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Professor's New Work Looks at Happiness in Soviet Times

Rachel Hatch
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Contact: Rachel Hatch, (309) 556-3960

Professor's New Work Looks at Happiness in Soviet Times

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – For decades, scholars have reported how the Soviet culture emphasized that happiness could be found in the utopia of a collective society. Yet how was collective happiness pursued? A groundbreaking new book, co-edited by Illinois Wesleyan University's Isaac Funk Professor of Russian Studies Marina Balina, explores the concept of happiness as defined by Soviet culture in *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style* (Anthem Press, 2009).

"These essays redefine the preconceived notion of Soviet happiness as the products of official ideology imposed from above and expressed predominantly through collective experience," said Balina.

Featuring articles by leading specialists in the study of Soviet culture from the United Kingdom (UK), the United States, Germany and Italy, the book is part of the publisher's series on Russian, East European and European Studies. The goal of this collection of essays is to introduce the Western reader to the most representative ideas of happiness, and the common practices of its pursuit that shaped Soviet everyday life and cultural discourse from the early post-revolutionary years to the later period of Stalinist and post-Stalinist culture.

The book's essays explore the idea of happiness as portrayed in paintings, architecture, films and posters, which contributed to our understanding of the "Soviet Self." Along with her editing duties that she shared with Evgeny Dobrenko of the University of Sheffield, UK, Balina has co-authored an introduction and contributed an essay on the concepts of happiness as portrayed in children's literature titled, "'It's Grand to be an Orphan!' Crafting Happy Citizens in Soviet Children's Literature of the 1920s."

A native of Russia who earned her doctorate at Leningrad State University (now St. Petersburg), Balina joined Illinois Wesleyan's faculty in 1989 and is a member of the University's Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures. Her published research has focused on contemporary Russian life writing including autobiography, memoir, travelogue, and most recently on children's literature and culture of the former Soviet Union. She has co-edited *Endquote: Sots Art Literature and Soviet Empire Style* (Northwestern UP, 2000), *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Russian Writers since 1980*, (Thomson & Gale Publishers, 2003,) an anthology of Russian and Soviet fairy tales, *Politicizing Magic* (Northwestern UP, 2005), and most recently *Russian Children's Literature and Culture* (with Larissa Rudova, Routledge, 2008).