Postcommunist Fiction (SLAV 477 / CWLT 477 / REES 477)

Section A  
Fall 2007  
1048 FLB  
T 1–3:50

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Course description:
This survey of the central and east European novel in the postcommunist period explores how fiction has responded to and creatively figured the period of the so-called “transition” to capitalism and the continuities and discontinuities in literary traditions and in these societies, as well as the relevance of theories of postmodernism and postmodern literary analysis to these literatures.

Course objectives:
Students will read a number of novels published in 1989 or after in formerly communist countries. Through background readings and discussion of the novels, they will learn about the social and economic changes that have been occurring in these societies in the “transition” to democratic forms of government and capitalist economies. More centrally, students will learn how some of the most critically acclaimed writers of this period have chosen to represent this period in fiction. Students will be able to discuss recurrent themes in this multinational literature (such as paranoia, carnival, dislocation, corporeal experience, crime and mafia, nostalgia) and the varied literary techniques employed (palimpsest texts, unreliable narrators, misdirection and mystification, use of popular genres, metanarrative). Students will gain understanding of theories of postmodernism and engage with debates on their relevance for these literatures.

Requirements and grading:
Attendance and participation in discussion  10%  
Research paper (8–10 pp undergrads; 12–15, grads)  40%  
In-class presentation  20%  
Final exam  30%

Graduate students with the relevant language skills will complete readings in the original.

Required texts:


*Additional readings available on e-reserve.*

**Schedule:**

Please have read for each scheduled class the texts indicated for that session.

**Week 1**

Introduction. Syllabus. Socialism, Postsocialism, and Postmodernism

**Week 2**


*Postmodernism in postwar American literature*

**Week 3**

Topol, *Sister*, to page 167 e-res: Leslie Fielder, from *Cross the Border—Close the Gap*

**Week 4**

Topol, to page 347 e-res: John Barth, “The Literature of Exhaustion” (1967)

**Week 5**

Topol, to end **Evening film:** *Mandragora* (1997, Czech Republic) e-res: John Barth, “The Literature of Replenishment” (1980)

*Philosophical treatments of the postmodern*

**Week 6**


**Week 7**

Andrukhovych, *Perverzion*, to page 106
e-res: Lyotard, “Answer to the Question: What is the Postmodern?”

**Week 8**
Andrukhovych, to page 209  
**Paper assignment**  
e-res: Jameson, from *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

**Postmodern literary technique**

**Week 9**
Andrukhovych, to end  

**Week 10**
Gospodinov, *Natural Novel* (136 pp.)  
e-res: McHale, “Chinese Box Worlds,” ch. 8 of *Postmodernist Fiction*

**Week 11**
Tokarczuk, *House of Day, House of Night*, to page 146  
e-res: McHale, “Worlds of Discourse,” ch. 11 of *Postmodernist Fiction*

**Postmodernism and east central Europe**

**Week 12**
Tokarczuk, to end  
**Evening film:** *A Friend of the Deceased* (1998, Ukraine)

**Week 13**
Ugrešić, *The Ministry of Pain*, to page 121  

**Week 14**
Ugrešić, to end  
**Papers due.**  

**Final exam.**