

Politics and Culture in European Short Fiction
Spring 2019
ENG 429/598; SLC 429/598

Professor Ileana Orlich; orlich@asu.edu; office hours: T, Th 3:00-6:00 and
by appointment; office: LL 402 A

The lines of difference marking the diverse and fascinating discourses of European cultures before and after the end of Soviet hegemony animate and legitimize the Other Europe. It is no longer possible today to speak of Czechoslovak or Serbo-Croatian literature, or of countries previously known as Yugoslavia. Political changes of the past decade, specifically the memorable events of 1988-1991, have revealed not only the unresolved variations and contradictions within a region once viewed as monolithic; they have also generated the emerging field of Post-Totalitarian Cultural Studies. In recent years Slovaks have decided to create an independent cultural identity, while the present divisions in the former Yugoslavia have a much longer history. Most Serbs are Greek Orthodox and use the Cyrillic script, whereas Croats are Roman Catholic and use the Latin alphabet. Although the languages of the two nations are closely related, any story by Ivo Andric (the 1975 Nobel Prize recipient) will quickly show just how much their cultural traditions differ. My point, of course, is that while embroiled in the transitional period after the collapse of communism in Central Eastern Europe, these nations and cultures (Albanians, Bulgarians, Czechs, Croats, Hungarians, Macedonians, Poles, Romanians, Russians, Slovaks, Slovenes) have emerged as vibrant and independent states, which define themselves within and beyond traditional dichotomies of cultural otherness and whose traditions and cultures do not match up with those of the West, particularly because of the long absence of interregional and cross-disciplinary studies in those regions.

There are of course other problems closely linked to the dangerous temptation to ignore the cultural diversity of the smallest continent. In the not so distant past, Gyorgy Lukacs, one of the most influential Marxists, wrote only in Hungarian or in German. His most ambitious work, *Die Eigenart des Aesthetischen* (1963), is still not available in English, although it would be indispensable to those who represent Marxist theory in literary scholarship. The much anticipated European Parliament, occupying center stage in the new Europe, has submerged all national differences under the unification of all national identities. Consequences are the object of our

exploration. Will the Catalans or the Scotts justify then their claim to national statehood? Will the interruption of differences (a Hungarian writing in a language of limited circulation) be tolerated, and the forgotten lesson of colonization be allowed to awaken our consciousness to the painful memory that cultures can be both assimilated and ignored? As Goethe wrote to Herder in 1796, “strangers have a strange life which we cannot assimilate if we are interested in it merely as guests.”

At the dawn of the “New World Order” in a divided European Union that faces the migrants crisis and Brexit, East and West find themselves fragmented and strange bedfellows, still divided by the anachronistic rhetoric of binary opposition yet thrust together within an “European” space. The purpose of this courses, then, is to reach out toward a new theory for understanding the region of the former Soviet bloc, the still mysterious Other Europe, as well as the region of the former great empires, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, Russian or what is today Central Europe and the Balkans, by escaping simplistic definitions and provoking innovative cross-disciplinary interrogations of the very concepts of culture, national identity and global politics, tradition, sustainability, religion and ethnic conflict, among many others. Refusing to fold un-problematically into a unified Europe or into the respected fields of globalism, and multiculturalism, European cultures interrogate the different constructions of class and race provided by the former communist countries and empire nations – a region of artificially built political and cultural environments that more than once encountered American values.

Learning outcome for this course:

Our course will further enhance discussions about the invention of ethnicity, those issues about which we all became so painfully aware in the aftermath of the recent conflicts (1991-1992) in former Yugoslavia or the current treatment of various ethnic minorities like the Roma people in the new democracies of the European Union. More recently, the migrants’ crisis which poses new problems in a much divided European Union membership.

Our readings will enable you to be conversant with key figures, events, and discourse practices within the environmental, community and public spaces, governance and social movement in today’s Europe vis-à-vis the United States and a rising Islam, and to understand the connections of those practices to environmental, cultural, and other civic debates in society at large.

For a comprehensive understanding of today's Europe, and for a better understanding of our class discussions, consider reading the following:

Hupchick, Dennis P. *The Balkans. From Constantinople to Communism* (Palgrave)

Applebaum, Anne. *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956*. (Doubleday)

Martin Sixsmith. *Russia: A 1,000-Year Chronicle of the Wild East*

READINGS:

Handouts and Blackboard readings will also be provided as materials for our discussions.

Primary reading to understand our class's reader-oriented discussions: Anton Chekhov, "The Lady with a Dog" (Bookstore); Joyce Carol Oates, "The Lady with a Lap Dog" (Blackboard). Societies, cultures, demographics, gender and class relations: Europe/Russia and America.

Week one, two and three:

Political Naivete: Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno" (Spanish/American colonies; Bookstore); Mikhail Sholokov: "The Fate of a Man" (USSR; Blackboard); changing the society and demographics through propagandistic fiction; Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: "Matryona's House" (Blackboard but also in the book *We Never Make Mistakes*)

Week four:

The Ottoman Empire: (Bosnia) Ivo Andric: "Ali-Pasha" (Blackboard); "Letter from 1920" (Blackboard); "The Damned Yard" (Blackboard). The Austro-Hungarian Empire: Kafka: *The Trial* (Bookstore). (Istanbul, Sarajevo, the Danube, the Bosphorus and the Black Sea; regional and political changes in the aftermath of the fall of empires.)

Week five and six:

War stories: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: "An Incident at Krechetovka Station" (USSR; Bookstore); (Yugoslavia) Milovan Djilas: "War" (Blackboard); Istvan Orkeny: "The Toth Family" (Blackboard); (Czechoslovakia) "Closely Watched Trains" (Blackboard and movie)

MIDTERM

Week seven, eight and nine:

Images of Girlhood: (Europe and America) Henry James, "Daisy Miller" (Bookstore); Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (Bookstore; movie); (Bosnia) Ivo Andric, "The Pasha's Concubine" ((Blackboard)). Examine fin-de siècle America, Europe, the Balkans.

Week ten and eleven:

Women and Culture: (Romania): Ion Agirbiceanu: "Fefelega" (Blackboard) exploitation of gold and silver mines, community and Orthodox in Central Transylvania; Sadoveanu, "Haia Sanis" (Blackboard) Jewish and Christian communities in Moldova; Alexandru Vlad: "Raccourci" (Blackboard) (Ceaurescu's Romania); Herta Muller: *Passport* (ethnic minorities of Central Europe; Bookstore; also read essay on Blackboard). Movie: *4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days*. Health programs and social programs, gender relations before and after the European Union.

Week twelve and thirteen:

Balkan Politics (Yugoslavia): Before the Rain (movie); (Albania) Nazan Bekiroglu, "Hava Hanim IsDead" (Blackboard). Impact of the European Union upon the Balkans; "The Judge's Will" (Blackboard); (Romania) "Minjoala's Inn" (Blackboard; also read essay)

Week fourteen:

Central Europe (all stories are on Blackboard): (Russia) Checkov: "Rothchild's Fiddle (Blackboard); (Croatia) Slavenka Drakulic, "The Balkan Express"; (Hungary) Peter Esterhazy, "Down the Danube"; (Bulgaria) Stanislav Stratiev, "A Bulgarian Tourist Chats to an English Pigeon in Trafalgar Square"; (Bulgaria) Ivailo Dichev, "The Erotica of Communism." The Impact of the European Union in the legislation of recently incorporated Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary (2004) and Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia (2007). Crises of the refugees (migrants) in Europe.

Required readings to be purchased at the ASU Bookstore:

Anton Chekhov, "The Lady with a Dog" (Bookstore)
Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno" (Bookstore)
Franz Kafka, "The Trial" (Bookstore)
Aleksandr Sholzhenitsyn: "An Incident at Krechetovka Station" (Bookstore)
Henry James, "Daisy Miller" (Bookstore)
Edith Wharton, *A House of Mirth* (Bookstore)
Herta Mueller, *Passport* (Bookstore)

Readings/short stories on Blackboard:

The Fate of a Man; The Toth Family; Matryona's House; Ali-Pasha; Letter from 1920; War; Fefelega; Raccourci; Hava Hanim is Dead; The Judge's Will; Minjoala's Inn; The Balkan Express; Down the Danube; A Bulgarian Tourist...; The Erotica of Communism.
Ivo Andric, "The Damned Yard"
Ivo Andric, "The Pasha's Concubine"
Joyce Carol Oates, "The Lady with a Lap Dog"

Movies (all shown in class):

The House of Mirth
Closely Watched Trains
After the Rain
4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Grading: Your grade in this class will be based on the following:

1. **midterm exam** (short essay answers) 30%
2. **final exam** (short essay answers) 30%
3. **term paper** (six to eight pages for undergraduates; two papers, ten pages each, for graduate students) 30%. Your paper will focus on a work by any Central Eastern European fiction writer whose work appeared during the 1918-present period. Works discussed in class cannot be used for the paper, but you may choose to write on works other than those discussed in this class by the authors included on the syllabus. Early papers are welcome. Late papers will not be accepted. You need to discuss with me your selected topic, so make sure you let me know your selection before you begin writing.

4. **class participation** (10%) This includes points on one essay of your choice, to examine in a two-page short essay one of the four movies on the syllabus. Due the day of the term paper.

Undergraduate research paper guidelines:

- this paper of approximately six to eight pages in length, should use a bibliography; use 12 point font and 1.5 spacing (see MLA Manual for style.)

Graduate research paper guidelines:

- Two papers, each of ten pages in length, and all of the above.

Midterm and final exams will cover the duration of class time. Please mark your calendars for those dates as exam times and dates cannot be changed. Please bring blue books for midterm and final exams.

CLASS ATTENDANCE

Since we are showing rare and hard-to-find movies and our class material is a collage of materials gathered from many sources, your classroom attendance is mandatory. Missing class means missing classroom participation and engagement in classroom discussions. Missing such activities will result in a drop of one letter grade after three unexcused absences. In case of an emergency or unavoidable situation, please contact me so that we can make alternate arrangements. It is very important that you arrive to class on time. Because of time constraints, movie screenings will start immediately at the beginning of the class session for which they are scheduled.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY, including plagiarism and inappropriate collaboration or cheating, is not tolerated!

Academic honesty is expected of all students in all examinations, papers, laboratory work, academic transactions and records. The possible sanctions include, but are not limited to, appropriate grade penalties, course failure (indicated on the transcript as a grade of E), course failure due to academic dishonesty (indicated on the transcript as a grade of XE), loss of registration privileges, disqualification and dismissal. For more information, see <http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity>.

Disability Accommodations: Qualified students with disabilities who will require disability accommodations in this class are encouraged to make their requests to me at the beginning of the semester either during office hours or by appointment. **Note:** Prior to receiving disability accommodations, verification of eligibility from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) is required. Disability information is confidential.

Establishing Eligibility for Disability Accommodations: Students who feel they will need disability accommodations in this class but have not registered with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) should contact DRC immediately. Their office is located on the first floor of the Matthews Center Building. DRC staff can also be reached at: 480-965-1234 (V), 480-965-9000 (TTY). For additional information, visit: www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/ed/drc. Their hours are 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday.