

Writers and Power: The European East in the Twentieth Century  
INTL 317-01, Macalester College, Spring 2008, 4 Credits

Instructor: Nadya Nedelsky  
Time: Monday 7:00-10:00  
Room: Car 305  
Office: Car 407  
Phone: x6479  
Office hours: T/Th 4:30-5:00; Wed 10:00-noon

The long-standing influence and prominence of Central and Eastern European writers and filmmakers stand in contrast to the relative anonymity of their western counterparts. This partly reflects their confrontation with the three most powerful ideological systems of the past century: fascism/ultra-nationalism, communism, and democracy. Fascism/ultra-nationalism produced a literature that included dire warnings, passionate endorsements, and chilling stories of horror and survival. During the Cold War, illegally published novels, articles, and journals (*samizdat*) and smuggled novels and plays were major literary events. Individual writers—Czeslaw Milosz, Milan Kundera, and Eugene Ionesco—provided enduring metaphors for understanding the implications of totalitarian power; all three went into exile. Others, including Adam Michnik and Václav Havel, refused to leave their countries and became figures esteemed for their defiance in the face of Communist repression. Still others, like Christa Wolf, made uncomfortable alliances with power. The region's writers thus enter the post-Communist era as veterans and heirs of profound encounters with regimes based on the extremes of both Right and Left. With those regimes in ruins, writers and filmmakers confront anew the question of the limitations and scope of power in a just society. In this course, we follow these written and cinematic engagements with power over time, ultimately considering history's lessons.

Required Texts:

Slavenka Drakulic, *Café Europa: Life after Communism*  
Eugene Ionesco, *Rhinoceros and Other Plays*  
Milijenko Jergović, *Sarajevo Marlboro*  
Ivan Klima, *Waiting for the Dark, Waiting for the Light*  
Milan Kundera, *The Joke*  
Czeslaw Milosz, *Captive Mind*

Films/Documentaries (some of which will be excerpts):

*Eastern Europe: A Century of Trouble* (3-part documentary), Krzysztof Talczewski, 1998  
*Fighter*, Amir Bar-Lev, 2000  
*The Firemen's Ball*, Miloš Forman, Czech with subtitles, 1967  
*The Lives of Others*, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006  
*Oratorio for Prague*, Jan Nemeč, 1968  
*The Shop on Main Street*, Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos, Slovak with subtitles, 1965  
*Stalin: The Red God* (documentary), Frederick Baker, 1999

## Overview of course components:

1. Weekly reading notes, questions, and participation: 20%
2. Discussion paper/leadership in one class period: 15%
3. Paper 1: (propose topic by February 25), due March 10, worth 30%
4. Paper 2: due May 5, worth 35%

### 1. Reading Notes and Questions

Each week each student will write up one page of notes on the readings and/or films that we will be discussing (in the case of films, you will write them up for the class period after we watch them). These notes may be free in form and should express your reactions to the readings/films, linking them to the course's overarching questions. You should also write down two questions for class discussion. There are three main purposes for these notes/questions: 1) to allow you to gather your thoughts on the materials before class; 2) to facilitate discussion through preparation of questions, especially for those who feel less comfortable speaking up in class; and 3) to give me a sense of your reactions to the readings and an opportunity to address questions not raised in class during the next period, if necessary or useful. I will hand back the notes the next class period. They will be graded "check," "check plus," or "check minus." For full credit, you must average a "check" on the notes. Their completion will count towards the 20% of the grade based on participation, which will also include class discussion. Because of their importance to discussion, no late notes will be accepted. And finally, you should be prepared to share one of your prepared questions or comments in class. To be handed in weekly.

### 2. Discussion paper/leadership

During one class period, each student will lead a portion of the discussion. To prepare for this class, you will write a 3 page paper instead of reading notes. As with the notes (but more systematically and thoroughly), you should explore the insights these materials offer into the questions that we are looking at in that particular section of the course. You should also offer two questions for discussion, and e-mail these to me by 5 pm the Saturday before class (every hour after 5 pm will result in a half grade deduction – be on time with these!). The discussion paper/leadership is worth 15% of the grade.

### 3. Paper 2: Encounters with Fascist and/or Communist Power

The second assignment is to write an 8-to-10-page paper comparing how two of the authors/filmmakers deal with a particular aspect of power during the fascist and/or communist periods. Your paper may deal with one of the questions laid out at the start of each of the sections of the syllabus or it may be one that you raise yourself. You should e-mail me your idea for a topic by Monday, February 25. The paper is due on March 10 at class time. It is worth 30% of the grade.

### 4. Paper 3: History's Lessons

The third assignment is to write a 10-to-12-page paper in which you assess the lessons the writers' and filmmakers' analyses of political power offer for the construction of political communities. Placing yourself in the role of an engaged intellectual and drawing on lessons from at least five works covered in class (not more than one of which you looked at in your first paper), you should make four arguments concerning the proper scope, distribution, and purposes of political power in an

“open society.” Whether these lessons are positive (we must ensure...) or negative (we must avoid...), make sure to indicate how both the writers’ works and the region’s history offer support for your arguments. The paper is due May 5 at class time. It is worth 35% of the grade.

**Please note:**

Unless you speak with me beforehand and come to an agreement with me, late papers will be docked a grade per day they are late.

Plagiarized work is unacceptable. I will report it to the Dean of Academic Programs, and it will result in a substantial penalty. If you are using someone else’s ideas, words, or research, you MUST cite them properly.

Attendance is mandatory. If you do not talk to me beforehand or offer evidence of a medical or family special circumstance, each absence will result in a deduction from your final grade.

Barring medical or family emergency, incompletes must be negotiated before the end of classes, and all paperwork done by the last day of class.

Grading Scale:

100-94: A	89-87: B+	79-77: C+	69-60: D
93-90: A-	86-83: B	76-73: C	59-55: D-
	82-80: B-	72-70: C-	

- “A” work 1) is on time; 2) accomplishes the assigned tasks fully; 3) is clearly and engagingly written using proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation; 4) well-organized; 5) correctly cites all sources used; 6) is carefully and thoroughly researched, if research is required; 6) and shows a superior level of creativity, thoughtfulness and insight into the topic at hand.
- “B” work competently accomplishes requirements 1-5 listed above, and is generally well done, but shows lower levels of creativity, originality, and/or insight.
- “C” work offers a minimum level of competence on some or all of requirements 1-5, but contains serious flaws in argument, writing, research, and/or organization.
- “D” work does not competently realize most or all of requirements 1-5 and contains many serious flaws

**Schedule** (readings not in required texts are on Moodle)

**Part I: Fascist/Ultra-nationalist Power**

How did fascist/ultra-nationalist ideology define the scope and purposes of political power? Why are regimes based on such ideology dangerous, and what did they harm or destroy? Why were East European writers and intellectuals attracted to it? What warnings did others voice? What are the moral implications of writers and intellectuals’ complicity with these regimes? What power do the regimes’ victims gain or exercise by writing about their experiences?

- January 28

Course introduction and film, *The Shop on Main Street*

- February 4 (all on Moodle)

Mihail Sebastian, Norman Manea, Patrick Camiller, "Friends and fascists," (extracts from diary of Mihail Sebastian), *The New Yorker*, Oct 2, 2000 v76 i29.  
Arnošt Lustig, "Infinity"

And these excerpts:

Ernst Jünger, *The Great War: Father of a New Age and The Emergence of a New Type of Human Being*  
Gottfried Benn, *The New Breed of German*  
Ion Mota, *The Romanian Legionary's Mission in Spain*  
Corneliu Codreanu, *The Resurrection of the Race*  
Karl Polanyi, *The Hopeless Task*  
Peter Drucker, *Black Magic*  
Max Horkheimer, *The Iron Heel*  
Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*

## **Part II: Writers and Communist Power**

How did Communist ideology define the scope and purposes of power, and how did East European states exercise it? What attracted some writers and intellectuals so strongly to Stalinism? Through what processes did people accept and submit themselves to the Communist/Stalinist notions of power? According to critics, what were the intellectual, moral, and psychological effects of Communist power on both those who exercised it and those subjected to it? How did writers and filmmakers defy unlimited state power and aesthetic orthodoxy? How can we assess individual moral responsibility under Communism? How have critical writers/filmmakers judged East European Communism?

- February 11

Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind*  
Jakub Berman, "The Case for Stalinism" (brief piece)  
Erich Fromm, "Joseph Stalin: A Clinical Case of Nonsexual Sadism" (brief piece)  
Film: *Stalin: The Red God*

- February 18

Eugene Ionesco, *Rhinoceros*  
Film (excerpt), *The Fighter*

- February 25

Milan Kundera, *The Joke*

- March 3

Film: *The Firemen's Ball*

- March 10 (**Paper 1 due**)  
Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless*  
Gabriel Liiceanu, *The Paltinis* □ Diary (excerpt)  
Film: *Oratorio for Prague*

• March 17: No class – **Spring Break!**

- March 24  
Adam Michnik, *Letters from Prison* (excerpt)  
Film: *Eastern Europe: A Century of Trouble*, part 3  
Havel, *New Year's Address*

### **Part III: Post-Communism**

What lessons does Eastern Europe's past hold for post-communist communities? Does justice demand a response to the injustices committed under previous regimes? If so, who should be held responsible? What are the requirements of an "open society"? How should power be defined and distributed? What are the most critical challenges facing post-communist societies? And what is Eastern Europe's place in the post-Cold War world?

- March 31  
Ivan Klima, *Waiting for the Dark, Waiting for the Light*
- April 7:  
Slavenka Drakulic, *Café Europa: Life after Communism*  
Excerpt from *Between Past and Future: the Revolutions of 1989 and their Aftermath*
- April 14  
Miljenko Jergović, *Sarajevo Marlboro*
- April 21  
Film: *The Lives of Others*
- April 28  
Christa Wolf, "What Remains," and discussion of *The Lives of Others*
- May 5: (**Paper 2 due**)  
Course wrap-up