

## BRAUN

Over the course of my time at Notre Dame, I have had the opportunity to utilize research and analytical skills in both my major and minor, Russian and Education, Schooling, and Society. This particular course, Contemporary Russia in Russian, encourages a cross-media analysis as we combine an understanding of history with that of politics, film, and literature. With this project that I was truly able to put my skills to the test by combining outside source material with my own close reading of Russian texts. My research began with an interest in further investigating the female experience in the Soviet Union with the hopes of providing a more feminist perspective to the analysis of the culture during the Soviet Union. Due to a focus in previous readings on art and literature of the Soviet Union era, I decided to focus my investigation on the connection between the female experience and feminine expression of art, particularly in the poetry of Elena Shvarts. Shvarts stood out to me as a poet not only because she was female, but because she was a samizdat poet, or a poet that only published using the underground artistic community. Her unique perspective would provide insight that was not necessarily censored by the Soviet government itself, a critical distinction when analyzing Soviet literature. After reading poems from Shvarts' collection, *Paradise*, I decided to focus on the poems "What that Street is Called" and "The Dump." My research then incorporated my background investigation into interpretations of the poetry with the consideration of Shvarts as a female poet. I concluded that Shvarts' use of jarring contrast implicated her place in the forced duality of the female experience in the Soviet Union.

Once I had identified my topic, I immediately turned to the online library catalogues; in particular Hesburgh Library. Due to the wide net that I needed to cast in terms of background, I used a variety of different searches, as well as searching methods to find my material. As I reviewed various search terms, I quickly realized that the most useful sources for my project were physical items in the Hesburgh Library collection. It was then that I turned to the stacks, thoroughly perusing the the eighth and eleventh floors, home to the Russian history and literature collections. Each new book led me to another source. For example, in my search for *A History of Women's Writing in Russia*, I stumbled upon *Fruits of Her Plume: Essays on Contemporary Russian Women's culture*. Besides these, I gleefully chose a stack of books that would provide the necessary background material both on the history of the Soviet female experience and Elena Shvarts' life and poetry. Although I did not end up using all of the sources in my final citations, they provided a critical understanding of the forced duality that Soviet women had to suffer through. The texts also equipped me with a basic understanding of the academic criticism surrounding Shvarts' work, in turn supplying me with the tools to analyze Shvarts in an academic context myself.

As important as the materials gathered using library resources were, the physical resources that the library offered provided an equal amount of assistance. First, the physical spaces within the library provided the setting for my saga of exploration. Whether it was the arrangement of the tomes that presented new titles and ideas for my discovery, or the multitude of study spaces that allow for a different writing sensation depending on the need of the moment. Secondly, the physical electronic resources that the library provides quickly became a necessity after the death of my laptop. Both the stationary desktops and the laptops-for-loan provided me with the necessary tools and flexibility to compile my project and bring the various aspects of research together. Finally, and most importantly, the staff at the library more than deserves my recognition. From those who loaned me the laptops repeatedly, always with a

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smile and positive attitude, to the janitorial staff who maintain the space so that we can continue to use it, to the security staff that greet me warmly at the end of the night of work, every individual worked to create a space conducive to learning and academic inquiry. My research is possible because of their support, whether they knew they were supporting me in that moment or not.

All of these pieces came together as I built my project myself. The extensive background that the online library catalogues and physical collection provided gave me the opportunity to analyze other scholars and distinguish whether they added value by citing them in my own work. The physical spaces supported both my research and writing process, giving me the spaces that I needed to be successful. The physical electronic resources provided media tools to analyze, outline, and write my project. Finally, the unsung heroes on staff at Hesburgh Library created an environment where I could create my best work.