

THE NATIONAL AND KAPODISTRIAN UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS
School of Philosophy
Department of English Language and Literature
Division of Literature and Culture

ENL194 FICTION AND POWER IN WORLD LITERATURE

Monday 12:00-15:00 – Room 822

Fall 2026-27

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Office Hours: Thursday 12:00-13:00 and by email

*In the dark times,
will there also be singing?
Yes, there will be singing
about the dark times.*

—Bertolt Brecht, “Motto”
Svendborg Poems (1939), trans. John Willett

<https://artbornemagazine.com/singing-about-the-dark-times/>

Module description:

A central line of inquiry lies at the conceptual heart of this module: “Does fiction possess power?” An exploration of this question will provide the framework for examining the multifaceted relationship between fiction and power in a twofold manner. On the one hand, the module gives the students the opportunity to study politically engaged texts produced under, or in response to, the totalitarian regimes which held sway in the twentieth century and whose legacies continue to inform the present. The selected works explore ways of resisting, challenging, and subverting authoritarian power, from Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany, and communist China to the dictatorships of Latin America, the Iranian Revolution, and conflicts in the Middle East. By exploring the complex entanglements of individual agency and responsibility, collective identity, and state power, these narratives bear witness to violence and oppression, preserve cultural and historical memory, and articulate forms of political critique in what, in 1939, Bertolt Brecht called “dark times.” On the other hand, the module moves beyond specific historical political phenomena to examine less obvious negotiations of fiction and power, especially with respect to the various forms of power to which these texts are subject, in which they participate, and on which they reflect metafictionally.

Subject Specific Learning Objectives:

As a result of taking this module, you will be able to:

1. Demonstrate full awareness of and ability to analyse critically discursive power relations in context (political, ethnic, gendered, etc.).
2. Demonstrate an excellent understanding of the interplay between ideology and the imagination, politics and literature.
3. Demonstrate an excellent understanding of the interrelation of fact and fiction.
4. Demonstrate an excellent understanding of literature in its function as a catalyst and product of identity formation.
5. Demonstrate a full awareness of literature in its function as a vehicle of cultural self-reflection.
6. Select and synthesise very complex material and develop and defend coherent, persuasive and well-presented arguments both in class and in writing in a comparative context.
7. Demonstrate an improved ability to undertake the comparative analysis of literature of outstanding quality.

Generic Learning Objectives:

As a result of taking this module, you will be able to:

1. Demonstrate excellent oral communication skills through informed participation in seminars and through the delivery of one formal, critical and argumentative seminar presentation
2. Demonstrate outstanding written communication skills, including the structuring of an original, coherent and persuasive argument, through the writing of one extended essay which will enable you to write a cogent discussion of a comparative nature, developing an independent argument and critically engaging with relevant and substantial secondary literature.
3. Demonstrate and improve ability to read very closely and critically, and to confidently and accurately apply a range of critical terms to literary texts.
4. Read, analyse and discuss the methodological premises and key concepts of the primary theoretical essays.
5. Research secondary sources and identify their methodology and theoretical premises.
6. Ratify or refute by sound critical argument critical views other than your own.
7. Further develop and refine your critical "voice."
8. Ratify or refute by sound critical argument critical views other than your own.

Transferrable skills:

As a result of taking this module, you will gain and be able to transfer to your career the following skills:

1. Analytical and critical thinking skills
2. Organizational and Planning skills
3. Creativity
4. Teamwork and collaboration
5. Communication/public speaking
6. Interpersonal and emotional intelligence skills relating to social and political awareness

Required and Recommended Reading Material:

All required reading is available on e-Class. Most recommended reading is available on e-Class.

Other Material:

Lectures will be delivered through PowerPoint Presentations and these will be made available on e-Class following the delivery of the lecture.

Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is the cornerstone of a university education. Academic dishonesty diminishes the university as an institution and all members of the university community. All members of the NKUA community have an explicit responsibility to foster an environment of trust, honesty, fairness, respect, and responsibility. All members of the university community are expected to present as their original work only that which is truly their own. The use of Generative AI for coursework is prohibited and will result in an automatic failure. Please, note the huge environmental impact of AI technology in terms of carbon emissions, electronic waste and detrimental impact on ecosystems. The training of AI algorithms is undertaken using the work of individuals (writers, artists, academics, etc.) who have not been consulted on nor compensated for the infringement of their copyright or intellectual ownership of the material used. The training of AI algorithms is also implicated in the extractive and exploitative use of Global South labour. Every use of AI contributes to this environmental damage and exploitation. AI is of course not 'intelligence' but computer algorithms, either LLMs (large language models) or generative AI (deep learning models) trained on existing data.

Requirements / Assessment Patterns:

This 4th year elective module applies a cap of 40 students. Students are expected to attend regularly, participate in the class discussions and complete one short reflective exercise (in-class writing) and one final research paper. Students may also choose to give short oral presentations to boost their mark. More specifically, students will be assessed according to the following patterns:

Option 1:

1. Attendance / Seminar Participation: 20%
2. Short Reflective Essay (in-class exercise – date tbc): 20%
3. Final Research Essay: 60% (On-site and/or online sessions will be arranged to discuss your ideas.)

BONUS:

4. For an extra 10% - in case they want to boost their mark – students will have the opportunity to deliver one or more* short presentations on specific topics in consultation with the instructor. This means that students may choose to present brief commentaries or perform close reading analysis of parts of a text they find interesting. The presentations are *self-assigned* but the instructor needs to be informed prior to the seminar.

*the number of presentations each student will be able to give will depend on the number of registered students and the number of students who are interested in giving a short presentation. Only an extra 10% is awarded for presentations and the specific mark earned in this category will be determined by the student's performance.

Option 2:

1. Attendance / Seminar Participation: 20%
2. Final written exam: 80%

CONTENT DISCLAIMER

Please note that the content of this module consists of topics which some may find sensitive, such as identity, religion, politics, ideology, the nation, gender, sexuality, etc. While all students are required to engage with the primary and secondary material as well as the seminar discussions in a critical manner, they are not expected to be in agreement with the ideas or ideological perspectives studied. If you have any concerns related to this issue, please get in touch with the instructor as soon as possible.



Nazi Book Burnings, 10 May 1933, Germany



MODULE OUTLINE

NB: Please note that the Module Outline is arranged in sessions and not in calendar weeks.

Any changes due to missed classes will be announced on e-Class with as much notice as possible prior to the lecture/seminar. For this reason, you are kindly requested to check e-Class regularly for announcements.

Sessions 1-2: Introduction: Can fiction change the world?

Required reading:

- Hanne, Michael (1994/1996). Chapter 1: "Narrative and Power" (pp.1-42). In *The Power of the Story: Fiction and Political Change*. Berghahn Books.

Recommended reading:

- Jacques Derrida (1992) "'This Strange Institution Called Literature': An Interview with Jacques Derrida". In Derek Attridge (ed.) *Acts of Literature*, Routledge.
- Axel Stähler and Klaus Stierstorfer (Eds.) *Writing Fundamentalism*, Cambridge Scholars.
- Salman Rushdie (1990) *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Granta Books.

Sessions 3-4: Ideology, or the quest for identity: Zionism before Israel

Required reading:

- Linda Grant (2000) *When I Lived in Modern Times*. Granta Books.

Recommended reading:

- Axel Stähler (2004) "Mothers in Israel? Female Jewish Identities and Eretz Yisrael in the Works of Jewish Women Writers of the Anglo-American Diaspora: Anne Roiphe, Tova Reich and Linda Grant". In Peter Erlebach et al. (Eds.). *Jewish Women's Writing of the 1990s and Beyond in Great Britain and the United States*, WVT.
- Emma Parker and Linda Grant (2010) "on fiction, femininity, and fashion: an interview with Linda Grant", *Feminist Review* 96, 127-134.
- Abdul-Wahab Kayyali (1977) "Zionism and Imperialism: The Historical Origins", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 6: 3, 98-112.
- Alan R. Taylor (1972) "Zionism and Jewish History", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 1: 2, 35-51.

Sessions 5-6: Nazism and the “death” of humanity

Required reading:

- Leni Riefenstahl (dir.) (1935) *Triumph of the Will* (FILM)
- Primo Levi (1947/1979) *If This Is a Man*. Trans. Stuart Woolf. Abacus.

Recommended Reading:

- Christian Crouse (2005) “Intellectualism Cut Off at the Neck: The Body Politic-as-Aesthetic in Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*”, *Film Journal* 1:11 [no pagination].
- Ekaterina V. Haskins (2003) “Time, Space, and Political Identity: Envisioning Community in *Triumph of the Will*”. In David Blakesley (ed.) *The Terministic Screen: Rhetorical Perspectives on Film*. Southern Illinois UP, 92-106.
- Alan Marcus (2004) “Reappraising Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*”, *Film Studies: An International Review* 4: 75-86.
- Kazimierz Robak (2006) “Power and Art: The Aesthetic Principles in the Theory and Practice of Fascism and Nazism”. Will Wright and Steven Kaplan (Eds.) *The Image of Power in Literature, Media, and Society*, 306-314.
- Susan Tegel (2006) “Leni Riefenstahl: Art and Politics”, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 23:3, 185-200.
- Frank P. Tomasulo (1998) “The Mass Psychology of Fascist Cinema: Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*”. Barry Keith Grant and Jeanette Slonioski (Eds.) *Documenting and Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*. Wayne State UP, 99-118.
- Brian Winston (1981) “Reconsidering *Triumph of the Will*: Was Hitler There?”, *Sight and Sound* 50: 102-107.
- Brian Winston (1997) “*Triumph of the Will*”, *History Today* 47: 24-28.
- Debra Romanick Baldwin (2005). “The Horror and the Human: The Politics of Dehumanization in *Heart of Darkness* and Primo Levi’s *Se questo è un uomo*”, *Conradiana: A Journal of Joseph Conrad Studies* 37:3, 185-204.
- Bryan Cheyette (1999). “The Ethical Uncertainty of Primo Levi”, *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 48: 57-67.
- Robert S. C. Gordon (1997) “Per mia fortuna... Irony and Ethics in Primo Levi’s Writing”, *Modern Language Review* 92: 337-347.
- Robert S. C. Gordon (1999) “Primo Levi’s *If This Is a Man* and Responses to the Lager in Italy 1945-47”, *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 48: 49-57.
- Ariella Lang (1999) “Reason as Revenge: Primo Levi and Writing the Holocaust”, *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Foreign Literatures* 52: 255-68.
- Elizabeth Scheiber (2006) “The Failure of Memory and Literature in Primo Levi’s *Il sistema periodico*”, *MLN* 121: 225-239.
- Maria Ruglio (2000) “The Task of the Witness in Primo Levi’s *Se questo è un uomo*”, *Forum Italicum* 34: 136-156.
- Rita Wilson (1995): “Narrated Memories: The Writings of Primo Levi”, *Acta Germanica* 23: 93-106.

Session 7: The “death” of an ideology: Communism and the fall of the Berlin Wall

Required reading:

- Wolfgang Becker (dir.) (2003) *Good Bye, Lenin!* (FILM)

Recommended Reading:

- Scott Galupo (2004) “Humor from Germany’s divide”, *The Washington Times* (19 March 2004).
- Victorino Matus (2004) “Go East! The German Democratic Republic is alive and well, and better than it ever really was, in *Good Bye, Lenin!*”, *The Daily Standard* (27 February 2004).
- Jennifer Creech (2009) “A Few Good Men: Gender, Ideology, and Narrative Politics in *The Lives of Others* and *Good Bye, Lenin!*”, *Women in German Yearbook* 25, 100-126.
- Roger F. Cook (2005) “Recharting the Skies above Berlin: Nostalgia East and West”, *German Politics & Society* 23: 1, 39-57.
- Anke Finger (2005) “Hello Willy, Good Bye Lenin!: Transitions of an East German Family”, *South Central Review* 22: 2, 39-58.
- Mattias Frey (2013) “‘Ostalgie,’ Historical Ownership, and Material Authenticity: Good Bye, Lenin! And Das Leben der Anderen”, *Postwall German Cinema: History, Film History and Cinephilia*, Berghahn Books.
- Lu Pan (2013) “Nostalgia as Resistance: Memory, Space and the Competing Modernities in Berlin and Shanghai”, *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 12: 1, 135-160.
- Slavoj Žižek (2012) *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (FILM available on YouTube) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBcFLmu_tlc&ab_channel=ThePhilosopherKing

Sessions 8-9: What goes wrong with revolutions? Iran between royalty and theocracy

Required reading:

- George Orwell (1945/1989) *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story*. Penguin Books.
- Ryszard Kapuściński (1985) *Shah of Shahs*. Trans. William R. Brand and Katarzyna Mroczkowska-Brand. Penguin Books.
- Marjane Satrapi (2000) *Persepolis*. Trans. Anjali Singh. Vintage Books. [EXTRACTS ONLY. TBC]

Recommended reading:

- V. C. Letemendia (1992) “Revolution on Animal Farm: Orwell’s Neglected Commentary”, *Journal of Modern Literature* 18:1, 127-137.
- David Dwan (2012) “Orwell’s Paradox: Equality in *Animal Farm*”, *ELH* 79:3, 655-683.
- Paul Kirschner (2004) “The Dual Purpose of *Animal Farm*”, *The Review of English Studies, New Series*, 55: 222, 759-786.

- Samantha Senn (2015) "All Propaganda is Dangerous, but Some are More Dangerous than Others: George Orwell and the Use of Literature as Propaganda", *Journal of Strategic Security* 8:3, 149-161.
- Richard White (2008) "George Orwell: Socialism and Utopia", *Utopian Studies* 19:1, 73-95.
- Donald E. Morse (1995) "'A Blatancy of Untruth': George Orwell's Uses of the Fantastic in *Animal Farm*", *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 1:2, 85-92.
- John Newsinger (2018) "'Until They Become Conscious They Will Never Rebel': Orwell and the Working Class", *Hope Lies in the Proles: George Orwell and the Left*, Pluto Press.
- Lane Crothers (1994) "George Orwell and the Failure of Democratic Socialism: The Problem of Political Power", *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 77: 34, 389-407.
- Emanuel Edrich (1962) "George Orwell and the Satire in Horror", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 4: 1, 96-108.
- James L. Aucoin (2001). "Epistemic Responsibility and Narrative Theory: The Literary Journalism of Ryszard Kapuściński", *Journalism: Theory, Practice, and Criticism* 2: 5-21.
- Anders Bodegård (1995). "Interview with Ryszard Kapuściński", *Brick: A Literary Journal* 51: 14-19.
- Carl Tighe (1996). "Ryszard Kapuściński and *The Emperor*", *Modern Language Review* 91: 922-928.
- Carl Tighe (1998). *The Politics of Literature. Poland 1945-1989*. University of Wales Press. [especially pp. 203-223]
- Eleanor Wachtel (1994). "Ryszard Kapuściński", *Queen's Quarterly* 101: 862-873.
- Rocío G. Davis (2005) "A Graphic Self: Comics as Autobiography in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*", *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* 27: 264-279.
- Amy Malek (2006) "Memoir as Iranian Exile Cultural Production: A Case Study of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* Series", *Iranian Studies: Journal of the International Society for Iranian Studies* 39: 353-380.
- Nancy K. Miller (2007) "Out of the Family: Generations of Women in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*", *Life Writing* 4: 13-29.
- Nima Naghibi and Andrew O'Malley (2005) "Estranging the Familiar: 'East' and 'West' in Satrapi's *Persepolis*", *English Studies in Canada* 31: 223-247.
- Gillian Whitlock (2006) "Autographics: The Seeing 'I' of the Comics", *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 52: 965-979.

Sessions 10-11: Totalitarianism and Resistance: The Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico

Required reading:

- Roberto Bolaño (1999/2009) *Amulet*. Trans. Chris Andrews. Picador.

Recommended reading:

- Alberto Medina (2009) "Arts of Homelessness: Roberto Bolaño or the Commodification of Exile", *Novel: A Forum of Fiction* 42: 3, 546-554.
- Ryan Long (2010) "Traumatic Time in Roberto Bolaño's *Amuleto* and the Archive of 1968", *Journal of the Society for Latin American Studies*, 128-143.
- Juan Villoro (2010) "Roberto Bolaño: The Future Battle", *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas* 43: 1, 9-18.

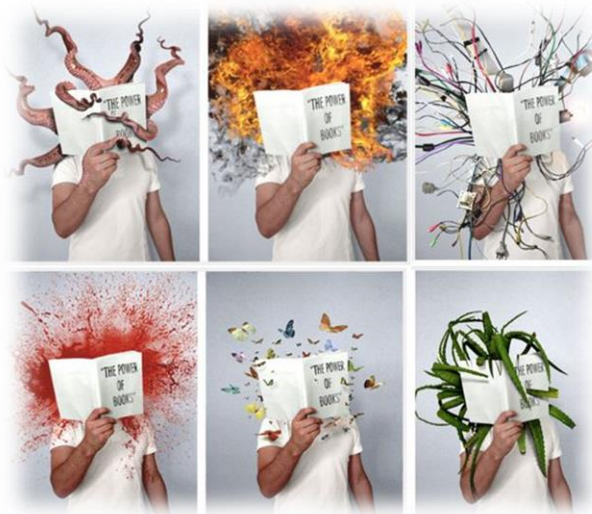
Sessions 12-13: Fiction and Power: China and the Cultural Revolution

Required reading:

- Dai Sijie (2000) *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*. Trans. Ina Rilke. Vintage Books.

Recommended reading:

- Flore Chevaillier (2010) "Commercialization and Cultural Misreading in Dai Sijie's *Balzac et la petite tailleuse Chinoise*", *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 47: 1, 60-74.
- Barbara Mittler (2008) "Popular Propaganda? Art and Culture in Revolutionary China", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 152: 4, 466-489.
- Michelle E. Bloom (2005) "Contemporary Franco-Chinese Cinema: Translation, Citation and Imitation in Dai Sijie's *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* and Tsai Ming-Liang's *What Time is it There?*", *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 22: 4, 311-325.



"The Power of Books" (2005) by Mladen Penev