

Presenter: Claire Whitehead, University of St Andrews

Title: Secular and Divine Justice: The Representation and Function of Religion in Early Russian Crime Fiction

Abstract:

The genre of crime fiction as practised in Russia in the late Imperial era (from c.1862) offers a fascinating corollary to the discussion of nineteenth-century Russian literary realism more broadly. This paper will interrogate mimetic practice in early Russian crime fiction with specific reference to the genre's depiction of the relationship between representatives of secular law (the *sudebnyi sledovatel'*) and those of the Church. Although the detective figure, with his quasi-scientific, rational and positivist approach to solving crime, is the genre's obvious hero, local priests, particularly in rural or provincial communities, make frequent and telling appearances in Russian crime fiction from this era. The proposed analysis will consider whether the depiction of the relationships between these religious and judicial figures is driven primarily by the 'world-creation' impulse or by a desire for 'world imitation'. In particular, the paper will demonstrate how both sympathetic and antipathetic relations drawn between detectives and priests constitute a key component in the construction of the narrative authority of the former within the fictional world. It will also acknowledge the part played by this aspect of early Russian crime fiction in advocating the benefits of real-world reforms to the arcane judicial system. Finally, it will examine the mimetic drive behind those instances when the criminal investigator adopts the role of a substitute priest so as to coax the all-important confession from the suspect. Although some reference will be made to the well-known example of Porfirii Petrovich in Dostoevskii's *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, the paper will largely focus on lesser-known examples of the genre, including: P.I. Stepanov's *Pravye i vinovatye* (1869), N.P. Timofeev's *Zapiski sledovatel'ia* (1872) and S.A. Panov's *Ubiistvo v derevne Medveditse* (1872) and *Tri suda, ili Ubiistvo vo vremia bala* (1876).