost to distance or to circumstance. I find that for the émigrés (Kundera, Škvorecký, and others), memory is often an all-too-feeble shield against the overwhelming power of the regime, against the tragedies of histories and identities lost forever. Many of those who stay (Hrabal, Ajevaz, and others) offer another view, one of memories, narratives, and signs which shift and transform, persisting even as power tries to annihilate them, if in altered form. Both traditions offer different defenses against forgetting and enrich our understanding of narrative and memory under an oppressive regime.

BIOGRAPHIES

PRESENTERS

Emma Baldwin is in the Ph.D. program in Slavic languages and literatures at the University of Michigan. She works with Czech and Russian literature of the 20th and 21st centuries, particularly sci-fi and speculative fiction, and is especially interested in the texts of contemporary Czech writer Michal Ajvaz.

Eryn Cannon is an MA student in REES at the University of Kansas. She holds a BA in Political Science and Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies, as well as an MA in Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies, both from the University of Colorado at Boulder. Eryn is a US Figure Skating Adult Gold Medalist in skating skills, an active ice dancer, and a USFS accredited coach. Her academic interests lie at the intersection of REES studies and women and gender studies, with a particular focus on the political impact of figure skating in the REE region.

George Gasyna is Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures and Comparative and World Literature at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Prof. Gasyna holds a BA and an MA in Russian and Slavic Studies from McGill University in Montreal, and a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Toronto (2005). Specializing in Polish literature of the 20th century, in particular modernist authors, his work engages with a number of adjacent fields including émigré and exilic writings, diaspora studies, and Polish-Jewish relations, as well as travel writing and memoir. Prof. Gasyna is author of *Polish, Hybrid, and Otherwise: Exilic Discourse in Joseph Conrad and Witold Gombrowicz* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), and editor for the volume of essays *Joseph Conrad's Polish Soul: Realms of Memory and Self* (2016). His scholarship has appeared in a number of critical collections and journals including *Slavic Review*, *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, *Polish Review*, and *Russian Literature*. His most recent book, *A Time for the Province: Palimpsests and Borders in Twentieth-Century Polish Literature*, was published in spring 2025 by McGill-Queen's University Press. Last summer (2025) he was appointed editor-in-chief of the *Slavic & East European Journal* (SEEJ).

Zoey Grant is a first-year PhD Student in the Polish, Russian, and Lithuanian Studies department at the University of Illinois, Chicago. Her research interests focus on philosophical approaches to 20th-century Polish and Russian literature. Her recent project was a Fulbright at the University of Łódź, Poland, where she worked on Witold Gombrowicz in translation.

Mariana Kellis is a History PhD student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her dissertation focuses on imperial governance in borderland regions, employing a comparative approach between the Russian and Spanish Empires. She is particularly interested in questions of legal culture, privilege, and obligation in the nineteenth-century era of reforms.

Yana Koza is a graduate student and Ukrainian Language Teaching Assistant in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Washington, Seattle. Her current research examines shifts in gender dynamics in Ukraine amid the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war, with a focus on women's empowerment initiatives to support postwar reconstruction.

Kateryna Lytvynenko is an MA student in Art History at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. She holds BA and MA degrees in Art History from the National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture, Kyiv, Ukraine. Her research focuses on Ukrainian modernism, national identity, and the role of visual culture in shaping cultural memory under imperial and Soviet rule. She is particularly interested in the work of Fedir Krychevskiy and the intersections between modernism, national tradition, and literary culture. Her current research examines Krychevskiy's triptych *Life* (1925–1927) in relation to Ukrainian cultural revival and the poetry of Taras Shevchenko.

Joseph Mosse' is a second-year graduate student in the Russian, East European and Eurasian Center's joint MA/MSLIS degree program at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, focusing on Ukrainian studies. His research centers on the work of Ukrainian diaspora writer Natalena Koroleva, and analyzes images and narratives of Kyivan Rus' and antiquity in Ukrainian literature and their relationship to constructed identities. His current project connects to broader interests in late 19th and early 20th century Ukrainian education, literacy and readership, Ukrainian publishing, and bibliography.

Tala Naumovska is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, where she also pursues a minor in Anthropology. Her dissertation investigates Ukrainian literature and culture through the lens of colonial and postcolonial studies, focusing on the linguistic and cultural dissociation of Ukrainian citizens from Russian cultural practices. In particular, her research examines the processes by which Russian-speaking Ukrainians transition to Ukrainian cultural and linguistic patterns amid intensifying anticolonial movements in Ukraine. Nataliia holds M.A. degrees in Folklore Studies and Language & Literature (Japanese and English) from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, as well as B.A. degrees in Folklore Studies and Oriental Languages and Literature.

Sofia Osokina is a PhD student in Polish, Russian, and Lithuanian Studies department at the University of Illinois Chicago. She holds an MA in Polish Studies from the Higher School of Economics, Moscow. Her research focuses on imperial identities, cultural memory, and literature produced in imperial and post-imperial situations. Her current work examines the reception of Russian literature in early twentieth-century Poland.

Ekaterina Petrenko is a Ph.D student in Russian Studies at the Department of Polish, Russian, and Lithuanian Studies at University of Illinois Chicago (UIC). Her current research interests are the medical humanities and media studies in the context of Late-Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia. She examines epidemic crises in the Russian Empire and the USSR in their historical, cultural, social, and media layers.

Aleksandr Perchatkin is a PhD student in the Slavic Languages and Literatures program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He holds a BA with honors in Humanities from NYU Shanghai, where he also minored in Russian and Slavic Studies and Global China Studies. During his undergraduate studies, he spent time as an exchange student at the University of Amsterdam and NYU New York. His research interests include environmental humanities, Soviet environmental thought and policy, literary exchanges between the USSR and Latin America, and the traditions of Soviet literary criticism. At UW-Madison, Aleksandr teaches Russian language courses and serves as a Graduate Language Program Coordinator at Russkii Dom.

ORGANIZERS

Shannyn Bald is a PhD student in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She received her MA in History at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada, researching the working relationship of the church and magicians in Drevniaia Rus' and Muscovy. Her current research looks at the interpretation and appropriation of the Middle Ages in 21st century Russian historical fiction and far right rhetoric.

Danielle Hix is a PhD student in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She holds an MA in Slavonic Studies from Oxford University, where she researched instances of neomedievalism and historical framing within Russian popular music. Drawing on this background, her current research focuses on representations of the medieval period in contemporary Russian and Serbian popular culture.

Mariana Kellis is a History PhD student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her dissertation focuses on imperial governance in borderland regions, employing a comparative approach between the Russian and Spanish Empires. She is particularly interested in questions of legal culture, privilege, and obligation in the nineteenth-century era of reforms.

Aleksandra Khuzina is a PhD student in Russian studies in the Department of Polish, Russian, and Lithuanian Studies at the University of Illinois Chicago. She holds an MA in Polish, Russian, and Central and Eastern European Studies from UIC. Her most recent conference paper on magical realism, postcolonialism, and invented myths in the works of Chingiz Aitmatov was presented as part of her dissertation project on Russophone Literature. At UIC, Aleksandra teaches Russian language courses and serves as a Russian Basic Language Program coordinator.

Julia Kulon is a Neubauer Family Distinguished Doctoral Fellow in Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Chicago. Her research explores both direct and indirect representations and embodiments of the physically disabled body in Polish culture during the first half of the twentieth century, tracing its presence across literary and cultural production as well as material culture, with particular attention to the interwar and early postwar periods. She holds an M.A. in Modern and Contemporary Art History from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a B.A. in Liberal Arts from St. John's College (Annapolis).

Ziyan "Jamie" Lin is a graduate student in Polish Studies at the University of Illinois Chicago. Her current research focuses on the dialogues between the Slavic world and East Asia. She is interested in exploring the cognitive gaps formed by the interplay and conflict between the two historical categories of "world literature" and "national literature" through intersections and cross-material analysis. As a translator, she has worked with literary magazines, cultural institutions, and video game studios on projects involving Polish literature and speculative media.

Mack Noxon is a PhD student in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Her research focuses on the representation of the Caucasus in Russian literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Megi Tedoradze is a Comparative and World Literature PhD student at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Her research focuses on Georgian and Russian late Soviet and post-Soviet Literature with special focus on gender, infrastructure, and post-colonialism.

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