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Mellon Foundation Area and International Studies Fellowships for Incoming Graduate Students

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This past summer, I was able to travel to Skopje, Macedonia and Paris, France for 6 weeks to pursue dissertation research thanks to the funding from the Mellon Recruitment award. I spent most of my time in Macedonia primarily meeting with faculty from the University of Sts. Kiril and Methodius and the Institute of Macedonian Literature as well as doing archival research in the University library. In Paris, I was able to visit the Arsenal Library and spend time with the works of several of the core Oulipo group writers, primarily focusing on the manuscripts and letters of Georges Perec.

The bulk of my time abroad was spent in Skopje and Ohrid, another city in southern Macedonia. My research investigates late twentieth century fiction from the Balkans, Africa and Western Europe and engages with questions of postcolonial and postcommunist nationalism, translation and aesthetic experimentation. A lot of my research this summer can be called contextualizing. Though I was born in Skopje and am a native speaker of Macedonian, it is always useful to go back and refresh my memory of the language, the lexicon, the slang and turns of phrase that have changed over time and get access better linguistic resources than I have in the States to investigate the etymology and evolution of the language. Further, in conversations with professors of Macedonian literature and folklore, I can more easily situate certain texts and stories in the story of Macedonian literary history, something that would take far more research and digging on this side of the world. Since I work with aesthetically and stylistically experimental texts, the work of interpretation is often challenged by superficial knowledge of Balkan history and culture. One insight that this summer's research yielded was the etymological connection between the English word *guest* and its roots in Slavonic which is linked to the Macedonian word for God. The Macedonian cultural practice of going на гости (roughly translated as *visiting*) becomes a way of welcoming the divine into one's home. It is precisely this fairly common practice which is a kind of basis for an ethical life in Macedonia that becomes threatened in the ethnic hatred and violence which precipitated the fall of Yugoslavia and the wars in Macedonia in the early 2000s.

Additionally, I met with contemporary Macedonian authors on several occasions to discuss their works and how they see themselves as writers and public figures in what might be called a "minor literature." I was eager to hear about the community of writers that has recently formed in Macedonia and discussed approaches to make their work accessible to an English-speaking readership.