Why “peripheral” modernism?

Many histories of literary modernism follow a diffusionist model in which this political and artistic project arises in Europe proper and spreads throughout the rest of the world incrementally and often incompletely, along with the general spread of European civilization. On the basis of recent significant theoretical interventions in the study of global modernisms, in this course we will seek to understand the rise of modernism in Eastern Europe as a project more directly related to processes of Eastern European modernization itself, rather than a cultural or intellectual diffusion from or imitation of Western European literary models. This novel approach to reading modernism in European peripheries has been dubbed peripheral modernism.

Why Second World?

In today’s post-socialist, globalized, and post-transition Eastern Europe, interrogating the category of the “Second World” will seem at best unseemly and at worst anachronistic. Eastern Europe had, with the fall of socialism, after all, achieved its decades-long dream of “rejoining” Europe on the path of progress, modernization, and civilization, i.e., joined the First World. While recent years have brought more “Euro-skeptics” to the forefront, one will be hard pressed to find many Eastern Europeans questioning the cultural and “civilizational” advantages of Europe itself.
However, the last twenty years have also brought new perspectives in Eastern European studies, including the introduction of postcolonial methodology in studying the region’s cultures, literatures, and intellectual histories. In the most general sense, a postcolonial approach to Eastern Europe takes to task precisely this narrative of progress and modernization at the heart of the project of “rejoining” Europe.

Understanding modernism as an autochthonous aesthetic movement in Eastern Europe, as we will seek to do in this course, follows this postcolonial interrogation of modernization and its narratives. Recovering the category of the Second World (rather than Eastern Europe) will similarly allows us to better understand the center/periphery relations of the Cold War’s Three Worlds division.

In discussions of primary texts and secondary readings we will identify and contextualize basic features of modernism as a historical, political, and artistic project in Eastern Europe, focusing especially on a comparative view across different “Second World” literary markets, as well as the particular similarities and differences between these texts and the most common features of traditionally understood Western modernism.

**Primary texts:**

Ivo Andrić *The Bridge on the Drina*
Tadeusz Borowski *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*
Mikhail Bulgakov *Master and Margarita*
Ismail Kadare *The Three Arched Bridge*
Miroslav Krleža *The Return of Filip Latinovicz*

**Secondary texts:**

Warwick Research Collective *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World Literature*
Deleuze and Guattari *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*

Eysteinsson and Liska *Modernism: Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages*

**Course Requirements:**

- Regular attendance and active participation in class
- Weekly responses to readings
- Ten-minute in-class presentation
- Two 7-10 papers or one 20-page paper (two conference presentations or one journal article)
**VERY tentative schedule:**

**Week 1 and 2: Course Introduction: Modernity and Modernism in Global Perspective**
- Global Modernism Introduction
- On Combined and Uneven Development
- On World Systems Theory

**Week 3, 4, and 5: Magical Realism as Modernism**
- Warwick Research Collective *Combined and Uneven Development*
- Franco Moretti “Conjectures on World Literature” *New Left Review* 1, Jan-Feb 2000.
- Mikhail Bulgakov *Master and Margarita*

**Week 6 and 7: Modernism of Minor Literatures**
- Deleuze and Guattari *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*
- Ivo Andrić *The Bridge on the Drina*

**Week 8, 9, and 10: Modernism and Uneven Development**
- Miroslav Krleža *The Return of Filip Latinovicz*

**Week 11 and 12: Tradition and Modernism**
- Ismail Kadare *The Three Arched Bridge*

**Week 14, 15, and 16: Modernism after Auschwitz**
- Tadeusz Borowski *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*
- Jameson, Fredric. *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*