Ukraine. Literature and Politics.  
November-December 2023  
Andriy Kurkov

This is a 1-point seminar (grades: R or P/F).

Course format and description.

The course will consider the relationship between politics and literature in Ukraine, focusing on the late Soviet period up to the present, but also covering the tragic pages of the history of Ukrainian literature in the 1920s-1930s, when Ukrainian creatives loyal to the Soviet regime were seemingly granted freedom of expression only to be brutally suppressed.

We will trace the emergence of new post-Soviet literature and consider texts which were written in reaction to "dead Soviet literature". We will analyze why the first post-soviet generation of young Ukrainian authors was consciously apolitical and how this generation matured, experienced some dramatic events in Ukrainian politics and society, and formed their own political views. We will analyze how these views are reflected in the writers' texts.

We will consider the extent to which literature influenced Ukrainian society immediately after 1991, in the late 1990s, and up to the present day. What has been the role of the writer in Ukrainian society through this 30-year period?

Separately, we will consider and try to model the near future of Russian-language and Crimean-Tatar literature in the context of Ukrainian literature and politics.

The course will be given in English.

Course assignments:

Class participation (50%): Active participation in class discussions is crucial for the success of the course. Final Short essay (50%): Each student will be responsible for a short text on the topics of the course including personal approach.

Accommodations through the Office of Disability Services:

If you are a student with a disability and have an ODS-certified ‘Accommodation Letter’ please come to my office hours to confirm your accommodation needs. If you believe that you might have a disability that requires accommodation, you should contact Disability Services at 212-854-2388 and disability@columbia.edu.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Session One

The Chernobyl disaster and freedom of expression.

Required reading:

Executed Renaissance: The Erasure of Ukrainian Cultural Heritage in the Times of the Soviet Union


What is Ukrainian literature?

https://ukrainer.net/what-is-ukrainian-literature/

On the Ukrainian Poets Who Lived and Died Under Soviet Suppression


Session Two

Early Ukrainian Independence – Away from Moscow, but where to? Cabaret instead of ideology. “BU-BA-BU” group and cabaret-theater “Ne Zhurys” (Don’t Worry). First books to shape identity. A lack of interest in literature in general leaves writers whispering into the desert – Yuri Andrukhovych, Yurko Vynnychuk, Oksana Zabuzhko, Viktor Neborak.

“Ukrainian literature at the end of the millennium”. Vitaly Chernetsky. (World Literature today. Spring 2002)

«Carnival as Ukraine’s Postmodern Condition» (from The Canon Reversed by Tamara Hundorova. Pp 260-264

Viktor Neborak “From Genesis of Flying Head” (The White Chalk of Days)

Yurko Vynnychuk, “The Flowerbed in the Kilim, Malva-Landa Part 1” (The White Chalk of Days)

Yurko Vynnychuk, “Fantastic Worlds of Yurko Vynnychuk” (Glagoslav, pp 7 – 32)

Irena Karpa *Love in the Times of War* [https://www.penopp.org/articles/love-time-war?language_content_entity=en&fbclid=IwAR3CMVdW1Ii9rHwYoeCWhB3H7UUj4zCuFtuDyz3-2l-mbuxr_eG1Uog3YHI](https://www.penopp.org/articles/love-time-war?language_content_entity=en&fbclid=IwAR3CMVdW1Ii9rHwYoeCWhB3H7UUj4zCuFtuDyz3-2l-mbuxr_eG1Uog3YHI)

Irena Karpa excerpt from the novel *Good News from Aral Sea* (pdf, pp 1-36)

**Session Three**

“Sex, drugs and rock-n-roll” – a new generation of young Ukrainian writers, consciously distancing themselves from social and political issues in the country. Serhiy Zhadan, Svitlana Povoliaeva, Liubko Deresh, Svitlana Pyrkalo, Irena Karpa.

The little-known war between Russian and Ukrainian science fiction writers. V. Kozhelianko V Lukyanenko.


Liubko Deresh, excerpts from novels *Cult, Peacemaker, The Last Love.* (pdf, 27 pages)

Irena Karpa, fragments from novels

**Session Four**

A return to politics stimulated by events around the Orange Revolution – trends and the transformation of attitudes.

Politicization of Ukrainian literature (since 2004). Militarization of Ukrainian literature since 2014.

From 2014 – after the annexation of Crimea and the start of the war in Donbas – the appearance of a parallel literature, written and read by war veterans: Valery Markus, Saigon, Martin Brest.

The convergence of veterans’ literature with mainstream Ukrainian literature.

What is happening with Ukrainian Russian language literature? Volodymyr Rafeyenko, Stanislav Aseyev, Alexander Kabanov.

Writers and Ukrainian army.

Writing from the trenches: Artem Chekh, Artem Chapaye, Borys Humeniuk.

Sharing the Ukrainian news with the world: Markiyan Kamysy, Iryna Tsilyk, Victoria Amelina.

Civil society of Ukraine and rise of Ukrainian non-fiction.

Artem Chapaye on defending Ukraine [https://www.newyorker.com/books/this-week-in-fiction/artem-chapeye-04-04-22](https://www.newyorker.com/books/this-week-in-fiction/artem-chapeye-04-04-22)

Artem Chekh “I am Ukrainian Soldier and I’ve accepted my death” [https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/30/opinion/ukraine-soldier-war.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/30/opinion/ukraine-soldier-war.html)
Markyian Kamysh, Review of The Stalking the Atomic City: Life Among the Decadent and the Depraved of Chornobyl. 


My anthology Ukraine 22: Ukrainian Writers Respond to War will be published by Penguin in August 2023 and could also be used a source of readings for students to choose from.

Recommended Books

Zhadan, Serhiy. Voroshilovgrad (Deep Vellum, 2016)

Zabuzhko, Oksana. Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex (Amazon Crossing 2011)

Andrukhovych, Yuri. The Moscoviad (Spuyten Duyvil 2008)

Chekh, Artem. Absolute Zero (Glagoslav, 2020)


Kamysh, Markiyan. Stalking the Atomic City: Life Among the Decadent and the Depraved of Chornobyl (Astra House, 2022)

Yakimchuk, Lyuba. Apricots of Donbas (Lost Horse Press, 2021)

Rafeyenko, Volodymyr. Mondegreen (Harvard Library of Ukrainian Literature, 2022)


Kabanov, Alexandr. The Age of Vengeance. War time verses from Kyiv. (Amazon, 2023)

