

Presenter: Erica Camisa Morale, University of Southern California Iudushka and the Abacus:
Title: *The Golovlevs* between Destruction of the Idyll and the Torpidity of Consciousness

Abstract:

According to Foote, literary criticism has approached Saltykov-Shchedrin's *The Golovlevs* from one of two angles: either as primarily a social novel or as primarily a psychological one. Is this alternative inevitable? Or does a connection exist between Iudushka as a "historical type" and Iudushka as a character who experiences a personal tragedy?

The events in the novel can be fully understood in light of Bakhtin's interpretation of the idyll. It is in fact a harmonic "fastening-down ... of life ... to a familiar territory ... [a] little spatial world ... limited and sufficient unto itself," and *The Golovlevs* presents the features characterizing it reversed: instead of a variety of natural phenomena there is a deathly monotony, instead of the vibrancy of life we have the absence of any living being, and a sense of doom predominates everywhere.

The trigger of the crisis in the idyll and the link between the social and the psychological themes in the novel is greed, which is the element that makes the social system in the Russian countryside and the psychology of the individuals collapse. Greed has its roots in landownership and in the economic relations that produced the social institution of serfdom. It is also connected with psychological qualities like envy and obstinacy and generates tendencies like being closed off and isolated, which Iudushka represents in an exemplary way.

Thus, Saltykov-Shchedrin evaluates the end of idyllic life (and the genre representing it) differently from Bakhtin, who attributes it to "the new capitalistic world." In *The Golovlevs* instead, the avidity permeating social action and the characters' psychological activity is intrinsic to the socio-economic relations in the Russian countryside. Saltykov-Shchedrin seems to be telling us that the idyll probably never truly existed and has always had within itself the contradictions that determined its own death.