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Julia Perez
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Kuznetsova '24 Connects Gothic Literature to the LGBTQ Experience

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — After poring over the haunting stories of Bram Stoker and Mary Shelley as a 2023 Summer Eckley Scholar, Barbara Kuznetsova '24 examined how the feelings evoked by Gothic literature can be similar to experiences faced by those in the LGBTQIA+ community.

Kuznetsova said she was thrilled at being named an Eckley Scholar, allowing her to focus solely on her passion for literature

during her last summer at Illinois Wesleyan.

"This Eckley project boosted my close reading skills immensely, and that is impressive since I am an English major," she said. "I hope to use the paper I am writing right now as a writing sample for grad school and maybe to publish it in a literary journal."

With her Eckley project titled "Forbidden Relationships: Queer Anxiety in Gothic Literature," Kuznetsova spent the summer reading novels like *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *Carmilla* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. She paired these readings with various theory books about the intersection between Gothic stories and the LGBTQIA+ community.

Using this content, Kuznetsova began exploring how the anxiety faced by the main characters in classic Gothic

literature often reflects the same anxiety that the queer community faced during the Victorian period in England, especially how the "characters experienced complicated feelings of attraction and horror for the cause of their anxiety."

"This topic is important to me because when I tell people how Gothic literature is intertwined with queerness, they get surprised because rarely do they think about such topics," said Kuznetsova. "Being queer is a huge part of my identity, and it was important to me to connect these two parts of myself: being queer and loving literature."

Kuznetsova said weekly meetings with her faculty mentor, Visiting Assistant Professor of English Allison Serraes, helped add structure and strength to her research.

"Professor Serraes assisted me immensely because often I came to our meetings with many chaotic thoughts, and she helped me put those ideas in structure and more analytic terminology. I am deeply grateful that professor Serraes agreed to work with me on this research, and I know I have come so far only because of her," said Kuznetsova.

The Eckley project is just the beginning of Kuznetsova's relationship with Gothic tales.

"Hopefully, this whole project will end as a Gothic book, for which I am doing background research right now. I hope to continue it with research honors so I will get one step closer to the end-goal of [writing] that Gothic book," she said.

Established by the late IWU President Emeritus Robert Eckley and his wife Nell, the Eckley award provides a stipend of \$4,000 for each scholar to spend the summer conducting academic research or artistic activity under the mentorship of a faculty member. The program is designed to develop and deepen a student's creative and research competencies.



English major Barbara Kuznetsova '24 used her time as a 2023 Summer Eckley Scholar to examine how the feelings evoked by Gothic literature can be similar to experiences faced by those in the LGBTQIA+ community.

By Julia Perez