

## **Jerzy Kolodziej**

Associate Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures, Part-time; and Director, Summer Workshop in Slavic, East European, Central Asian, and Caucasian Languages

I first met Jerzy Kolodziej in the summer of 1967, when he was an associate instructor and tour leader of Indiana University's famous Slavic Workshop, and I was an advanced Russian student and Soviet tour participant. Jerzy was known as George in those days, but we students found it much more fun to call him Yury, the Russian equivalent, since we were pledged to speak Russian all the time and it sounded much more authentic. Jerzy was a remarkable personality. First of all, his Russian was extremely good and we learned that he was a native speaker of the related Polish language, born in Poznan but living in the United States since the age of 10. Secondly, he had a wonderful gift for working with people. We all felt that he was genuinely interested in the people he was working with. He had a relaxed self-confidence that made him the person we all preferred to turn to with any problems. His combination of excellent Russian language skills and superb administrative ability made a great impression on me.

In the mid 1970s my career brought me to the Slavic department of Indiana University, exactly eight years after my summer experience at the Slavic Workshop. At that time, we had a renowned senior scholar as chair, but the day-to-day business of the department was run by an assistant chair. In the years 1979–1983, Jerzy Kolodziej served as our assistant chair, replacing Dan Armstrong, who had previously served in that position, but who suddenly was stricken with a fatal illness in 1979. At first it seemed that Dan was irreplaceable, but it turned out that Jerzy had many of the same excellent qualities—a calm demeanor and an innate sense of fairness, together with a great deal of tact. Around this time, Jerzy returned to the use of his original Polish name.

Jerzy completed his Ph.D. from our department in 1984, which more or less coincided with my appointment as department chair. Then he left for a position at the University of Tennessee as I began my administrative career at IU. In those years, we had a perennial problem of finding appropriate directors for the Slavic Workshop each summer. In terms of enrollment and national visibility, the workshop has always been an important part of our departmental mission. However, there originally was no provision for continuity and the junior faculty of the department were asked to take turns directing it every few years. Other ideas were floated and tried, but we had not yet found a successful formula. It was clear that certain special skills, both linguistic and administrative, were absolute necessities in this position.

Thus I found myself as chair of the Slavic department and in desperate need of a new Slavic Workshop director in 1986. It did not take me long to hit on the idea of Jerzy Kolodziej as the most natural and perfectly qualified person for the job. I phoned Jerzy immediately and got his agreement to direct our workshop for the following summer. I had the idea that we would start by hiring Jerzy as an outside candidate for one summer, but that his incredible skills would most likely convince our deans that he should stay on and become our permanent Slavic Workshop director. Indeed, it happened that way! Jerzy more than fulfilled everyone's expectations and has been our director until this day, more than 20 years after I turned to him as the best person I could think of for the job.

In the 1990s, working together with Professor Henry Cooper and others, Jerzy greatly expanded the Slavic Workshop, by including a number of non-Slavic languages of Central Asia and the Caucasus. This led to the change of name to the Indiana University Summer Workshop in Slavic, East European, Central Asian, and Caucasian Languages. Though accurate, the name and its acronym— IUSWSEECACL—were ungainly. Therefore an earlier acronym, SWSEEL, pronounced universally “swih-SEAL” and standing for Summer Workshop in Slavic and East European Languages, was retained to refer informally to the program. In addition to his celebrated and time-consuming work with SWSEEL, Jerzy has also given us excellent service as a teacher of Russian literature and conversation, for many years covering with our newly retired colleague Laurence Richter most of the third year courses in our Russian language program.

Jerzy has published on a variety of Russian and Polish literary topics, including his dissertation on Zamyatin, and articles on Olesha and Reymont. He has served as a translator for both Russian and Polish. All things considered, Professor Jerzy Kolodziej has given us more than 20 years of the most dedicated and conscientious service imaginable. He has drawn on his vast knowledge of Russian and Polish language and literature, but most of all, he has served us as a fair and honest human being, for which we will be forever in his debt.

*~Ronald F. Feldstein*