**Writing the ‘Martyr-Heroine’:**

**The Prostitute in Garshin**

The crisis of Russian realism has been examined as a product of many contingencies: the human factor, the disintegration of Russia’s social and political landscape, the decay of the Russian language, and the dominance of materialism and positivism. This paper identifies one more factor that may have contributed to the decline of the Russian realist novel – the appearance of revolutionary women in Russian life and literature of the late 1870s-early 1880s. With the emergence of the historical martyr-heroines, such as Zasulich, Perovskaia, and Figner, the familial tropes of mother, wife, and bride lost their prominence. Instead, there appeared other narrative concerns – namely, how to portray a woman’s ideological violence, public activism, and penchant for martyrdom outside her traditionally familial designation?

This paper examines one such response by analyzing two stories by Garshin, “An Incident” (1878) and “Nadezhda Nikolaevna” (1885). While the other writers of the time (Polonsky, Turgenev, and Korolenko) reacted to the advent of revolutionary women by creating a new trope of the martyr-heroine, Garshin responded by re-evaluating the existing portrayal of the fallen woman. This paper investigates Garshin’s narrative of prostitution in three parts. The first part historicizes both stories as the writer’s timely response to the changing perception of women. The second part examines the subversive function of the prostitute and its symbolic contribution to violence in “An Incident.” The third part focuses on the redeeming role of an artist and the metaliterary implications of female sexual and political transgression in “Nadezhda Nikolaevna.” In the end, I argue that by challenging the traditional portrayal of the fallen woman as victimized, compassionate, or ready for marriage, Garshin enables the prostitute to transition from a marginalized character in the realist novel to the central personage of the modernist writing.