

As the Dust of Earth: The Literature of Abandonment in Revolutionary Russia and Ukraine

Wednesday, April 23, 2025 | 4:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.
Faculty Club, Atkinson Pavilion

"As the Dust of the Earth: The Literature of Abandonment in Revolutionary Russia and Ukraine" explores poetry and catastrophe, violence and relief work, artistic literature and documentation, injury and care. The work addresses these topics through the lens of the Jewish concept of "hefker," which originates in property law, where it refers to objects that are ownerless and available for anyone to claim. The author examines the multivalence of the hefker concept as a legal, poetic, existential, and political/social term. The study highlights how Yiddish poets, Russian-language authors, aid workers, and medical professionals—all responding to the pogroms of the Russian Civil War—used hefker to describe and conceptualize the experience of mass public violence. The evolution of the term is explored through various contexts: declaring a population or individual beyond the realm of law, acting with abandon, abandoning an object, and abandoning the ego.



Guest Speaker: Harriet Murav, Professor Emerita in the Departments of Comparative and World Literature and Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Bio: Murav is the author of six monographs and co-editor of five books on Russian and Yiddish literature. She co-translated *Judgment* (2017) and is working on *In the Shadow of the War*. Her recent work includes *As the Dust of the Earth* and a new project on contemporary Ukrainian poetry.

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