Translation Workshop in Slavic Languages Expands Summer Programming

The new Workshop in Literary and Scholarly Translation from Slavic Languages welcomed twelve participants working with six mentors during the first week of the Summer Research Lab, June 10-14. The workshop was organized by Sibelan Forrester of Swarthmore College in its inaugural year and brought PhD students and postdoctoral scholars from a variety of disciplines together to work on literary and scholarly translation projects from a range of Slavic languages.

Workshop participants began their mornings with lectures on translation theory, practice, and research by workshop mentors as well as an informational talk on publishing by Jeremy Davies of the Dalkey Archive Press and an introduction to the Slavic Reference Service and a library guide prepared for the workshop. One to two additional hours were spent each morning in consultation with their assigned mentors on their work in progress. Afternoon hours were free for additional consultation with mentors or other participants, research in the library related to the translation project, and of course intense work on translations. The week was capped of Friday afternoon with a celebratory dinner punctuated by readings of excerpts from translations.

In addition to the great treatment by the REEEC staff, and especially the nice breakfasts each morning, workshop participants expressed their appreciation for the library staff and the intense attention to their projects provided by the mentors. This year’s mentors included Brian James Baer and Joanna Trecziak of Kent State University, Ellen Elias-Bursac, an independent scholar and translator formerly of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and Harvard University, Amelia Glasser of the University of California San Diego, Sibelan Forrester, and REEEC Director David Cooper.

Translation projects included recent Bosnian, Russian, Slovak, and Slovenian novels and stories; Polish and Russian poetry; post-Soviet drama; articles from Ukrainian Orthodox Church periodicals from the 1920s; Olha Kobylianska’s stories, from the same Ukrainian 1920s; Anton Chekhov’s medical case studies; and Soviet scientist Aleksandr Chizhevskii’s Solar Terrestrial and Ionization studies.

Since the advent of more communicative style language instruction in the later 20th century, translation has been largely absent from the foreign language curriculum. But translation is a high level language skill, and specific training and practice in translation can benefit not only literary translators but also scholars working with vernacular sources. REEEC is pleased at the successful launch of this new program and the opportunity for professional training it provides, and looks forward to continuing the workshop in the coming years.

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