

here—not geeks in Silicone Valley, not cashiers at Bloomingdales, nor janitors at our universities. Since presses, unlike charity organizations, need to turn a profit, what does this scenario of fundamental incompatibility augur for the field? Nothing sunny, unless we honestly confront our mode of being for the last dozen or more years and revise our writing and spending habits.

In short, my vision prompts the following Polonius-like counsel: teach across broad areas, and in the process improve your own education; hire the applicant who truly impresses you, even if she plunges you into a state of trembling insecurity—if you cannot control envy, then channel it into other areas—envy your neighbor’s lawn or dog; consider co-producing scholarship with junior colleagues, including your graduate students, who can bring new perspectives to bear on topics that you might not even have contemplated. Buy books in Slavic instead of daiquiris or supplementary collision insurance. Consider voting in the Eliot Borenstein Tax on Tenure.

Chapter XI of Voltaire’s *Candide*, a salutary *vade mecum* of skepticism and clear-headed sobriety, contains a line that academics in areas under threat cannot afford to ignore: “O che sciagura d’essere senza coglioni!”—“Oh, what misfortune to be without balls!” Indeed, and not only in the world of *Candide*. In sum, then, I passionately believe that bringing one’s brains in alignment with one’s metaphorical balls and courting excommunication by Richard Brecht is the way for Slavic Studies to thrive in the new millennium.

Vision 20/20

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I choose to see the title “Vision 2020” as an exercise in speculative time travel rather than corrective ophthalmology. As a teacher of both utopian and apocalyptic literature, I find

this approach appropriate; after all, speculations about the future of Slavic Studies tend to oscillate wildly between these two modes. Either a new day is dawning, when every American girl and boy will be breaking down our doors, desperate to enroll in courses on the Slavophile/Westernizer debate and Russian pre-post-modernist prose, or the sky is falling, and lack of interest in our field is going to force us to close up shop altogether and go wandering the streets carrying signs that say “Will parse Slavic syntax for food.” More often than not, such prognostication is a pointless exercise, so rather than make predictions, I prefer to focus on two areas of particular importance for the next generations of Slavic scholars: the curriculum and the world of scholarly publishing.

When it comes to undergraduate offerings and in particular graduate program design, the last decade has seen a number of positive trends, even if they often amount to desperate measures in response to a perceived crisis. Though some might wince at the rise of courses with deliberately catchy (indeed, cutesy titles) such as “Dracula” or “Love and Death in Russian Literature,” when done right, these attempts to appeal to an undergraduate sensibility still expose students to traditional high culture through the tried and true “bait and switch” method. Traditionalists need not be so concerned that this is always a matter of “dumbing down,” that we are offering the Slavic equivalent of “Rocks for Jocks” (“Slavs for Slobs?”). Though it might seem rather obvious, new Slavic courses on sex and gender, women’s writing, popular culture, and film do not have to be part of a zero-sum game. Indeed, if my talk has a message to those who are reluctant to see the curriculum change, it is this: cultural studies is not your enemy.

By the same token, my appeal to my fellow practitioners of cultural studies is: you have fewer enemies than you think, or than you would like to believe. Slavic Studies is a field that is used to polarization, a field that has, perhaps,

inherited the binary thought patterns that Lotman and Uspensky attribute to the culture so many of us study. All too often, both traditionalists and Young Turks get a sense of satisfaction out of being embattled: defending the classics is never more righteous than when the barbarians are at the gates, and what’s the fun in tipping over the sacred cows if no one is indignantly harumphing? In reality, the stakes are not all that high, and the battle is far less interesting than it might first seem. Part of what passes for cultural studies, in Slavic and elsewhere, suffers from the tendency to chase after the latest fashion, but the basic premise, that highbrow literature does not exist in a vacuum, that it is part of a continuum of literary and extra-literary texts and contexts where aesthetics and ideology necessarily intersect, is so patently obvious as to verge on the banal. For graduate students, the addition of cultural studies to the curriculum can provide an even greater intellectual breadth, as well as a much-needed sense of versatility to the young scholar’s CV (one need only look at the number of job announcements asking for someone who can also teach film and “culture” to see the importance here).

In my department at NYU, we are in the process of completely overhauling our undergraduate and graduate curriculum, transforming it into an interdisciplinary program for Russian and Slavic cultural studies. We are about to experiment with a two-track system of graduate courses, where traditional classes that hold little appeal for students from other departments (poetry immediately comes to mind) are offered by our professors as tutorials: under this “pay-per-view” model, students theoretically pick any of these tutorials for full credit at any time in their career, while the faculty member will get some course release after providing a certain number of tutorials. Classes that draw on a base larger than our department, classes that bring in other arts and media than simply literature, will be offered in the traditional seminar format,

following the standard “cafeteria-style” model (choosing from what is offered at any given time). Through experimentation with curricular format and content, we intend to strike a balance that allows us to do comparative studies, film, art, philosophy, gender studies, and, yes, television and popular culture, without neglecting the classics.

My second subject is completely different, but of no less importance: the pathetic state of scholarly publishing, and its impact on the careers of young and future Slavists. As we all know, this is a realm in which the sky really is falling. As university presses implode and cut back, Slavic Studies is often one of the first areas to be jettisoned, for reasons that are economically understandable, but nonetheless lamentable. The economics of the business simply do not allow for the publication of the requisite number of new Slavic scholarly books, while tenure requirements continue to inflate. It would be a lost cause for Slavic Departments to crusade against tenure drift or to try to be innovators in the world of electronic publishing: we are too small and too insignificant to bring the winds of change to our colleges and universities. Proclaiming that a book is not always necessary, or that electronic publishing is just as legitimate as paper and cloth, is a quick path to total marginalization (however worthwhile both causes might be in principle). If we are to continue as a field, if young scholars are to get tenure, we must publish books with reputable university presses. And, more and more, these reputable presses simply don’t want us.

For the past several years, Northwestern University Press had admirably stepped up to the plate, saving more than one career by publishing a strong, good, but not very marketable first book by a newly-minted, tenure-track PhD. But the situation was financially untenable: there was not enough perceived demand to justify paperbacks, while few of us are willing to shell out \$80 for a book that we hope our libraries will purchase. Now that Northwestern

has cut back, things do not look good for strong, solid literary analysis, especially for such unsexy but important topics as poetry.

There is, however, at least one possible solution. We, as Slavists, and particularly as AATSEEL members, must recognize that we have a corporate interest in the publication and sales of Slavic scholarly books. We cannot just rely on the kindness of university presses. By the same token, even if we had the resources to set up a publishing arm, the result would probably not look reputable enough to satisfy a P&T committee at a research university or a selective liberal arts college. If at all possible, AATSEEL should form an alliance with a strong, reputable university press in order to promote a Slavic series that has just a small element of the Book-of-the-Month-Club to it. A press needs to guarantee a certain minimum level of publication, while AATSEEL needs to guarantee a minimum level of sales. The plan is as follows: University Press X establishes the “AATSEEL Slavic Series.” The press operates independently and retains its full rights to approve and reject manuscripts, but commits to publishing a certain number of books per year. And the key here is that the books be published in paperback as well as cloth. AATSEEL, meanwhile, drums up a subscription campaign, targeting primarily (but by no means exclusively) tenured faculty. If we are aware of our corporate interest in the future of our discipline, should we not be willing to commit to buying, say, three Slavic books a year by a certain press at \$25 a pop, even if they might not be on a subject in which we’re interested? Consider it a tax on tenure, or an acknowledgment of the debt we owe to the presses that publish us and to the scholars who will one day replace us. If we do nothing, we are complicit in producing more and more graduate students who, even if they are lucky enough to get tenure-track jobs, will be sacrificed to the harsh realities of the market. The 18 years to come will encompass the entire lifecycle of more

than one new generation of North American Slavists, who will end their abbreviated careers as so much academic road kill. And one hardly needs 20/20 vision to see just how unappealing a picture that is.

Turning Tables on the Future of Slavic

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My first thought after I was invited to participate in the MLA roundtable about the “future of Slavic” was that it would have been easier to write another paper than to entertain the profession with ideas about the future of the profession. I had never thought of myself as an academic fortune teller. The very way the theme of this “roundtable” (which turned out not to be round at all) was worded—an elliptical phrase whose second half appears to be missing, as in: “The future of Slavic [...]”—initially sounded intimidating in that it suggested that there is a future for Slavic, but that we do not know what that future might be. Other options for a title would have included the following: “Is there a future in Slavic?” In some ways such a question would have presented me with less of an obstacle because at least that question would have allowed for a clear-cut answer, as in “yes” or “no”. The not-so round roundtable functioned like the game the Germans call, not for nothing, *Stille Post*, or secret mail: Someone begins a phrase that he whispers into his or her neighbour’s ear, the neighbour tries to repeat the phrase, whispering it into his neighbours ear, and so forth. At every step along the way, the message is reissued in ways that forever defy precise reconstruction. When I sketched out my contribution to the discussion, I did not yet know if I would be sitting at the beginning or at the end of the line. If I were to sit at the end, I reasoned, it