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### **IRIS Grant Report**

I received the IRIS Area and International Studies Award as a part of my funding package when I began my graduate studies in the Slavic Languages and Literature program in the Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic + in 2020. I used the generous grant to fund my pre-dissertation library research which I conducted over eight weeks in summer 2023 in Krakow, Poland. Since I completed the third year of my program, I am expected to prepare and defend my dissertation proposal by the end of the next semester, and the research funded by IRIS helped me a great deal at the initial stages of this task.

In my dissertation, I plan to study realist novels, written in Polish and Russian in the Russian Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century, as a discursive form for imagining alternatives to the existing order. My approach challenges the traditional understanding of realist literature as a mimetic mode of writing preoccupied with reflecting the outside world. By analyzing utopian potentials of the realist novel, I expect to gain a better understanding of how the literary form serves as a vehicle for political imagination, especially in a highly repressive state where overt political writing and exploration of alternatives to the established order might not be possible.

During my trip to Krakow, I conducted research at the Jagiellonian Library and the Regional Public Library, focusing mainly on Polish realist novels and novellas written by authors such as Henryk Sienkiewicz, Maria Rodziewiczówna, Aleksander Świątchowski, Eliza Orzeszkowa, Stefan Żeromski, Bolesław Prus, and others, as well as on literary journals from the period, and Polish-language scholarship concerned with the material I am interested

in. Thanks to the vast collection of Polish-language sources in both libraries, I was able to study literary and critical texts which are often impossible to find online or in a physical format outside of Poland. I was also able to consult my ideas with scholars of nineteenth-century literature at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, and this contributed greatly to my research.

In addition to the library research, I also attended the World Congress of Polish Studies which took place in Krakow on July 12–14. There, I was able not only to gain a better understanding of the current state of Polish studies and to participate in discussions in the panels, but also to establish contacts with important scholars in the field from both Poland and abroad, and I am certain these relationships will help me during the work on my dissertation, as well as in my later career.

Thanks to the IRIS grant, I accomplished my research goals for this summer, and I am confident that I am better equipped to complete and present my dissertation proposal by the end of the upcoming semester.