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## **Re-Thinking the Thaw: Literature and Reform in the Soviet Union (1950s And 1960s)**

Daniel Hanson  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Michael Weis, Faculty Advisor  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

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Oral Presentation O8.3

**RE-THINKING THE THAW: LITERATURE AND REFORM IN THE  
SOVIET UNION (1950S AND 1960S)**

Daniel Hanson and Michael Weis\*

History Department, Illinois Wesleyan University

The Thaw, the period of Soviet history immediately following the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, was a fascinating time for culture and government. Until recently, there has not been significant scholarly attention devoted to this period in cultural history. A new examination of memoirs from writers, dissidents, and Party leaders shows that this period was much more complex than some historians previously thought. The Thaw was neither a true liberalization nor was it a government-facilitated catharsis for the Russian Intelligentsia. Instead, it witnessed the re-emergence of a number of ideologies, each of which proposed a different way forward. However, these competing philosophies were all marked by a distinctly Russian view of the world, a view marked by binary opposition, disavowal of the recent past, and belief that a glorious future awaits. Using memoirs and literature from this period, this project will examine the changes in the Soviet Union in light of this cultural phenomenon.