

POLITICAL SCIENCE 205 - POLITICAL FICTION

Term I

TR 9:55-11:10, Briggs 126

Dr. Stephen Manning

235 Briggs, X3-1087/3-1267

Office Hours: T & R 12:00-4:00, & by appointment

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Purpose of the Course: This course is built around the premise that insights into politics can be gleaned from a variety of sources, including fiction. We will begin with a brief overview of some of the literature on political fiction. To be more specific, we will familiarize ourselves with the debate over just what constitutes the genre. We will proceed to explore this premise by reading and discussing pieces of fiction that might qualify as political fiction, variously defined. This (potentially political) fiction purports to illuminate our understanding of the communist and post-communist political experience.

Course Format: This course is both text- and discussion-based. The success of the course will thus be based in large part on your close reading of the texts, and your preparation for class discussion of same.

Course Requirements & Grades: Your grade will be determined by three main components, the specifics of which will be determined at our first several class meetings. First, you will be graded on your contribution to class discussion, some of which will involve you leading the class in its discussion of particular texts. The second is your grade on several short papers you write on specific readings and use as the basis of class discussion. The third course requirement is a research paper on a topic germane to political fiction, broadly conceived and established in consultation with the instructor. We will hammer out the details the first week of class.

Policy Concerning Late Work: My policy concerning late work is simple; I accept it, without regard to how late it is (so long as it is turned in by the last day of class) and penalize it by one full grade.

Policy Concerning Incompletes: My policy on Incompletes is equally straightforward: I will not assign an I grade unless (a) a student who has taken the course seriously is at the end of the semester suddenly faced with an impossible set of circumstances over which s/he had no control, and (b) the student requests that I consider a grade of I and makes arrangements to complete the unfinished work.

Readings: The following books, listed in the order in which we will read them, are available at the bookstore; you should purchase them and bring the appropriate volume to each class.

Zamyatin, Yevgeny. *We*. Penguin, 1924.

Fischer, Tibor. *Under the Frog*. Picador, 1992.

Hein, Christoph. The Tango Player. Northwestern University Press, 1989.
Klima, Ivan. Waiting for the Dark, Waiting for the Light. Picador, 1994.
Barnes, Julian. The Porcupine. Random House, 1992.
Ratushinskaya, Irina. Fictions and Lies. John Murray Publishers, 1999.
Topol, Jachym. City Sister Silver. Catbird Press, 1994.

In addition to these required books, there are several supplemental required readings that I will make available to the class.

COURSE SCHEDULE & ASSIGNMENTS

I. INTRODUCTION & FOUNDATIONS

A. Attempts at Defining Political Fiction

Catherine H. Zuckert, "Why Political Scientists Study Fiction," The Chronicle of Higher Education March 8, 1996, p. A48.
Ibid., "Why Political Scientists Want to Study Literature," PS: Political Science & Politics XXVIII:2, June 1995, pp. 189-190.
Paul A. Cantor, "Literature and Politics: Understanding the Regime," Ibid., pp. 192-195.
Irving Howe, "The Idea of the Political Novel," Chapter One in Howe, Politics and the Novel. New York: Columbia University Press, 1957, pp. 15-24.
Stephen Manning, "Political Fiction: A Bibliographic Essay," Spring 1997 manuscript.

B. The Context: Communism & Post-Communism

II. TOTALITARIAN DYSTOPIA, c. 26th CENTURY A.D. (Political Science Fiction)

Yevgeny Zamyatin. We.

III. COMMUNIST POLITICAL FICTION (The Brutal & the Absurd)

Norman Manea, "A Window on the Working Class," in Manea, Compulsory Happiness. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993, pp. 141-188.
Tibor Fischer. Under the Frog.
Christoph Hein. The Tango Player.

IV. THE REVOLUTION & TRANSITION (Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose?)

Ivan Klima. Waiting for the Dark, Waiting for the Light.
Julian Barnes. The Porcupine.

V. POST-COMMUNIST POLITICAL FICTION

(A New Beginning?)

Irina Ratushinskaya. Fictions and Lies.

Jachym Topol. City Sister Silver.

Milan Kundera, "The Great Return," The New Yorker, May 20, 2002, 96-105.

Milan Kundera, "The Great Return," Granta 78, Summer 2002, 129-154.

Class Presentations