

# the slavic scene

volume 40, winter 2026



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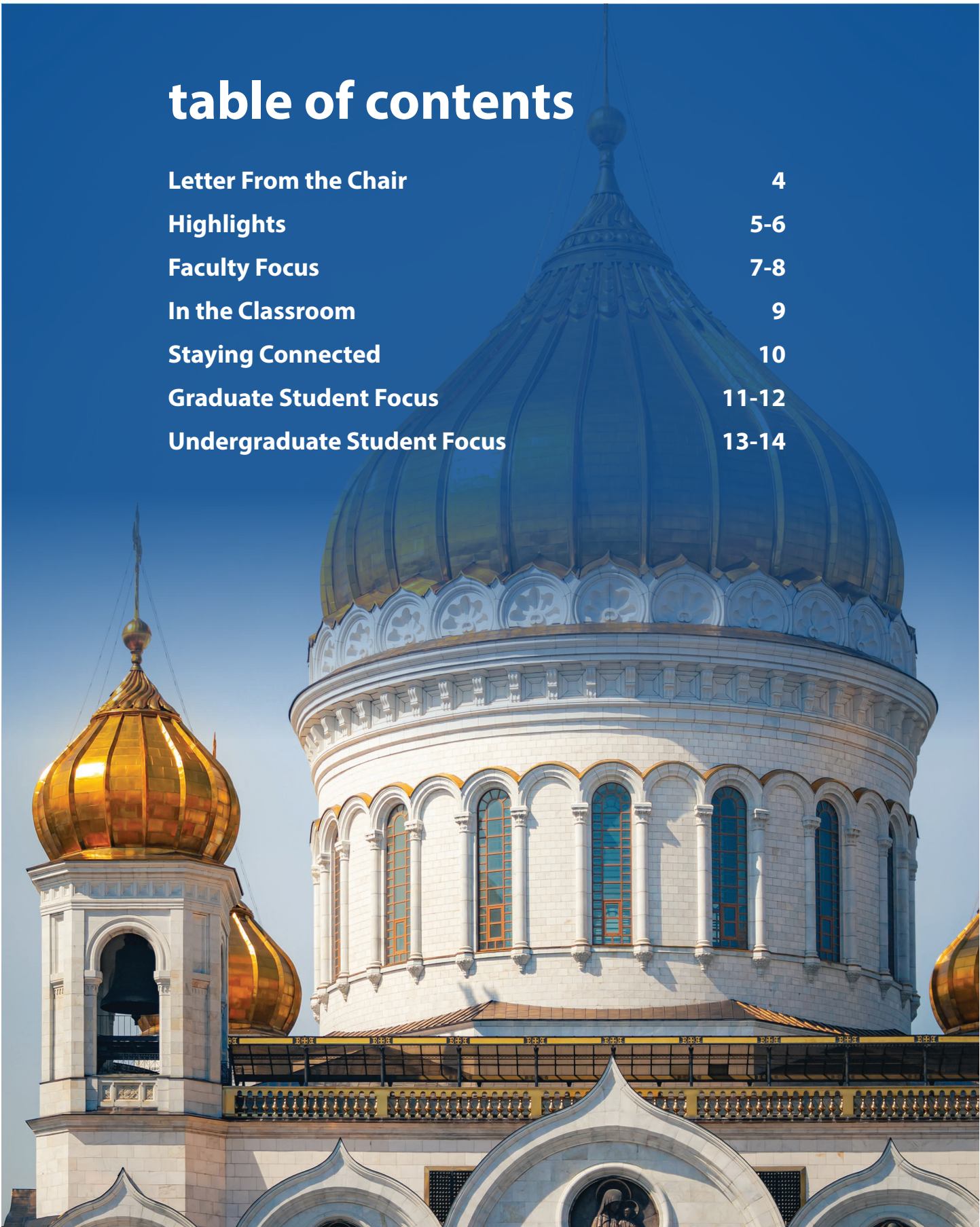
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# letter from the chair



Dear friends,

It seems that in the blink of an eye Winter has already arrived, and here we are with an issue of *Slavic Scene* that had originally been slated for when the peonies were opening in the Arb. While there are many factors behind that delay, it is also a reasonable reflection of how very busy we have been. We're a small department, but we do a lot. Like, a lot. We started the year with Dr. Aleks Marciniak's excellent dissertation defense before classes had even begun, and we haven't slowed down since.

Some of what we have been up to in and around the third floor of the Modern Languages Building is profiled in the following pages, where you can read about our current graduating class of undergraduate majors and minors; new faculty books by Alex Averbuch and Ewa Małachowska-Pasek; research by recent and current doctoral students (McKenna Marko, Aleks Marciniak,

and Azhar Dyussekenova); awards for teaching and public engagement for our outstanding faculty (Svitlana Rogovyk and Marija Rosić); and some of our department events in recent months, including campus visits and readings by Polish and Ukrainian poets.

While we are delighted to celebrate each and every one of these accomplishments and activities and encourage you to do so with us, a voice in me keeps saying, *Wait!* Because these are not all the books published by faculty, graduate students, and recent alumni over the past year; they are not all the accolades members of our community have received. As much as this issue of *Slavic Scene* showcases key aspects of our work, it is by no means everything. We'll be featuring more of what we've been doing in future issues, but we just cannot keep up. So if you find yourself wanting to know more, there is no better way than to get involved yourself—by attending our events, following our work, and/or making a financial contribution to our departmental funds.

As you are likely aware, higher education, fact-based research, and intellectual exchange are facing pressures today that some commentators insist on calling "unprecedented." Unfortunately, those of us who work in Eastern European and Eurasian Studies are all too familiar with the very real precedents for these pressures in other places and times. We nevertheless remain

committed to research and study that is rigorous, persistent, and constructive, because we recognize that the stakes of this work are no less than the security, prosperity, and mutual understanding of future generations.

We hope you will enjoy this brief tour of how we are helping to build that future.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Paloff

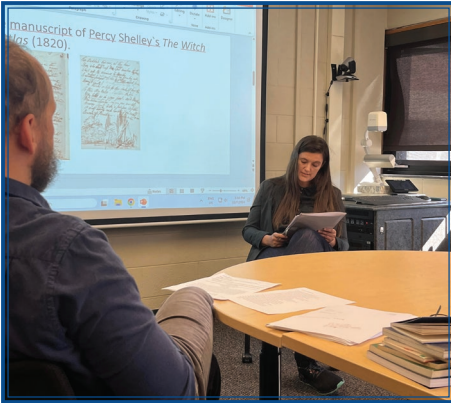
Professor and Chair, Department  
of Slavic Languages & Literatures



# highlights

## A Look Back at Our Memorable Guest Poets, Authors, and Artists

Alex Averbuch, Assistant Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures, and Lacey Krecko, Executive Assistant



Bianka Rolando during her visit to U-M's Slavic Department, October 7, 2024

In the Fall of 2024, as part of the department's cultural events series showcasing Contemporary Polish Poetry and Graphic Art, along with Ukrainian authors and artists, we had the honor of hosting three acclaimed, award-winning poets: Bianka Rolando, Marianna Kiyanovska, and Ostap Slyvynsky.

On October 7, 2024, the Slavic Department welcomed Bianka Rolando, a Polish poet and graphic artist. During her visit, Bianka presented her artistic projects and explored the relationship between poetry and graphic art. Bianka is an artist, poet and professor at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan. Her works have been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, the Polish Institute in Rome, at the Kunsthalle Bratislava and in Galeria Foksal, among others. She is an author of nine books of poetry. Her artwork combines different types of media in the unique language of artistic expression. In parallel to her artistic work, she writes – not commentaries on art, but rather explorations for her artistic projects. The works present dreamy afterglows, scenes from dreams, or frame reality in such a way that it turns out to be vague in its unveilings. The visual language deliberately introduces errors in precise representation so that a liberating poem can emerge.. They are not proof of achieving some goals but rather testify to the mere passion for traveling and transformation.



Alex Averbuch and poet Marianna Kiyanovska discuss *Voices of Babyn Yar* at U-M, October 23, 2024

On October 23, 2024, Marianna Kiyanovska performed both at the University and the Downtown Library. She read from her *Voices of Babyn Yar* (trans. Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky), a book that has received numerous awards, including the Shevchenko Prize (Ukraine's highest literary honor), the Zbigniew Herbert International Literary Award, the Peterson Literary Award, and the Jehuda Amichai Literary Prize. The University event attracted students and faculty, while the evening reading at the Downtown Library engaged local community members. In conversation with Alex Averbuch, Kiyanovska discussed Ukraine's history, its multicultural and multiethnic heritage, and the power of literature to reflect both on past tragedies and sources of inspiration.

*from Voices of Babyn Yar by Marianna Kiyanovska, trans. Oksana Maksymchuk & Max Rosochinsky*

*I could die on this street or that one around the corner  
but the guard won't allow it—you know, and who to ask here?  
I set my suitcase down; now I only have a name—  
I am Rachel.*



# highlights

## A Look Back at Our Memorable Guest Poets, Authors, and Artists (continued)

Alex Averbuch, Assistant Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures, and Lacey Krecko, Executive Assistant



Poet Ostap Slyvynsky reads from *Winter King* during a roundtable at U-M, October 28, 2024

On October 28, 2024, Ostap Slyvynsky read from his poetry collection *Winter King* (trans. Vitaly Chernetsky and Iryna Shuvalova, and recipient of the American Association for Ukrainian Studies' Translation Prize) and *A Ukrainian Dictionary of War* (trans. Grace Mahoney and Taras Malkovych), which consists of testimonials by Ukrainians about their experiences during Russia's war on Ukraine. In a discussion with Alex Averbuch, Slyvynsky and Mahoney reflected on how war transforms poetics and language and how translation conveys these changes.

Both Ukrainian events engaged deeply with the themes of documentalism in contemporary Ukrainian literature and the challenges of capturing the ongoing war in writing, and reflected on Ukrainian literature's growing international recognition in recent years.

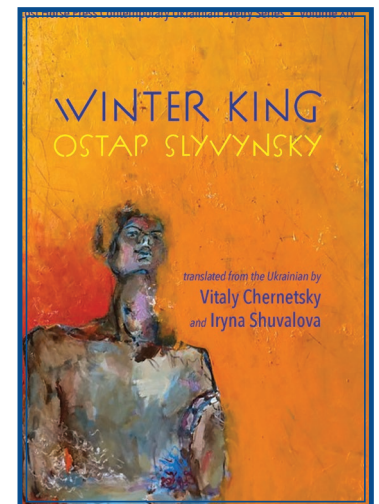
Kiyanovska shared insights into the ethical and emotional challenges of her work, especially the complex task of speaking on behalf of the perished, as reflected in *Voices of Babyn Yar*. She emphasized the importance of preserving these voices from history, so that present and future generations are not left without the truth of such horrors.

Slyvynsky's reading from *A Ukrainian Dictionary of War* was profoundly moving, provoking reflection on the challenges of documenting others' voices during war. It raised critical questions: How do we honor these voices without overshadowing them? Would we even hear these accounts if they weren't documented and shared in this way? The conversation underscored the vital role of literature in preserving stories that might otherwise remain unheard.

The department continued this initiative into the Winter semester. On February 27, during the invasion's anniversary week, we featured renowned Ukrainian poet Oksana Maksymchuk, who read from her recent poetry collection *Still City: Diary of an Invasion* (Carcenet Press, 2024), a powerful work that captures the intense anticipation of invasion and the complex emotional landscapes that followed, offering a deeply personal perspective on an enduring catastrophe.

We are grateful for the support provided by the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Institute for the Humanities; Frankel Center for Judaic Studies; Weiser Center for Europe and Eurasia; Copernicus Center for Polish Studies; Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies; Poetry & Poetics Workshop; and Department of Comparative Literature.

Photos by Yurii Kaparulin

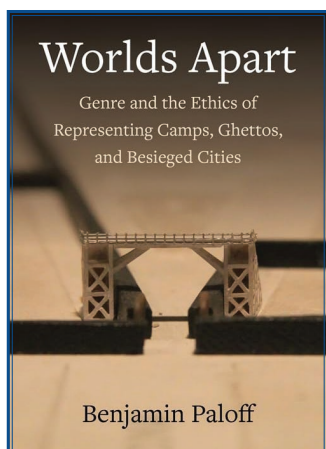




# faculty focus

## Benjamin Paloff Unpacks Narrative, Ethics, and Freedom in Two New Books

*Tyler Sanders, Marketing & Communications Specialist, Slavic Languages & Literatures*



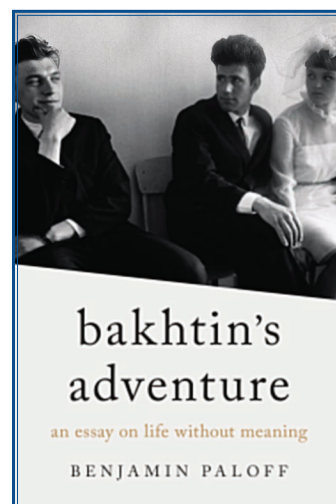
Chair and Professor Benjamin Paloff has marked an extraordinary publishing year with two thought-provoking books that probe how narrative shapes our understanding of history, morality, and personal agency.

*Worlds Apart: Genre and the Ethics of Representing Camps, Ghettos, and Besieged Cities* (Columbia

University Press) investigates why many survivors of twentieth-century atrocities turned to fiction rather than straight testimony to convey their experiences. Paloff shows how choices of genre, whether novel, memoir, or hybrid form, frame collective trauma and influence the ethical responsibilities of both writer and reader. By blending fact and imagination, he argues, authors open new avenues for remembering violence while challenging simplistic notions of historical truth.

In *Bakhtin's Adventure: An Essay on Life without Meaning*, Paloff pivots from the ethics of witnessing to the philosophy of freedom. Reexamining Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "adventure," he traces how stories help us imagine ourselves and others as dynamic characters rather than fixed identities. The result is a fresh meditation on narrative as a space where ethical action and creative possibility intersect, even in a world that resists tidy explanations.

Together, these new works highlight Paloff's wide-ranging scholarship and invite readers to explore the many ways narrative can illuminate—or unsettle—our engagement with history and the self.



## Ukrainian Government Honors Svitlana Rogovyk

*Lacey Krecko, Executive Assistant*



*Svitlana Rogovyk (right) receives her commendation, presented by Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Oksen Lisovyi, Minister of Education and Science.*

Teaching Professor Svitlana Rogovyk has received a formal commendation from the Government of Ukraine for her extraordinary work advancing Ukrainian studies in the United States. For over two decades she has designed innovative courses, organized conferences, and mentored new scholars, consistently bringing authentic Ukrainian voices into North American classrooms. Her teaching and outreach illuminate the nation's complex history and culture, clarifying how language, religion, and tradition shape Ukraine's identity and ongoing fight for sovereignty. At a time when Ukraine defends its freedom and democratic values on the global stage, Professor Rogovyk's initiatives—public lectures, cultural festivals, digital archives, and study-abroad programs—provide crucial context and foster cross-cultural understanding. We congratulate her on this well-deserved honor and thank her for her unwavering dedication to Ukrainian studies.



# faculty focus

## Congratulations to Marija Rosic, Honored Instructor

Lacey Krecko, Executive Assistant

Marija Rosic, Lecturer in Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian, was celebrated at this year's Michigan Housing Honored Instructor Ceremony for her exceptional teaching and the lasting impact she has had on students' college experience. The award recognizes educators who inspire curiosity, foster inclusive classrooms, and challenge students to think critically. Marija's dynamic lessons and steadfast encouragement have helped many learners discover new linguistic skills and a deeper appreciation for the cultures of the Western Balkans.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Marija for her dedication, creativity, and meaningful contributions to the student experience at the University of Michigan.



Marija Rosic (right) at the Honored Instructor Celebration, April 1, 2025, Rogel Ballroom.

## Evolving Narratives

Lacey Krecko, Executive Assistant



Ewa Malachowska-Pasek

Ladislav Matejka Collegiate Lecturer Ewa Malachowska-Pasek recently published a book in Polish with the Polish Academy of Sciences. The central focus and primary 'protagonist' of the book *From Gypsy to Roma: Roma in Polish Discourse on Ethnic and National Minorities* is language, which assumes multiple roles: acting as an

investigator and detective, a creator and destroyer of images, and a guardian of ideas and values. Language also serves as both evidence and a record of societal thought. This multifaceted approach lends the research its interdisciplinary character, intertwining themes and methodologies from the fields of linguistics, history, sociology, social anthropology, and applied psychology. Each discipline examines language use from a distinct perspective, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of its diverse roles.

The work provides an in-depth analysis of the lexical renomination from "Gypsies" to "Roma": a shift from the exonym "Gypsy" to the endonym "Rom." Pasek tracks the process and scope of this transition and investigates how society responds to the change, with a particular focus on acceptance or rejection strategies in official and social media. She delves into how contemporary discourse about Roma in Poland reflects the majority group's value system and ethnic identity; how the role of ethnic and national minorities—including their rights, privileges, and responsibilities—is perceived by the majority; and how this majority expresses its expectations toward the minority group.

By adding her voice to the ongoing discussion, Pasek hopes to contribute to understanding the evolving narratives surrounding ethnic minorities and their linguistic representation in Poland.





# in the classroom

## Lemko Heritage on Display in Slavic 290

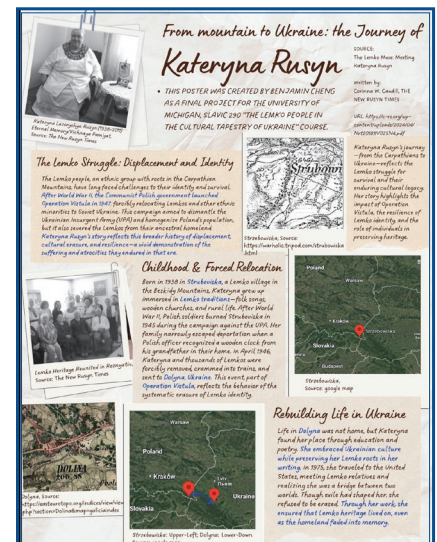
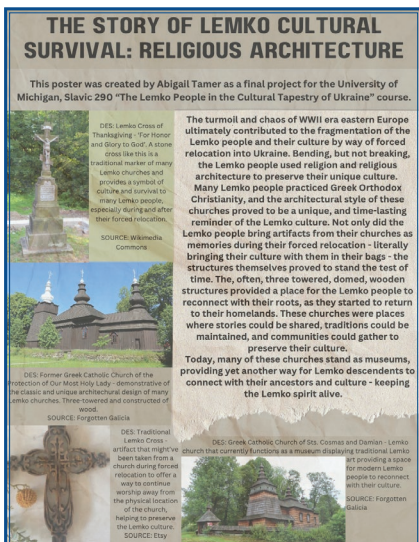
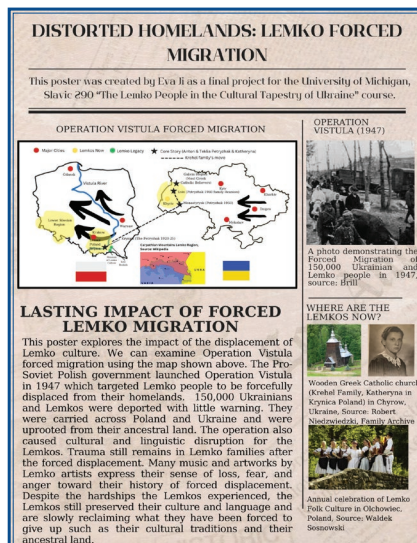
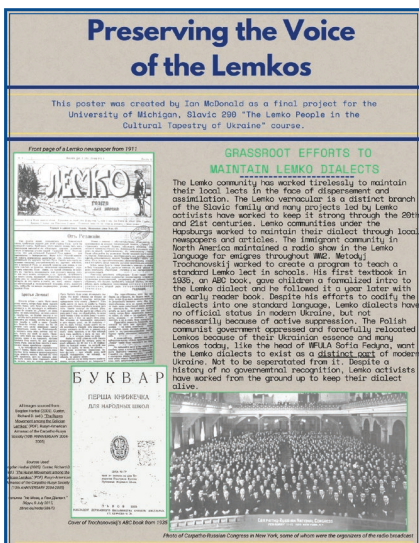
Tyler Sanders, Marketing & Communications Specialist, Slavic Languages & Literatures

Students in Slavic 290, The Lemko People in the Cultural Tapestry of Ukraine, traded traditional essays for research posters that illuminate an often overlooked community of the Carpathian region. Working in small teams, they investigated language, ritual, music, art, and everyday social practices to show how Lemko culture fits within (and sometimes challenges) the broader Ukrainian story.

The resulting posters do more than summarize facts. They map traditions across borders, trace the impact of displacement, and highlight contemporary efforts to preserve Lemko identity. Many projects pair archival finds with oral histories and visual design choices that reflect Lemko aesthetics, inviting viewers to learn through both data and image.

By publishing the posters online, the class extends its reach beyond the classroom, encouraging the public to explore these creative, deeply researched pieces. The showcase offers a concise primer on a community too rarely featured in mainstream narratives of Ukraine and Central Europe.

Browse the gallery to experience the stories, symbols, and voices the students brought forward, and join us in celebrating the Lemko heritage they worked to honor.





# staying connected

## Life and Career Developments Post-Ph.D.

Dr. Mckenna Marko, Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Holocaust Literature School of Languages, Cultures and Societies, University of Leeds



Dr. Mckenna Marko

I am currently a postdoctoral researcher in Holocaust Literature at the University of Leeds. My three-year postdoc is part of the United Kingdom's AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) funded research project, "Rethinking Holocaust Literature: Contexts, Canons, and Circulations", which brings together a team

of researchers at Leeds and the University of Washington, St. Louis. The project is a comprehensive rethinking of the history of Holocaust literature, applying contemporary concepts of power, inequality, human rights, and social justice to determine what Holocaust literature consists of, how it operates, and what the Holocaust means today. As one of three postdoctoral scholars employed on the project, my duties include working with forty-four senior and early career scholars to edit and publish the forthcoming *Cambridge History of Holocaust Literature*, organizing a public engagement program for the volume with institutional partners in the UK, US, Europe, Australia, and South Africa, and editing a pedagogy-focused volume *New Approaches to Teaching Holocaust Literature* (Camden House).

In the past year and a half, I've met Holocaust scholars across different disciplines and taken inspiration from the fascinating work they are doing. We have hosted



two conferences for our contributors to the *Cambridge History of Holocaust Literature* at the University of Washington Bellingham and YIVO, and had panels represented at this year's Lessons & Legacies conference. As one of the coeditors, I have the privilege of reading chapters on diverse topics such as the Holocaust's intersections with the Rwandan genocide in Rwandan literature, the politics of translating Polish girl's ghetto diaries into English, literature thematizing the Afro-German experiences of Nazism, Holocaust literature in Latin America, and the multilingual corpus of Theresienstadt poetry, among many others. I'm also writing my own chapter for the volume on the transnational circulation of Holocaust testimonies from East/Central Europe during state socialism. I am beyond thrilled to be a part of this volume as both contributor and coeditor, and wish I had such a resource back when I was writing my dissertation on Yugoslav Holocaust memory.

The second publication is a teaching volume showcasing new methods for teaching Holocaust literature in higher education. Grace Mahoney and I will be co-writing a chapter for this volume on teaching Holocaust literature, film, and other media from East/Central Europe, focusing on the former Yugoslavia and Ukraine, through a transnational lens. We will be applying our teaching experience gained over the years in Michigan's Slavic department to the chapter. We hope it might one day become a valuable resource for instructors hoping to include more literature from the region in their syllabi!

Finally, my colleagues and I are organizing an extensive international public engagement program featuring our contributors for *The Cambridge History of Holocaust Literature*. Ben Paloff and I, along with Russian literary scholar Leona Toker, did an online roundtable at the Holocaust Education Foundation at Northwestern University discussing postmemorial constellations in socialist and postsocialist Holocaust literature in April.

For those of you interested in following our activities, you can check out our website here: <https://sites.wustl.edu/rethinkingholocaustliterature/>



# graduate student focus

## How do Doctoral Students Survive, Thrive, and Revive?

Aleks Marciniak, Ph.D. Alum (Class of 2025)



Aleks Marciniak

The beginning and end of each academic year is invigorating for graduate students. The beginning of the year is a time to make plans for a better year ahead; the end of the year is when we take stock of the past year. The department hosted an inaugural graduate student retreat which was an off-campus, student-only retreat that offered an opportunity to engage in reflection and set goals for the upcoming academic year and beyond.

The retreat's facilitators engaged graduate students in several individual and group exercises throughout the day. One activity made the biggest impact on me:

"Survive, Thrive, and Revive." The instructions were to individually sort the activities we relate to our graduate school identities (as students, instructors, and colleagues) into three respective columns. The "survive" column was for activities that we found difficult or mandatory; the "thrive" column was for activities that we do well in or are neutral to; and the "revive" column was for activities that nourish and rejuvenate us.

I initially paused at the beginning of this exercise. I could easily list my responsibilities and obligations – dissertation writing, researching, lesson planning, lecturing, attending meetings, and so forth – but I was unsure how to categorize them. Despite my doctoral

training to analyze everything, I had never really considered which of my academic responsibilities was reviving. How does thriving differ from reviving? Am I going to be the only person who lists dissertation writing in the "survive" column? I was overthinking. I began to write honestly and waited for the facilitators' cue to stop.

When everyone completed the exercise, we walked around the room and read one another's responses. Then, we discussed what we noticed. Before being invited to share, I noticed something familiar in others' survival columns. We began to discuss why it was there. What could be done to make it more manageable? If those changes were made, could we move it into the thrive column? The nature of graduate school makes it easy to latch onto a pattern of thought, especially about the dissertation, but the second part of this particular exercise was to encourage us to challenge our perspectives. By sharing how we individually engaged

with our shared roles and responsibilities differently and discussing our thought processes, we offered one another meaningful ways to reconsider how we perceived certain items in our columns. I began to shift some of my responses between columns.

Being able to reflect and brainstorm with my colleagues in a space of mutual understanding and support gave me a new sense of purpose for the academic year. I feel equipped to reframe

challenges into the "thrive" and "revive" columns wherever possible. Now that the semester is ending, I can say that I have held myself accountable to finding something positive (or at least neutral) in every survival task that I encounter. Try the exercise for yourself, you may be surprised at what comes of it.





# graduate student focus

## Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship Awarded to Azhar Dyussekenova

Lacey Krecko, Executive Assistant



Azhar Dyussekenova

Congratulations to PhD candidate Azhar Dyussekenova, who has been awarded a Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship for the 2025–26 academic year. This prestigious support allows Azhar to focus exclusively on her dissertation, *Unvirgin Steppe: The Queer Ecologies of Central Asian Postcolonial Cultural Production*. Her project examines how

Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tajik writers and filmmakers critique Soviet imperial policy and the extraction of the region's natural resources, bringing questions of environment, identity, and power into the same frame.

By tracing these creative works across languages and media, Azhar highlights how artists from Central Asia challenge dominant narratives and recover local ways of knowing. The dissertation foregrounds queer ecological perspectives to show how bodies, landscapes, and histories are intertwined, and how cultural production can resist and reimagine colonial legacies.

The Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship is one of the highest honors offered by the Rackham Graduate School. It recognizes doctoral candidates whose dissertations are unusually creative, ambitious, and impactful, and provides time and resources to complete that work. We are proud to see Azhar's scholarship recognized at this level and look forward to celebrating the insights that emerge from her research.

## New Graduate Students: Fall 2025

Welcome Emma Baldwin, Oksana Scherba, and Aleksandra Zakharova!



Oksana Scherba



Aleksandra Zakharova

Emma Baldwin (not pictured)



# undergraduate student focus

## Polish Language and Culture Events

Piotr Westwalewicz, Lecturer

### Wolverine Ball Charity Gala

**February 15, 2025 | Weber's Restaurant & Hotel Grand Ballroom**

More than 200 guests filled the ballroom for the Polish Student Club's signature event, the Wolverine Ball. The Slavic Department was recognized for its ongoing sponsorship, a Polanie song set the tone, and a Detroit-based dance ensemble delivered a lively program. Students also premiered a short video showcasing the club's projects throughout the year. Every dollar raised went to the ChadTough Defeat DIPG Foundation.



### Fat Tuesday Pączki Pop-Up

**March 11, 2025 | Mason Hall**

Over 200 students lined up for fresh, gloriously rich pączki at the club's Fat Tuesday sale. The annual treat day remains a joyful (and unapologetically sugary) way to share Polish culinary tradition on campus.

### Polish Program Outing at Amadeus Café

**March 11, 2025 | Ann Arbor**

Nearly 30 students and faculty gathered for our largest Polish Program outing yet. Polish majors and minors, future concentrators, and students from language and culture courses enjoyed a family-style meal hosted by Paweł Stróżyński, owner of Amadeus Café and a longtime supporter of the event. The Copernicus Program also contributed to making the evening a success.

**Thank you to everyone who planned, volunteered, performed, and attended. Your enthusiasm keeps Polish language and culture thriving at Michigan.**





# undergraduate student focus

## Congratulations to our 2025 Graduates!

Lacey Krecko, Executive Assistant

On Friday, May 2, 2025, the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures celebrated our talented students and their many accomplishments in a graduation ceremony in the Michigan Room at the Michigan League. The ceremony included a heartfelt welcome and remarks from Professor and Department Chair Benjamin Paloff and recognition of this year's graduates and award winners by our department faculty, including Sofya Khagi, Ewa Malachowska-Pasek, Marija Rosic, Tatjana Aleksić, Svitlana Rogovyk, Nina Shkolnik, and Piotr Westwalewicz. Thank you to our amazing graduates, their friends, and families, and to all Slavic Languages and Literatures faculty and staff who helped to create a wonderful and lasting memory for our graduates!

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Aleksa Sekularac

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Daria Podgorski\* | Kate Rozanski

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\* Denotes Summer or Fall 2024 Graduates





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