**Panelist**: Alexander Zholkovsky <alik@usc.edu>

**Title**: Exile and Experimental Writing: Bunin's *Dark Alleys* with special reference to “Calling Cards”

**Abstract**: In this paper, I will argue that Ivan Bunin’s exilic isolation and resulting creative freedom took the form of an experimental, laboratory-style, exploration of his favorite themes. The dominant theme of *Dark Alleys* (1937-44) is neither “nostalgia for Russia” nor “relishing erotic experience,” but rather a sort of formal, and thus un-ideological, experimentation with the theme of “love,” testing all of the possible approaches, versions/solutions, points of view, and narrative techniques. The plots of the short stories comprising *Dark Alleys* can be seen as diverse variations on a limited set of basic situations, presented from multiple angles and carrying paradoxically divergent value judgements. A close analysis of “Calling Cards” will demonstrate how an “experimentation with love” pervades both the plot and the narrative structure of one of the most controversial tales in the collection. Remarkably, the readers’ and critics’ responses to the short story in question and the collection as a whole have been, first in emigration and later in Russia, mostly inadequate -- precisely because experimentation, and all the more so, experimentation with sex, was alien to the Russian idea-centric intellectual tradition.