

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

## Section A

Fall 2007

1048 FLB

T 1–3:50

*Instructor:* David L. Cooper

*Office:* 3131 FLB

*Email:* dlcoop@uiuc.edu

*Office Hours:* M, R 10–11

*Phone:* 244-4666

## 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:

Yuri Andrukhovych, *Perversion*, Northwestern, ISBN 0-8101-1964-1 (2005; orig. 1997)

Georgi Gospodinov, *Natural Novel*, Dalkey Archive, ISBN 1-56478-376-6 (2005; orig. 1999)

Péter Nádas, *A Lovely Tale of Photography*, Twisted Spoon, ISBN 80 902171 6 8 (1999; orig. 1995) –**DROPPED!**

Andrzej Stasiuk, *Tales of Galicia*, Twisted Spoon, ISBN 80 86264 05 X (2003; orig. 1995)

Olga Tokarczuk, *House of Day, House of Night*, Northwestern, ISBN 0-8101-1892-0 (2003, orig. 1998)

Jáchym Topol, *City, Sister, Silver*, Catbird Press, ISBN 0-945774-45-1 (2000; orig. 1994)

Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Ministry of Pain*, HarperCollins, ISBN 0060825847 (2006; orig. 2005)

Pavel Vilikovský, *Ever Green Is ...: Selected Prose*, Northwestern, ISBN 0-8101-1908-0 (2002; orig. 1989)

*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 Vilikovský, *Ever Green Is...*, page 13 to 113 (in class film REEC “Colonel Redl”)  
e-res: Verdery, *What Was Socialism? And What Comes Next?* (1996), Ch. 1, 8.

#### *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 Stasiuk, *Tales of Galicia* (120 pp.)  
e-res: Nadas “A Careful Definition of the Locale: Walking Around and Around a Solitary Wild Pear Tree”  
e-res: Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” and Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”

Week 7 Andrukhovych, *Perverzion*, to page 106

