



**3RD INTERNATIONAL H/STORY
SEMINAR**

COMMUNISM IN HISTORICAL FICTION

APRIL 02, 2026

HISTORY

is a research group affiliated with the University of Silesia. Set up in 2013, the group focuses on the field of history overlapping with literary studies. Since then, we have organised a number of international conferences, meetings and workshops. We have grown into a circle of scholars whose research interests revolve around, broadly speaking, the issues lying at the intersection of these two areas, with occasional incursions into historiography, literary history and theory, cultural studies, psychology, sociology, but also biology and medicine. What connects us, then, are the interests in the ways in which history is narrated, disseminated, gendered, en- and decrypted, re-worked and re-used (as well as abused), and in the ways in which narratives of history can be treated and analysed as literary texts. We believe that history is full of good stories and that their meanings not only lie at the heart of various identities and cultures but can also benefit from being juxtaposed with other areas of research. You can find more about us here: <https://hstory.us.edu.pl/> and contact us at: hstory.seminar@gmail.com.



UNIVERSITY OF SILESIA

IN KATOWICE is our alma mater; though the Institute of Literary Studies, where you can find us in person, is located in Sosnowiec, a city neighbouring Katowice.

Seminar Programme

09:00 Seminar start and opening remarks – Communisms in Historical Fiction				
09:15 Alicja Bemben				
09:15 Keynote Address (chair: Sławomir Konkol)				
10:15 Lucy Jeffery and Anna Váradi – Historicising Communism: The Emergence of a “Trauma/Nostalgia Paradigm” in Contemporary Cultural Production				
10:15 Coffee break				
10:30				
12:30	Panel 1 Dismantling Communism (chair: Paulina Hacaś) Alexandra Preitschopf – Dismantling the Soviet Myth: Mark Aldanov’s <i>The Fifth Seal</i> as Counter-Narrative to Communism for Western Readers Lara Righi – Representing the Traumatic Memory of Communism in Belarus: An Analysis of Sasha Filipenko’s <i>Red Crosses</i> Jeff Smoliga – Dismantling Communism through Youth, Determinism, and Moral Collapse in Late Socialist Cinema Yanis Iqbal – The Revolutionary Without an Enemy: Communist Fantasy and Its Undoing in Parsai’s Satire	Panel 2 Fantastic Takes on Communism (chair: Chinmaya Lal Thakur) Manjola Brahaj Halili – The Representation of Persecution, Individual Alienation, and the Absence of Freedom in Communist Totalitarianism: A Literary Analysis of <i>The Palace of Dreams</i> by Ismail Kadare Taha Al-Sarhan – The Cosmic Bourgeoisie: Lovecraft, Class Anxiety, and the Decline of the American Dream Z.I. Mahmud – Red Hooves, Broken Histories: Replaying Communism Through <i>Animal Farm</i> ’s Roman à Clef and Screen Afterlives Mariia Romanova – <i>Red Plenty</i> and the Representation of the Soviet Economy: Intellectual Imaginaries and Historical Reflection	Panel 3 Truth and Narrative (chair: Michiel Rys) Naomi O’Rourke – Censorship, Truth and Self-Reflexivity in Polish Cinema of Moral Anxiety Anxhela Çikopano – “Blackening Reality”: Revisionist Theatre Purges in Communist Albania Bariş Çoban – Literary Genealogies of Revolution: Sheikh Bedreddin as Proto-Communist Hero in Nazım Hikmet’s Poetic Myth-Making Tang Ke – The “Novel-Epic” (“роман-эпопея”) and <i>War and Peace</i> in Soviet Literary Criticism	Panel 4 Visual Perspectives (chair: Yago Paris) Michele Varini and Nicola Costalunga – Intelligent Insanity. Hauntology, Memory, and the Refiguration of Communist History in Digital Games Mustafa Orhan Göztepe – The Aesthetics of the Control Room: A Comparative Analysis of <i>Papers, Please</i> and Its Cinematic Adaptation Özgür Yılmaz – Alternative Modernities, Alternative Communications: A Visual Communication History of Communism Viktorija Rimaitė-Beržiūnienė – Dismantling Soviet Visual Fiction: The Two Faces of De-Sovietization in Post-1990 Monumental Practices
12:30 Coffee break				
12:45				
14:45	Panel 5 Gendering Communism (chair: Alicja Bemben) Hunter Liguore – The Communist Winter of Tove Jansson’s <i>Moomins</i> : Queerness, Oppression, and Cold War Allegory in <i>Moominland Midwinter</i> Paulina Hacaś – Enduring Fear and Insecurity in Everyday Queer Existence under Communism in Tomasz Jędrowski’s <i>Swimming in the Dark</i> Maliha Iqbal – Between Revolution and Reproduction: Motherhood and Communism Tahmina Jumshudlu – Intimate Histories Under Sovietization: Female Narrative and Gendered Memory in Banine’s Memoir	Panel 6 Spaces and Identities (chair: Dorota Heneghan) Ritam Dutta – Toxic Modernity and Socialist Progress: Industrial Landscapes as Ideological Space in Jáchym Topol’s <i>Night Work</i> Stana Tadić Pantić – A Postmodern Approach and the Concept of Power in the Short Story “The Magical Circle of Cards” by Danilo Kiš Inna Häkkinen – The Communist Enemy as Techno-Political Other in Nuclear Espionage: Jennie Fields’s <i>Atomic Love</i> Elif Körpe – Identity Formation in Caryl Churchill’s <i>Mad Forest</i>	Panel 7 Slovak and Ukrainian Contexts (chair: Katia Hayek Nováková) Martin Makara – “...and in every detail they recognised advantages of the West against the East.” Pictures and Stories of Communism in Contemporary Slovak Historical Fiction from the Anasoft Litera Award Olesia Isaiuk – Ukrainian Historical Fiction as a Way of Comprehending the Deformation of Identity in the Communist Reality Diana Bota – Pidmohylny’s Short Story Portraits: Characters Reflecting on Communism	Panel 8 Before and after 1989 (chair: Mustafa Orhan Göztepe) Barbora Vinczeová, Marianna Bachledová and Richard Gramanich Štromajer – “Us” and “Those in the West”: Interpersonal Relationships and Self-Worth in (Post)Communist Slovakia Ghayth Manhel Alkinani – Narrative Anthropology of a Failed Revolution: Ali Bader’s <i>Chasing the Wolves</i> and the Iraqi Communist Odyssey in Africa Oana Marin – After 1989: Semi-Peripheral Transition, Uneven Development, and the Afterlife of Communism in the Romanian New Wave Nataša Simeunović Bajić and Anja Savić – The Manager-Businessman Figure and the Legacy of Socialism in Serbian Television Fiction
14:45 Lunch break				
15:45				
17:15	Panel 9 German Contexts (chair: Martin Makara) Michiel Rys – Rehearsing Communism. Activist Learning and Political Affect in Bertolt Brecht’s <i>Die Tage der Commune</i> (1948) Chinmaya Lal Thakur – Configuring Communist Pasts in the Present Or, Reading Representations of East Germany in the Writings of Jenny Erpenbeck Rebecca Carr – Replaying Communism with <i>Kleo</i>	Panel 10 (Re)Conceptualising Communism (chair: Inna Häkkinen) Soumia Bentahar – Two Narrative Communisms, One Logic: Historical Authority and Ventriloquised Confession in Viet Thanh Nguyen’s <i>The Sympathizer</i> and Julian Barnes’s <i>The Noise of Time</i> Craig Frayne – Quiet Containment: Cold War Cultural Governance and the Reconfiguration of Labour in National Film Board of Canada Cinema Nicholas Fazio – Masses and I: Consciousness in Witkiewicz, Toller, and Babel	Panel 11 Hungarian Contexts (chair: Bariş Çoban) Blanka Pillár – (Re)Framing Nostalgia: The Aesthetics of Duplicity in Socialist Hungary Yago Paris – István Szabó’s Historical Fictions: Power, Agency, and the Limits of Post-Communist Betterment András Szeibert-Erdős – Communism as Macabre and Horror in a Very Influential Hungarian Novel	Panel 12 Uses of Communism (chair: Anxhela Çikopano) Dorota Heneghan – A Convenient Shield: Communism and Politics in Sofia Casanova’s Interwar Fiction Edoardo Rugo – Communist Nostalgia as Historical Stagnation: The Case in Italian Cinema Katia Hayek Nováková – What If Communism?
17:15 Closing remarks				
17:20				

To join the keynote address and/or panels 1, 5, 9, use the following link:

<https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/35911973455839?p=hEwd6Zp2sxUDwdSORh>

Meeting ID: 359 119 734 558 39

Code: nB6yP3tG

To join panels 2, 6, 10, use the following link:

<https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/37060305412097?p=mdMnZWorP34p9h0e>

Meeting ID: 370 603 054 120 97

Code: kF2zY9eh

To join panels 3, 7, 11, use the following link:

<https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/33917728856389?p=To8P0Gg9yKNIMO9TvL>

Meeting ID: 339 177 288 563 89

Code: Wa7aT7ai

To join panels 4, 8, 12, use the following link:

<https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/33171087677289?p=HZQ0MQe1EbWwdkd7JD>

Meeting ID: 331 710 876 772 89

Code: gU9FP2DG

Abstracts and Biographic Information

Lucy Jeffery and Anna Váradi Historicising Communism: The Emergence of a “Trauma/Nostalgia Paradigm” in Contemporary Cultural Production

In this keynote, Lucy Jeffery and Anna Váradi introduce their recent edited collection *Replaying Communism: Trauma and Nostalgia in European Cultural Production* (CEU Press, 2026), where they outline how the communist past is represented in contemporary culture across Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). In doing so, Jeffery and Váradi identify a “trauma/nostalgia paradigm” at the heart of everyday life and culture across the region. Indeed, drawing on an interdisciplinary analysis of diverse forms of historical fiction (including literature, television, museums, games, online forums, radio plays, and performance art), they demonstrate how trauma and nostalgia are coexisting forces that reflect the complex attitudes towards the recent past—especially the transition years—across CEE.

For this “Communism in Historical Fiction” seminar, Jeffery and Váradi take examples from contemporary literature about East Germany, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria to demonstrate how memories of communism influence identity, politics, and democratic development. Ultimately, they posit that critical engagement with the “trauma/nostalgia paradigm” in such texts is essential for shaping democratic European futures centred on securing widespread civil liberties.

Lucy Jeffery is Co-Founder of the Replaying Communism project which received funding from the AHRC SWW-DTP in 2023. She has published on Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Ezra Pound, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Magda Szabó. Her monograph—*Transdisciplinary Beckett: Visual Arts, Music, and the Creative Process*—was published by Ibidem in 2021. She then co-edited a special issue for the leading environmental literature journal, *Green Letters*, entitled “A New Poetics of Space” (2022). In 2024 she was a Visegrad Fellow at Central European University and the Open Society Archives.

Anna Váradi is Co-Founder of the Replaying Communism project which received funding from the AHRC SWW-DTP in 2023. She has published on media, gender, and national identity in the work of Magda Szabó, and has served as a translator from Hungarian and German for several academic projects. Since 2020, she has worked extensively with displaced people and forced migrants who are pursuing Higher Education. Anna currently works at Cardiff University, Wales.

Alexandra Preitschopf

Dismantling the Soviet Myth: Mark Aldanov's *The Fifth Seal* as Counter-Narrative to Communism for Western Readers

Mark Aldanov's novel *The Fifth Seal* [*Nachalo kontsa*] offers a compelling example of how historical fiction served to dismantle communist ideology from the perspective of democratic Russian émigré intellectuals. Written in Paris on the eve of World War II by a writer who experienced the Bolshevik seizure of power firsthand, the novel could only be published in English translation in 1943 in New York, where Aldanov found himself in a second exile after fleeing Nazi-occupied France.

Set in late 1930s Paris, *The Fifth Seal* follows three Soviet officials on a mission abroad in France—a Comintern agent, a diplomat, and a military advisor—whose fates intertwine against the backdrop of Stalin's Great Terror. Through these characters, Aldanov exposes the machinery of communist oppression: systematic torture, show trials, political purges, and the pervasive atmosphere of fear. What distinguishes Aldanov's work is its dual critique: while exposing Soviet crimes, it simultaneously challenges the "Soviet myth" that pervaded progressive circles in 1930s France. At a time when many Western intellectuals celebrated the USSR as a bulwark against fascism, Aldanov warned against the totalitarian nature of both communism and fascism. His fiction became a form of political intervention, attempting to alert European democracies to the dangers of Soviet propaganda that portrayed Stalin's Russia as a "proletarian state" with the "most free constitution."

Accordingly, this paper examines how Aldanov's historical novel functions as counter-narrative, demonstrating literature's attempt to preserve alternative memories of communism, resist political mythmaking and defend European democratic values against totalitarian ideologies. By analyzing *The Fifth Seal* within the context of democratic Russian émigré intellectual circles, I explore how these voices—despite Aldanov's prominence in the interwar period (he was nominated thirteen times for the Nobel Prize)—remained largely unheard in their warnings against totalitarianism from both left and right, but deserve reconsideration today.

Alexandra Preitschopf obtained her PhD in Contemporary History at the University of Salzburg in 2016. From October 2016 to February 2021, she taught as a lecturer of Austrian History at the University of Sofia (Bulgaria). From March 2021 to January 2026, she was a postdoctoral assistant of Contemporary History at the Institute of History at the University of Klagenfurt (Austria), working on anti-communism in interwar Europe, with a focus on anti-Bolshevik Russian emigration. Since February 2026, she has been working as a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of History at the University of Salzburg.

Lara Righi

Representing the Traumatic Memory of Communism in Belarus: An Analysis of Sasha Filipenko's *Red Crosses*

The presentation aims to investigate the entanglement of memory and trauma in the portrayal of Communist Belarus in Sasha Filipenko's *Red Crosses* [*Красный крест*] (2017). Filipenko is a Belarusian writer, journalist, and presenter who has been living in self-imposed exile in Switzerland since 2013 because of his opposition to Aliaksandr Lukashenka. He is one of the 21st-century Belarusian writers who write in Russian, the language that symbolises the neocolonial subjugation of Belarus to Putin (Bekus 2014, 48; Wilson 2021, 203), to encourage a political action: to appropriate the language of power to disclose the traumatic memory of Communist Belarus, which is currently silenced by state-sponsored reinterpretations of the past. Set in Minsk in 1999, *Red Crosses* revolves around Aleksandr, a young man who is vicariously transmitted the memory of Soviet-era traumas by Tatyana, an old neighbour of his who suffers from Alzheimer's. Hirsch's affiliative postmemory (2012: 36), the memory system through which a person who has no kinship with a victim or survivor of a historical trauma can actively preserve the memory of the event, can be regarded as the prismatic concept to read the text. Tatyana's stories, personal documents, letters, and family pictures allow Aleksandr to become the heir of the memory of the crimes of Communism in Belarus; the GULag system, abuses of power, and the stories of survival and collaborationism behind the emphasis on narratives centred on heroism and bravery regarding the "Great Patriotic War" in Belarus (Fedor et al. 2017: 8; Morozova 2022: 137). Through the analysis of selected passages taken from the novel, the presentation goal is to investigate Filipenko's dismantling of the propagandistic and nostalgic depiction of the Communist era that is currently promoted by Lukashenka.

Lara Righi is a PhD student in Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Verona. Her research project focuses on the dynamics of collective memory at the basis of the representation of the USSR in three genres of 21st-century Russian literature (historical novel, dystopia, and postmemory literature). She also investigates the representation of the memory of the USSR in 21st-century Belarusian literature through the postcolonial approach. Her research interests encompass post-Soviet literature in relation to memory studies, trauma studies, postmodern studies, and postcolonial studies.

Jeff Smoliga

Dismantling Communism through Youth, Determinism, and Moral Collapse in Late Socialist Cinema

This paper examines the dismantling of communism as represented in late socialist cinema through three films produced on the eve of systemic collapse in Eastern Europe: *Margarit i Margarita* [*Margarit and Margarita* Nikolay Volev, Bulgaria, 1989), *Przypadek* [*Blind Chance*, Krzysztof Kieślowski, Poland, 1987], and *Krzyk* [*The Cry*, Barbara Sass, Poland, 1982]. Read together, these works expose the moral exhaustion, social determinism, and ideological bankruptcy of communist regimes shortly before their dissolution. In all three films, individual trajectories—whether rebellious, conformist, or marginal—are shaped by a socio-political order that systematically neutralises agency and transforms human relations into transactions governed by power.

In *Margarit i Margarita*, youthful rebellion and romantic idealism clash with a society in which social advancement depends on submission, networking, and sexual barter. This degeneration of socialist ideals into cynicism finds an echo in *Krzyk*, where social reintegration is revealed as an illusion: despite Marianna's resilience, the system reproduces inequality by protecting former communist elites while confining the marginalised to closed, carceral spaces disguised as care institutions. In both films, communism operates less as an ideology than as a mechanism of moral erosion, in which dignity, intimacy, and justice are sacrificed to survival. *Przypadek* extends this critique by introducing contingency as a narrative device that exposes the inescapability of the system. Whether Witek aligns himself with the Party, the Catholic opposition, or attempts political neutrality, his fate remains structurally predetermined. This fatalism resonates with the trajectories of Margarit, Margarita, and Marianna, whose lives demonstrate that neither resistance nor compliance offers genuine emancipation. Across the three films, the promise of mobility—social, moral, or existential—is consistently undermined.

Together, these films articulate dismantling communism not as a sudden political rupture, but as a prolonged moral and social disintegration, revealed through youth, gendered vulnerability, and the erosion of belief in socialist ideals.

With a PhD in film studies, **Jeff Smoliga** recently defended his thesis on the transformation of Polish, Spanish, and Bulgarian cinemas during periods of economic and political transition. He is a research associate at RIRRA21 (Paul Valéry University Montpellier) and a lecturer at the University of Strasbourg.

Yanis Iqbal

The Revolutionary Without an Enemy: Communist Fantasy and Its Undoing in Parsai's Satire

This paper offers a theoretical reading of Harishankar Parsai's mid-twentieth century Hindi satire "The Revolutionary" ["Krāntikārī"], situating it within post-independence Indian socialist culture and Cold War-era Left romanticism. Through the lens of Jacques Rancière's critique of the Marxist paradigm of unmasking, I argue that Parsai's narrative performs an immanent dismantling of a specifically communist political imaginary that conceives emancipation as the unveiling of hidden domination and the recovery of collective unity.

The self-styled revolutionary in the story inhabits this paradigm fully. He presumes bourgeois hypocrisy beneath familial affection, interprets love as conspiracy, and anticipates rupture as the necessary condition of political authenticity. His subjectivity depends upon the existence of a concealed structure of oppression requiring exposure. This structure mirrors classical models of ideology critique in which political truth emerges through revelation.

Yet the story systematically frustrates this expectation. The father responds to inter-caste marriage with calm acceptance and public celebration. The anticipated scene of antagonism dissolves. In Rancièrian terms, the fantasy of totalizing domination loses its object, and the logic of revelation collapses under its own presuppositions. The revolutionary's despair at the absence of struggle dramatizes the exhaustion of a communist ethos sustained by permanent denunciation.

The wife's final declaration, naming him a "bourgeois fool" while affirming love, withdraws his epistemic privilege as enlightened critic and redistributes interpretive capacity across the domestic scene. Emancipation appears as relational intelligence embedded in everyday life. By relocating communism from historical totality to intimate interaction, Parsai's fiction challenges dominant representations of communism in historical fiction that privilege trauma, heroism, and catastrophe. Political subjectivation emerges through a reconfiguration of the sensible within ordinary, shared scenes of affect and care.

Yanis Iqbal is studying at Aligarh Muslim University, India. He is the author of *Education in the Age of Neoliberal Dystopia* (Midwestern Marx Press, 2024) and *The Sword and the Neck: Reading the al-Aqsa Flood* (Iskra Books, 2025).

Manjola Brahaj Halili

The Representation of Persecution, Individual Alienation, and the Absence of Freedom in Communist Totalitarianism: A Literary Analysis of *The Palace of Dreams* by Ismail Kadare

This paper aims to analyze the representation of persecution, alienation of the individual, and absence of freedom in the communist system through the literary narration of the novel *The Palace of Dreams* [*Pallati i ëndrrave*] (1981) by Ismail Kadare. The novel represents one of the works with an allegorical-parabolic structure and is among the most complex in Albanian literature. It is a work in which, through a fictional world set within an imperial reality, a powerful metaphor of communist totalitarianism and its oppressive mechanisms is constructed. At the center of the analysis stands the institution of the Palace of Dreams, which is transformed into a symbol of absolute state control over the individual—not only over public life, but also over the most intimate sphere of existence: dreams and the subconscious.

This paper argues that persecution of the individual in the novel does not appear solely as physical violence or direct repression, but rather as a continuous process of psychological violation that produces fear, insecurity, anxiety, and self-censorship. The main character, Mark-Alem, gradually experiences the alienation of the self, transforming from a passive individual into a cog within the oppressive mechanism. This shows that communism erases individuality through both punishment and enforced collaboration institutionalized by the Palace of Dreams. The absence of freedom is presented as an existential condition in which the individual loses the ability to think and act independently, while their fate is determined by anonymous and elusive structures of power.

In conclusion, the novel *The Palace of Dreams* serves as a profound literary reflection on the repressive nature of communism, offering a universal critique of totalitarianism and demonstrating the power of literature to articulate painful historical experiences through allegory and symbolism.

Prof. Assoc. Dr. **Manjola Brahaj (Halili)** is an Albanian scholar of literature and literary studies, currently serving as Professor at Ukshin Hoti University of Prizren, Faculty of Philology. Her scientific research focuses on literary theory, intertextuality, semiotics, narrative studies, comparative literature, literary criticism, and contemporary theoretical approaches, including posthumanism and AI in literature. Prof. Brahaj (Halili) has published in internationally indexed journals, including SCOPUS and Web of Science: “Literary Space in the Novel of Ismail Kadare: *The Palace of Dreams* (A Social Semiotic Approach),” *Ars Aeterna*, 2019; “Posthumanism and the Role of Technology: Between Myth and Metaphor in H.G. Wells’ Dystopian Novel *The Time Machine*,” *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 2022; “The Traditions of Albanians and Their Portrait in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*,” *Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences*, 2023; “The Albanian and Slavic Eposes: Problems of Antiquity and Originality,” *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, 2018. Her latest work “Reflections on AI and Literature Studies: Between Analytical Support and the Irreducibility of Literature” was published in *Communications in Computer and Information Science* (CCIS, volume 2669) series of Springer Nature.

Taha Al-Sarhan

The Cosmic Bourgeoisie: Lovecraft, Class Anxiety, and the Decline of the American Dream

This article examines H.P. Lovecraft's fiction through a Marxist lens, focusing on how his cosmic horror encodes the anxieties of a declining bourgeois class in early twentieth-century America. While Lovecraft's work is often interpreted in terms of race and cosmic indifference, this study situates his fears of degeneration and hybridity within the context of class instability and economic transformation during the interwar years. Stories such as *The Shadow over Innsmouth* and "The Dreams in the Witch House" reveal an underlying concern with the erosion of traditional social hierarchies, the collapse of economic security, and the haunting presence of the proletarian "other" within modern urban and maritime spaces. Through close textual analysis supported by the theories of Karl Marx, Fredric Jameson, and Raymond Williams, the article argues that Lovecraft's monsters and decaying settings operate as allegories for the contradictions of capitalism and the loss of bourgeois control. By reading Lovecraft's cosmicism as a displaced class ideology, the paper exposes how his sense of insignificance before an indifferent universe mirrors the crisis of identity experienced by a class witnessing its own obsolescence. In doing so, the study contributes to the broader re-evaluation of Lovecraft as a writer whose horror reflects not only metaphysical dread but also the material conditions and social tensions of his age.

Taha Al-Sarhan is a 4th-year PhD student at the University of Pecs currently researching the field of Weird and New Weird Fictions with special emphasis on the sublime in H.P. Lovecraft's works. He also researches topics related to different media adaptations of Lovecraft's works, such as comic books, video games, films, and tabletop games. His other interests include Postcolonial horror, Eco-criticism and Environmental studies.

Z.I. Mahmud

Red Hooves, Broken Histories: Replaying Communism Through *Animal Farm's* Roman à Clef and Screen Afterlives

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) occupies a singular position at the intersection of literary allegory, ideological critique, and visual historiography. Read as a *roman à clef*, the text encodes the historical experience of Soviet communism through displaced characters, symbolic action, and strategic opacity rather than through mimetic reconstruction. This paper proposes a hybrid theoretical framework—drawing on narratology, affect studies, Marxist cultural theory, and adaptation studies—to examine how *Animal Farm's* novelistic and cinematic afterlives reanimate communism within the cultural imagination. Rather than treating the novel and its adaptations as discrete artefacts, the paper conceptualises them as a transmedial narrative system that continually reframes the memory, affect, and political legibility of communism across media.

At the level of literary form, the novel's progression from revolutionary rupture to authoritarian consolidation functions as a narrativised theory of ideological degeneration. Its reliance on repetition-with-variation, cyclical temporality, and the gradual erosion of narrative perspective exposes the systemic logic of communist mythmaking—founding fictions, pedagogical slogans, and institutionalised forgetting. As a *roman à clef*, *Animal Farm* foregrounds not historical accuracy but affective truth, revealing how fear, collective euphoria, complicity, and the attrition of agency become normalised within ideological regimes.

These dynamics are read alongside two pivotal screen adaptations: the 1954 Halas and Batchelor animation and the 1999 live-action film. The 1954 adaptation mobilises animation's semiotic flexibility to visualise ideological intensities, Cold War propaganda, and geopolitical spectacle, reframing Orwell's allegory within Western representational logics. By contrast, the 1999 film employs live-action naturalism and voice-over interiority to foreground trauma, memory, and the politics of witnessing. In each case, medial transformation produces theoretical reorientation, as visual grammar reshapes the *roman à clef's* political work.

The paper argues that *Animal Farm's* cross-media life demonstrates how the *roman à clef*, in literary and cinematic forms, operates as a pedagogical and affective engine through which communism is continually narrativised, aestheticised, and contested within modern cultural consciousness.

After presenting at *Confound the Time: Reception in Medieval and Early Modern Studies* (January 24, 2026), **Z.I. Mahmud** continues comparative research linking medieval reception, global modernism, and transcultural reinterpretation. A recent book chapter, "Ecocosmic and Cybernetic Femininities: Posthuman Metamorphosis in *Wuthering Heights* and *Great Expectations*," appears in *Emerging Trends and Future Directions in Comparative Literature*, edited by Abhijeet Dawle et al. (Empyreal Publishing House, Mumbai, 2024; ISBN: 978-93-49359-72-7). Another chapter, "Savitri's Indianization of Eurowesternist Alter Ego," appears in *Explorations in English Language and Literature: Theories, Texts, and Critical Approaches*, edited by Dr. Donipati Sumalatha (KY Publications; ISBN: 978-93-92760-66-2). His work-in-progress chapter, "The Clockwork Corpse: Miss Havisham's Haunting of Time and Flesh," is forthcoming with The North Meridian Press. Noteworthy conference

engagements include reckons “The Albatross and the Life-In-Death: A Coleridgean Pathogenesis within Posthumanist Apocalypse” (British Association for Romantic Studies [BARS] 2026, University of Birmingham), a project that situates Romantic ecology, spectral embodiment, and posthuman ethics within longer medieval and early modern cosmologies; “Experiential Anthropogenic(ity): Locational Identities in Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath’s Tale*” (Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Reading); “Stirring Up Trouble: Heroic Rebels Beowulf and Robin Hood—From Page to Screen,” in the *15th Háskóli Íslands Student Conference on the Medieval North* (University of Iceland, Reykjavík). Additional conference projects include “The Poetics of Frozen Glossolalia: Mystical Grammar from Hermione’s Living Marble Statue to Havisham’s Cobweb-Laced Bridal Spectre” (*8th Annual Comparative Literature Conference*, Louisiana State University), and “Footprints of the Displaced: Narrating Migration, Memory, and Unsettled Belonging from the Thames to Tasmania” (*Intersectional Studies Remote Conference (ISC)* at South Carolina State University 27th March, 2026), “Giants of the Earth, Stars of the Mind: Brobdingnag’s Reimagined Cosmos” (*Star Gazing: Astrology and Astronomy in the Medieval and Renaissance Imagination Popular Culture and the Deep Past 2026* Ohio State University), “Her Crown Was Forged in Ruinous Wounds: Sadomasochistic Sovereignty, Masculine-Forced Unmothering, and Traumatic Governance from Satis House to Crunchem Hall” (*Theorizing Turmoil, Tragedy, and Transformation: Textual Approaches to Trauma* [17-18th April 2026] Binghamton University Comparative Literature Department), and “Sepulchres of Love and Evidence: Mourning, Detection, and the Gothic Logic of Truth from ‘Annabel Lee’ to *The Moonstone*” (*Young Scholars Literary Symposium*, Shenandoah University). An alumnus of Satyawati College, Department of English, University of Delhi, India, Mahmud resides in Bangladesh and aspires toward Fulbright-supported postgraduate research aftermath of double honours with concentrations in Linguistics and Literature from the Department of English and Modern Languages, DEML, North South University.

Mariia Romanova

***Red Plenty* and the Representation of the Soviet Economy: Intellectual Imaginaries and Historical Reflection**

The paper explores how Francis Spufford's *Red Plenty* (2010), a hybrid work that blends historical research, speculative narrative, and economic theory, reflects and reconstructs the intellectual and cultural imaginaries of the Soviet planned economy. Rather than treating the book as a literary allegory or a simplified economic fable, my analysis situates *Red Plenty* within broader debates in the history of economic thought and intellectual history. I examine how the narrative engages with conceptualisations of planning, technological optimism, and the possibilities and limits of socialist economic rationality.

By reading *Red Plenty* as both a text of historical imagination and a commentary on the epistemological foundations of Soviet economic practice, the paper contributes to ongoing discussions on how economic systems are narrated, symbolised, and understood beyond formal economic models. It also intersects with key themes of the seminar, including how ideas, representations, and intellectual constructs shape and reflect historical orders and discontinuities.

Mariia Romanova, BA MA, is a predoctoral fellow in the ERC project “Datarev—Leading the First Data Revolution in European Agriculture: Farm Accountancy Data and Their Impact, 1870–1945” (PI: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Federico D’Onofrio, Department of Economic and Social History, University of Vienna). She is currently working on her PhD project titled *Redefining Profit: Multilevel Perspectives on the Reform of Accounting in Russia’s Economic Transition (ca. 1980s–2000s)*.

Emerging in the wake of Poland's Stalinist period, the "Cinema of Moral Anxiety" offered audiences a nuanced and critical appraisal of Polish life under communism and a departure from the socialist realism of mid-20th century Polish cinema. The movement became an avenue for filmmakers to voice dissent politically and publicly through fictionalised narratives, allowing directors to unpick and provide thinly veiled critiques of social life under authoritarian rule (Falkowska, 1995). Cinema of Moral Anxiety was characterised by its exploration of individual moral dilemmas, responsibility and tensions between the state and the self. This turn towards the self is reflected in two films of the late 1970s, Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Marble* [*Człowiek z marmuru*] (1976) and Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Camera Buff* [*Amator*] (1979). Both productions employ a "film-within-a-film" concept, reminiscent of Hamlet's play-within-a-play, each following documentary directors and the political and ethical impasses they face throughout the filmmaking process. Chosen here for their shared self-reflexive critique of both the nature of filmmaking and life in communist Poland, both films provide commentary on the influence of censorship on personal and public life.

This presentation aims to explore these themes of truth, authenticity and moral ambiguity in the world of documentary production and censorship. I argue that while both *Man of Marble* and *Camera Buff* use "film-within-a-film" to soften their political critique (Güven, 2024), this device also allows them to turn the discussion inward. Through a self-referential depiction of life as a Polish filmmaker, these two works allow for a self-critical appraisal of the directors' own roles and complacency regarding censorship and propaganda (Mazierska, 2015). However, by exposing their own role in the production of "inauthentic" cinema, the directors also call for the audience to follow suit. These films encourage a consideration and reconsideration of the cultural and political "truths" many may have come to accept.

Naomi O'Rourke has recently completed an MPhil in Identities and Cultures of Europe at Trinity College Dublin following a BA in Sociology from the University of Exeter. Her research areas have included questions of belonging, identity and migration, with more recent explorations of relationships between personal histories, emotion and identity.

While the mechanisms of censorship and repression under Albanian state socialism are being examined in political, social, historical and artistic scholarship, the phenomenon of so-called “revisionist theatre” remains insufficiently addressed in international discourse. During the ideological tightening that followed the broader Eastern Bloc “thaw,” Albanian authorities denounced certain theatrical productions as “revisionist,” associating them with deviations from Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist orthodoxy and with alleged Western, “imperialist” influence. A number of plays were banned, performances withdrawn, and theatre practitioners subjected to imprisonment, professional exclusion, or public denunciation.

This paper investigates the ideological construction of “revisionism” in Albanian theatre and interrogates the regime’s claim that such works “blackened reality.” What constituted this allegedly distorted reality? How did these contested representations differ in subject, aesthetics, theme, and dramaturgy from officially sanctioned socialist realism productions? Were the accusations of “blackening reality” genuine acts of denunciation, or did they serve as a pretext for other, underlying political or ideological objectives? Through close analysis of selected banned and approved plays, archival materials, and contemporary critical discourse, the study examines the tension between theatrical mimesis and ideological orthodoxy.

By situating Albanian revisionist theatre within broader debates on communism in historical fiction and cultural memory, the paper argues that these purges reveal not only mechanisms of cultural control, but also competing conceptions of truth, reality, and subjectivity under communism and its ideological framing. Revisiting these suppressed works today contributes to a reassessment of communist cultural policy, the politics of representation, and the fragile boundary between artistic experimentation and political transgression.

Dr **Anxhela Çikopano** is a senior researcher of theater and cinema at the Centre of Art Studies in the Academy of Sciences of Albania, as well as a lecturer at the University of Arts in Tirana. She holds a 4-year diploma in Theater Directing and a PhD in Cultural Anthropology, focusing on Albanian customary laws and theater. Her research centers on socialist and post-socialist theater and cinema in Albania. She has published a monograph titled *Customary Laws in the Albanian Drama*; and is currently working on a second book about the so-called revisionist theater in communist-era Albania.

Barış Çoban

Literary Genealogies of Revolution: Sheikh Bedreddin as Proto-Communist Hero in Nazım Hikmet's Poetic Myth-Making

This paper investigates the cultural construction of revolutionary identity in Turkey through the figure of Şeyh Bedreddin as a proto-communist hero and Nâzım Hikmet as the poet who canonised him. Hikmet's "The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin" ["Şeyh Bedreddin Destanı"] (1936) transformed a 15th-century religious and social rebel into a symbolic ancestor of modern communism. By reframing Bedreddin's egalitarian revolt against feudal and Ottoman authority as an early articulation of socialist ideals, Hikmet created a narrative of historical continuity that legitimised the communist movement within a local tradition. This literary intervention positioned Bedreddin not merely as a historical figure but as a mythic hero embodying class struggle and collective emancipation.

The paper argues that Hikmet's poetic myth-making served two interrelated functions: first, it provided the Turkish left with a culturally resonant genealogy, and second, it embedded Marxist ideology within national historical memory. This process exemplifies Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony, in which art serves as a vehicle for ideological transformation. The revival of Bedreddin in subsequent decades, particularly during the 1970s, when revolutionary movements reached mass mobilisation, further illustrates the enduring power of this myth. Plays, novels, and poems of the period reactivated Hikmet's Bedreddin as a legitimising symbol for socialist struggle, reinforcing the movement's claim to indigenous roots.

By analysing Hikmet's poetic strategies and their afterlife in later cultural productions, the study demonstrates how literature shaped the trajectory of Turkish communist politics. It highlights the reciprocal relationship between art and revolutionary praxis, showing that the creation of a proto-communist hero was not a mere aesthetic gesture but a strategic act of ideological positioning that amplified the communist movement's social impact.

Barış Çoban is a Professor in the Communication Sciences Department, Doğuş University, Turkey. His research interests include alternative media, alternative journalism, surveillance and the safety of journalists.

Tang Ke

The “Novel-Epic” (“роман-эпопея”) and *War and Peace* in Soviet Literary Criticism

The genre of the “novel-epic” (“роман-эпопея”), theoretically rooted in the works of Georg Lukács and formally defined by A.V. Chicherin, positions Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* [*Война и миръ*] (1869) as its archetype and precursor. As the predominant generic classification acknowledged by Soviet scholarship, the novel-epic framework was instrumental in resolving the longstanding debate regarding the artistic unity of Tolstoy’s magnum opus. This paper examines the teleological significance of *War and Peace* within this specific theoretical tradition. By engaging with Lukács’s conceptual framework, I argue that the narrative movement in *War and Peace* was interpreted by Soviet literary criticism as a progression from the “problematic individual” characteristic of the novel form toward the “totality” of the epic. In the context of Soviet literary criticism, this trajectory was not merely aesthetic but ideological; it framed the text as an evolutionary step within the historiography of historical progress, serving as a harbinger of Socialist Realism. Consequently, through this theoretical lens, *War and Peace* was successfully embedded into the developmental history of the Soviet communist spirit and its corresponding literary history.

Tang Ke is a PhD candidate at the College of Literature and Journalism, Sichuan University. His research interests center on Russian literature of the 1860s and 1870s and the Soviet tradition of literary criticism regarding classical canons. His recent publications include:

1. Скрытый диалог между Лукачем и Бахтиным в контексте соцреализма— Поэтика жанра в перспективе большого времени, *Филология: научные исследования*, 2025. № 1. С. 46-57. [“The Hidden Dialogue between Lukács and Bakhtin in the Context of Socialist Realism: The Poetics of the Genre in the Perspective of Great Time,” *Philology: Scientific Researches*, no. 1 (2025), pp. 46-57.]
2. 曼德尔施塔姆的罗马书写与俄罗斯诗人形象建构, *外国文学动态研究*, 2025年第4期, 第77-95页。 [“Osip Mandelstam’s Writings of Rome and His Construction of the Figure of Russian Poet,” *New Perspectives on World Literature*, no. 4 (2025), pp. 77-95.]
3. 苏联时代对世界美学史的书写——〈美学史:世界美学思想文献〉简介, *比较美学*, 第5辑 (2025), 第22-43页。 [“The Historiography of World Aesthetics in the Soviet Era: An Introduction to History of Aesthetics: Monuments of World Aesthetic Thought,” *Comparative Aesthetics*, no. 5 (2025), pp. 22-43.]

Michele Varini and Nicola Costalunga Intelligent Insanity. Hauntology, Memory, and the Refiguration of Communist History in Digital Games

This paper explore how contemporary video games, such as *Darkwood* (2017), *Atomic Heart* (2023), *Cronos: The New Dawn* (2025), and the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R* (2007-25), *Metro* (2010-24) and *Fallout* (1997-2018) series, situated in the space of Eastern Europe and post-Soviet territories, refigure and reshape communist history as “official” history within an alternate historical framework (uchronia). Drawing on memory studies, post-socialist cultural theories, and hauntology as theorized through the work of Jacques Derrida, we argue that these games present communism as a specter: a structure that transcends its historical demise and re-emerges as atmosphere, infrastructure, and affect.

Rather than representing communism as a historically bounded period, these games reconceptualize communism as what we term a “playable archive,” in which monumental socialist realist architecture, decaying industrial complexes, surveillance regimes, and bureaucratic systems are refigured as interactive environments navigated by players. Official communist history, grounded in narratives of progress, collectivism, and industrial success, is displaced by speculative, dystopian, or horror-inflected counter-histories. Bodily mutations, ecological catastrophe, secret experiments, and abandoned cities expose the fault lines beneath the surface of ideological certainty. Through an affect-oriented analysis, this paper examines how these games generate feelings of paranoia, nostalgia, horror, and melancholia, ultimately producing what may be described as “reflective nostalgia” rather than “restorative myth-making.” At the same time, the games commodify the aesthetic of socialist modernity and transform political trauma into entertainment. This dynamic forms part of a broader cultural process in which communist history reappears as official memory, traumatic residue, and speculative alternative horizon. By foregrounding the interactive dimension of digital media, this paper argues that video games have a distinctive role to play in the renegotiation of communist history, operating as a space between historical fiction, alternative history, and affective simulation.

Michele Varini holds a PhD in sociology, organisations, and cultures at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan. He currently conducts research on digital fashion issues, mainly on the hybridisation between the world of gaming and that of fashion production. A collaborator of the ModaCult study centre, he is interested in the phenomena of digitalisation, digital fashion, new forms of production and consumption, and post-humanism. ORCID: 0000-0002-7912-975X. ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Michele-Varini?ev=hdr_xprf.

Nicola Costalunga holds a Ph.D. in Global Studies, Justice, Rights, Politics, from the University of Macerata. He is currently a research fellow in the Horizon Project “GAME-ER” at the University of Turin, Department of Humanities, where he studies the dynamics of regional gaming clusters across Europe. Recently, he has been working on the foundational economy, social citizenship, and the role of trade unions. Additionally, he has frequently worked on issues related to Japanese social and cultural dynamics. He is a Subject Expert in general sociology. ORCID: 0000-0001-8254-8405. ResearchGate: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Nicola-Costalunga-2>.

Mustafa Orhan Göztepe

The Aesthetics of the Control Room: A Comparative Analysis of *Papers, Please* and Its Cinematic Adaptation

Set in 1982 at the border checkpoint of the fictional Arstotzkan city of East Grestin, the video game *Papers, Please* (2013) is designed as a synthesis of “spot-the-difference” puzzle mechanics, Iron Curtain aesthetics, and the psychological weight of moral dilemmas. Both the game, developed by Lucas Pope, and its cinematic adaptation, *Papers, Please: The Short Film* (2018), focus on the implications of repetitive bureaucratic labor within a confined control room of this imagined communist state.

The short film presents the story of an officer—whose momentary emotional vulnerability precipitates his personal ruin—through a relatively realistic lens, utilizing muted tones, brutalist aesthetics, and a minimalist setting. Unlike the game, it culminates in a closed ending that precludes multiple interpretations. The game, however, constructs a more complex narrative encompassing numerous potential endings through a branching structure emerging from the player’s choices. This narrative is shaped by the delicate balancing of critical variables, such as a state of perpetual war, meticulousness in labor, encountered moral impasses, the pressure of familial obligations, and resistance against the authoritarian state. Furthermore, the game facilitates a tonal transformation by juxtaposing its stylized pixel-art aesthetics with side-stories that verge on the absurd, thereby adding layers of complexity to the initial dramatic tension.

Drawing upon these narrative structures, this study examines how the game departs from the film’s realism to transfigure mundane, repetitive bureaucratic tasks into a compelling experience—maintaining player engagement through its interactive storytelling and playful visual language.

Mustafa Orhan Göztepe (PhD) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication and Design at Istanbul Kültür University. He earned his PhD in Cinema and Media Studies from Bahçeşehir University. His scholarly research interrogates the intersections of postcolonialism, ethnicity, and nationalism as they are manifested within cinema and the visual arts. Dr. Göztepe’s pedagogical and academic interests further extend to visual narrative structures, film history, and cultural theory.

Özgür Yılmaz

Alternative Modernities, Alternative Communications: A Visual Communication History of Communism

This paper examines how communist movements constructed alternative modernities through alternative communication infrastructures, focusing on a comparative media-historical analysis of visual and textual practices across four pivotal contexts: the Spanish Civil War of 1936, the Cuban Revolution, the early Soviet Union, and the Chinese Revolution. Drawing on open-access archival platforms such as Revolutionary Papers, the study situates these communication forms not merely as propaganda instruments but as epistemic frameworks that redefined political participation, collective identity, and revolutionary temporality.

In the Spanish Civil War, the Republican factions deployed visual culture—particularly posters and illustrated newspapers—to articulate a modernist, anti-fascist aesthetic that blended avant-garde visual strategies with mass mobilization. Cuba's *Radio Rebelde* and later *Prensa Latina* reconfigured the geography of information flows in the Cold War, creating a counter-hegemonic broadcast and news network capable of bypassing Western wire services. Their model demonstrated how low-tech infrastructures could produce high-impact global resonance. The Soviet case foregrounds the emergence of agitprop—agitation and propaganda—as a systematic communication method. Bolshevik posters, the cinematic experiments of Sergei Eisenstein, and the institutional power of *Pravda* and *Izvestia* shaped a visual-discursive regime that fused industrial modernity with revolutionary pedagogy. In Maoist China, poster art similarly functioned as a pedagogical-affective medium, translating ideological principles into emotionally charged images that circulated across rural and urban spaces, thus bridging the gap between literacy levels and political participation.

By placing these cases side by side, the paper argues that communist communication histories illuminate distinct trajectories of modernity—plural, contested, and materially grounded. The comparative approach reveals how aesthetic form, technological infrastructure, and political ideology intertwined to generate alternative media ecologies that rivaled capitalist information regimes. These examples suggest that revolutionary communication was not derivative but constitutive of political imagination, world-making, and collective agency.

Özgür Yılmaz is a communication scholar whose research focuses on digital capitalism, labour, political communication, and global media histories. He completed his PhD in Journalism at Istanbul University in 2024, supported by the YÖK 100/2000 Africa Studies scholarship, with a dissertation examining the reproduction of inequality in digital labour systems across the African continent. He previously earned an MA in Latin American Studies from Ankara University and a BA in Spanish Language and Literature from Istanbul University. His publications include peer-reviewed articles on digital colonialism, surveillance, social movements, labour transformations, media history, and political ideology in journals such as *AJIT-e*, *Journal of Human and Social Sciences*, *Abant Sosyal*. Yılmaz has served as a reviewer for numerous national and international journals and has contributed to scholarly conferences with papers on digital inequality, media theory, postcolonial communication, and African studies. He is a member of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) and has held editorial roles in *kampfplatz* and *4. BOYUT* journals. His broader academic interests include critical media theory, decolonial thought, cultural studies, and the intersections of technology, labour, and power.

The collapse of the Soviet Union not only marked the end of a political regime but also triggered the dismantling of an entire aesthetic fiction—the monumental visual system through which Soviet power narrated, staged, and legitimised itself. While dominant research on de-Sovietization focuses primarily on removal, demolition, and iconoclasm, this presentation argues that the process cannot be fully understood without examining what replaces the emptied symbolic space. The dismantling of Soviet monuments represents only the negative face of de-Sovietization. Equally significant—but far less studied—is its positive dimension: the construction of new monuments that produce alternative narratives, reconfigure collective memory, and establish a post-Soviet symbolic order.

This presentation conceptualises post-1990 Lithuanian monuments as sites where the regime of Socialist Realism meets and is gradually displaced by the new aesthetic regime, creating a new visual vocabulary that both replaces and rewrites Soviet monumental fiction. Empirically, the study relies on qualitative content analysis of expert interviews with Lithuanian sculptors, architects, and artists involved in monument-making since 1990.

More than 400 monuments erected in Lithuania since independence reveal a complex field marked by continuities, ruptures, and public contestation. While some new monuments reproduced familiar realist aesthetics—thus provoking criticism for their apparent proximity to Soviet monumentalism—others introduced symbolic, conceptual, and heteronomous forms that challenged the Soviet visual legacy.

The analysis identifies three overlapping features of a new post-Soviet visual vocabulary, which together dismantle the aesthetic fiction of Soviet monumentalism:

- (1) a movement away from Socialist Realism toward symbolism, conceptualism, and diverse forms of artistic experimentation;
- (2) a synthesis of state, national, and religious symbolism;
- (3) a strong visual focus on narratives of struggle, freedom, and independence.

By examining what visually replaces Soviet-era monumental signs, the presentation demonstrates how post-Soviet monument-making contributes to the cultural dismantling of communism not through destruction alone, but through the production of new images, symbols, and aesthetic regimes that reshape memory and redefine national identity.

Dr. **Viktorija Rimaitė-Beržiūnienė** (PhD in Political Science) is an assistant professor at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University. She received her PhD in Political Science and Memory Studies in 2022 at Vilnius University. Currently, she is conducting postdoctoral research “The Positive Aspect of De-Sovietization: The Compatibility of the Narrative and Visuality.” The main specialization includes the analysis of memory processes and expressions of collective memory as politically significant objects with a focus on public spaces and visual memory practices that fill them, i.e. the analysis of different memory narratives and memory as a security issue and national as well as local history maker.

Hunter Liguore

The Communist Winter of Tove Jansson's *Moomins*: Queerness, Oppression, and Cold War Allegory in *Moominland Midwinter*

This paper/presentation examines Tove Jansson's *Moominland Midwinter* [*Trollvinter*] (1957) as a veiled historical fiction, arguing that its stark, frozen setting functions as an allegory for the psychological and cultural chill imposed by the Soviet-dominated political landscape during the Cold War. Specifically, it analyzes the novel's symbolic landscape and character dynamics to illuminate the oppression of queer identity within this historical context, drawing connections to Jansson's personal experiences and correspondence.

Moominland Midwinter deviates sharply from previous Moomin novels, depicting a world "frozen in fear" where the protagonist, Moomintroll, wakes prematurely to a somber, unfamiliar reality. The paper/presentation will focus on the symbolism of the relentless "Communist Winter"—a state of cultural and political petrification—and the emergence of characters who embody forms of hidden dissent and non-normative identity. The snow itself, an overwhelming and paralyzing force, mirrors the pervasive anxiety and ideological surveillance of the era.

The analysis will explore how the novel subtly addresses the need for queer refuge and survival under a regime that ideologically repressed non-conformity. By investigating Jansson's own life and the social climate in Finland and neighboring Communist regions, the project links Moomintroll's waking solitude, the melancholic figure of Too-ticky (often interpreted as a reflection of Jansson's partner, Tuulikki Pietilä), and the elusive Groke to historical themes of somberness, isolation, and coded resistance.

This reading aligns with the seminar themes of sympathies and fears evoked by communism (the Red Scare/Cold War) and identity formation under and against communism (survival, love). By reframing a beloved children's text as a poignant piece of historical allegory, the paper/presentation seeks to dismantle communism's cultural narratives by exposing the intimate, human cost of ideological oppression.

Hunter Liguore (she/her) is a distinguished writer and educator working across disciplines, teaching historical fiction writing in the MFA program at Lesley University, Cambridge, MA, and holding degrees in history and writing. She's also an award-winning author, translated in seven languages. Her research is defined by using narrative to engage in critical public discourse around themes of equity, social visibility, and historical reclamation, especially for LGBT peoples. Her focus on refuge and reclaiming heritage includes re-examining ancient texts for LGBT narratives and analyzing contemporary works, such as Jansson's *Moomins*, for symbolic narratives that address issues of political oppression and queer identity in history.

Paulina Hacaś
Enduring Fear and Insecurity in Everyday Queer Existence under Communism in Tomasz Jędrowski's *Swimming in the Dark*

Fear has long functioned as an affective force in human history and has been shaping the lives of many, including those living under communism. My interest is in how it influenced the queer people living in the communist Polish People's Republic (PRL) as regards their everyday life, particularly navigating social interactions and romantic relationships. Drawing on Berents and ten Have's (2017) conceptualizations of fear and insecurity, I argue that the persistent fear of exposure as a queer person within a system that criminalised and stigmatised non-heteronormative identities permeated their daily life by structuring patterns of self-presentation, intimacy, and trust that ultimately constrain and destabilise their social relationships.

For this purpose, in this presentation, first, I would like to adduce briefly Berents and ten Have's ideas, then expand on how these link to the queer experience of everyday fear and insecurity under the communist oppression. In the second part of my presentation, I use these concepts to analyse everyday life under communism in Poland in Tomasz Jedrowski's historical fiction *Swimming in the Dark* [*Płynąc w ciemnościach*] (2020). My intention is to focus on queer people's experience of fear and insecurity penetrating their everyday lives under the communist oppression and analyse the impact of these on their private lives. This study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between queer experience, everyday life, fear, and insecurity under the communist regime in Poland.

Paulina Hacaś is a postgraduate student of Postgraduate Professional Development Studies in Teaching Polish Culture and Language to Foreigners at the University of Silesia. Her main research interests include historical fiction, Polish literature, folklore and esoterism as well as rhetoric and queer studies. She has participated in several seminars and authored texts focused primarily on women in historical fiction, including her most recent publication in an edited academic volume published by Routledge and entitled "Feminism Meets Enterprise: Gentleman Jack's Anne Lister and Her Dual Legacy?" (2025). She is currently preparing for PhD enrolment at the University of Copenhagen.

Adrienne Rich distinguishes between motherhood as a woman's potential relationship to reproduction and children, and motherhood as an institution designed to keep that potential under male control. This paper examines two different temporal responses to such control by the paternalistic Party through readings of *Dada Comrade* [*Dada Kamred*] (1941) by Yashpal and *The Lowland* (2013) by Jhumpa Lahiri.

In *Dada Comrade*, Shailbala challenges party authority over female sexuality, questions monogamy, and resists male comrades' lechery. Yet communist praxis ultimately redirects her agency into motherhood, revealing tensions within the revolutionary project. Shailbala's pregnancy places her between two temporalities: the past, where motherhood functions as a traditional social institution, and the future, where it opens the possibility of a life outside party control. She is not formally married and chooses to raise the baby outside the conventional family, moving beyond the gender role assigned to her by the party. With childbirth absent from the narrative present, motherhood becomes a speculative space that imagines female agency outside communist control.

The Lowland presents a more extreme rejection of institutional control. After her husband's death in the Naxalbari movement, Gauri faces Party condemnation for marrying Subhash and leaving for the USA. Even outside its influence, she associates her daughter with political trauma and eventually chooses solitude. Her refusal carries no vision of futurity, leading to a sense of nonexistence that severs her from both future and present, marking not only a rejection of communism but a withdrawal from politics itself.

Together, these novels reveal a temporal contradiction within revolutionary politics: movements that claim to build the future often assign women roles that preserve the past. By unsettling this arrangement, the texts affirm a key insight of social reproduction theory: when motherhood remains untransformed, revolutionary projects reproduce the very structures of domination they seek to overcome.

Maliha Iqbal is a student of English Literature at Aligarh Muslim University, India. She has published over fifty articles, short stories and poems in magazines such as *Livewire* (*The Wire*), *Creativity Webzine*, *Cerebration*, *Histolit*, *Countercurrents*, *Times of India*, *Freedom Review*, *Counterpunch*, *ArmChair Journal*, *Kitaab*, *Counterview*, *Alcott Youth Magazine*, *Janata Weekly*, *FemAsia*, *Good Morning Kashmir*, *Writers Cafeteria*, *Café Dissensus*, *The New Verse News*, *Borderless Journal*, *Writing in a Woman's Voice*, *The Afterpast Review*, *The Palestine Chronicle*, *The Cadre Journal*, *The Paris Post* and *Indian Periodical*.

Tahmina Jumshudlu

Intimate Histories Under Sovietization: Female Narrative and Gendered Memory in Banine's Memoir

Azerbaijani exile writer Banine is one of those rare authors in Azerbaijani literature who had been able to introduce a counter-memory which “highlights the challenges of being a woman from the colonial margins in a community still bound by imperial nostalgia” (Dadashova, 2025, p. 158) in their works. Banine's autobiographical sequence of *Caucasian Days* [*Jours caucasiens*] (1945) and *Parisian Days* [*Jours parisiens*] (1947) depict the transformation of socio-political space in Azerbaijan in the early 20th century through the eyes of the local elite who later have been forced into exile. Through these two memoirs, Banine both presents the reader with a historical narrative on the transition from Tsarist to Republican and then, Soviet periods, but also manages to add gendered dimension to their illustration, highlighting the lived reality of women in majority-Muslim Russian “peripheries.”

This research firstly aims to highlight how Banine's depiction of the Soviet regime in *Caucasian Days* reveals Russian invasion of the short-lived post-imperial Republics in South Caucasus, especially Azerbaijan where the government advocated for women's emancipatory and educational right which the Soviet regime later took credit for as a propaganda mechanism. Secondly by referring to the excerpts from the novel itself, this study brings the social upheaval and corruption which accompanied the early Sovietization period into perspective and differentiates between the public and private spaces of communism. Lastly, I aim to put Banine's work in conversation with the Soviet narrative on the “liberation” of Muslim women and socialist regime's dismissal of women's writing. Banine's work offers an alternative narrative culture to the patriotic and masculinist Soviet literary tradition and exposes the gap between male-coded ideology and reality of women, as well as the Soviet liberatory rhetoric and perpetuation of the imperial control in the region.

Tahmina Jumshudlu is a Eurasian Studies Master's student at Middle East Technical University, Turkey where they also finished their Bachelor's degree in Sociology. Their current thesis focuses on the socio-political construction of gender and womanhood in Azerbaijan through the double burden experience of highly educated Azerbaijani women. Originally from Azerbaijan, Jumshudlu's research interests include postcolonial theory, symbolic violence, surveillance, gender, and politics of nature.

Ritam Dutta

Toxic Modernity and Socialist Progress: Industrial Landscapes as Ideological Space in Jáchym Topol's *Night Work*

This paper examines industrial and polluted landscapes as ideological formations in *Night Work* [*Noční práce*] (2001; English trans. 2019), arguing that Topol's historical fiction renders late and post-socialist modernity legible through environmental ruin. Being at the nexus of environmental humanities and post-socialist studies, the analysis treats factories, polluted soils, derelict infrastructure, as well as borderland wastes as material inscriptions of communist progress narratives and their afterlives. Rather than ignoring environmental degradation, which is more like the background, the novel highlights it as an active agent in the world of memory, affect, and political disillusionment.

The paper draws on Marxist and post-Marxist theories of modernity, especially Karl Marx's insight that under capitalism (and, by extension, industrial socialism) "all that is solid melts into air" (*Communist Manifesto*, 2008) to re-frame industrialisation as a destabilising force on the reordering of social, as well as ecological, relations. Complementing this, the concept of the production of space developed by Henri Lefebvre is useful in understanding how socialist industry reorganised landscapes to materialise this ideological authority, and the theory of capitalism-in-nature by Jason W. Moore enables a comparative reading of socialist extractivism as part of a wider modern world-ecology and not an ecological exception.

Methodologically, the paper employs material ecocriticism (Iovino and Oppermann, 2012) to interpret polluted matter—rust, toxins, industrial debris—as narrative actors, which "stor[y] ... ideology in non-discursive forms." In *Night Work*, industrial ruins thus serve as mnemonic devices: they are archives of the promises of socialist progress, exposing its ecological costs and ironic temporalities. Ultimately, the paper functions as an argument to Topol's novel by challenging both nostalgic and triumphalist accounts of communism by situating the role of ideology in the context of damaged environments that continue to act upon human bodies and political imaginaries. In doing so, it locates at the center, rather than on the periphery, questions of environmental degradation as an area through which communism is remembered, fought over, and re-told in historical fiction.

Ritam Dutta is a doctoral research scholar in the Department of English at Jadavpur University. Ritam completed his postgraduate degree in the Department of English, University of Delhi. His main areas of interest include Victorian Literature, Environmental Humanities, and Marginality Studies. Ritam has numerous research publications with both national and international publishing houses. He has created an online forum dedicated to the nineteenth-century literature called *Victorian Vanguard* (www.victorianvanguard.com), which has over 16000 members worldwide.

Stana Tadić Pantić

A Postmodern Approach and the Concept of Power in the Short Story “The Magical Circle of Cards” by Danilo Kiš

The life and work of the Yugoslav writer Danilo Kiš has for decades served as a paradigmatic example of the complex entanglement between politics and literature. To contribute to the broader scholarly debate concerning the extent to which literature operates as a register or medium for documenting and interpreting global conditions and interactions, I turn to an analysis of one of his stories.

In my presentation, I would like to explore the connection between Danilo Kiš's literature and Michel Foucault's postmodern theories of power, surveillance, and repression. Focusing on the short story “The Magic Circle of Cards” [“Magijsko kruženje karata.”] from *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich* [*Grobnica za Borisa Davidoviča*] (1976), I argue that Kiš's portrayal of Soviet labor camps reflects Foucault's idea of power as a decentralized, fluid force present in all social relations. The story features Karl Taube, a revolutionary imprisoned without explanation, and his antagonist, pahan Kostik Korshunindze, a criminal who rises to power within the camp hierarchy. This reversal of roles highlights the collapse of traditional social order and the emergence of a new power structure based on violence and fear.

Kiš draws from the lives of real historical figures, including his friend Karlo Štajner, and mixes fiction with documentary techniques—a hallmark of postmodern literature. Critics are divided on whether Kiš should be classified as a postmodernist, but his uses of intertextuality, metafiction, and historical references in this collection of short stories support this classification. The characters in this story and their power dynamics additionally contribute to the postmodern literary approach as they correspond to Foucault's notion that individuals are shaped and controlled by broader discourses and institutions. Ultimately, the story illustrates how ideology, surveillance, and violence are used to maintain control, even in society's most marginal spaces. through which communism is remembered, fought over, and retold in historical fiction.

Stana Tadić Pantić is a PhD student at the Department of Transdisciplinary Humanities and Theory of Art and Media at the Faculty of Media and Communication in Belgrade. She is particularly interested in postcolonial and decolonial studies in Culture and Media as well as in arts and social movements.

Inna Häkkinen

The Communist Enemy as Techno-Political Other in Nuclear Espionage: Jennie Fields's *Atomic Love*

Stemming from Andrew's argument that "the interpenetration of ideology and emerging atomic technologies created a technopolitical other whose dangerousness was configured both in terms of political allegiance and mastery of cutting-edge scientific knowledge" (Andrew 2018, 415), the presentation intends to outline the intersection of the communist imaginaries with advanced nuclear technologies via exploring the literary frames of "communist enemization" in historical fictional writing.

The presentation intends to outline tensions of geopolitical anxieties between Cold War-era communist nostalgia, contemporary "Red Scare" recycling, tied to nuclear capacities, in fictionalizing "communist enemy" within espionage techno-thriller projection. This literary analysis is achieved via appealing to conceptualizing radiation symbolism as an extension of ideological contamination fears, regarding radiation as ideological invisible contagion, which parallels the perceived spread of communist ideology within the Cold War radiation discourse about the nuclear, regarded not merely as a physical hazard but as a potent metaphor for ideological contamination – "a visible marker of the invisible spread of communist influence" (Leffler 1992, 287).

The presentation introduces Jennie Fields's *Atomic Love* (2020) as a literary response to outlining the communist enemy as the techno-political other within the ideological underpinnings of nuclear espionage in fiction. In Fields's *Atomic Love*, the communist adversary is entwined within Cold War-era nuclear paranoia, but depicted through a personal, intimate espionage lens, where technology serves as a means to individual and emotional manipulation rather than the state-level strategic combat. The Communist Other in this novel is humanized yet enigmatic, embodying both ideological threat and human vulnerability, illustrating the complex subjective experiences shaped by techno-political tensions in negotiating the communist enemy as both human and technological other.

The appeal to nuclear criticism scholarship (Hubbard 1997, Cordle 2006, Abblitt 2012) helps to explore how the amalgamation of fictional and factual narratives constructs the Communist Other as simultaneously omnipresent and scientifically threatening by appealing to ideological ambiguity and enemization through espionage affect for conceptualizing the Communist Other, mythologized around nuclear apocalyptic power, fusing Cold War cultural memory with techno-political nuclear imaginaries.

Inna Häkkinen, PhD is a visiting researcher of Helsinki Environmental Humanities Hub, the University of Helsinki. Her current project is focused on researching the literary dimensions of fictionalizing nuclear energy for children and young adults. She co-teaches/coordinates courses Chernobyl Studies, East Central European Nuclear Narratives, Nuclear Heritage in East/Central Europe at the University of Helsinki. After defending her PhD in Literary Studies (Dnipro, Ukraine), she has been a research fellow of Erasmus Mundus (Bologna, 2008; Turku, 2011), Cambridge Colleges Hospitality Scheme (2013), Open Society Foundation (Warsaw, 2016), etc. Her general research interests lie within environmental humanities, energy humanities, ecocriticism, nuclear criticism, literary energy narrative studies, nuclear fiction, energy ethics.

This paper analyses Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest* (1990) by focusing on the identity formation of its fictional characters during the communist, revolutionary, and post-revolutionary periods. The play describes the characters' identity formation in the 1989 Romanian Revolution. The play's three-act structure allows for looking at the characters' identities in three different phases: repressed under communism, anonymous during the revolution, and fragmented in the post-revolution era. Thus, the play presents identity formation not just as a political transformation but as a struggle of individuals transforming from ideological oppression to uncertain freedom. The play demonstrates that identity is constructed as a performance of survival in the first act. To illustrate, Vladu and Antonescu family members whisper at home with fear of being overheard, showing that individuals are safe if they do not express their private thoughts. The second act presents the witnesses as if they are not there during the revolution by only talking about their experiences. This shows that identity is lost in the chaos of revolution, reduced to a fragmented memory of articulation. In the last act, "communist brotherhood" identity is dismissed, and ethnic hatred becomes apparent. This demonstrates how constructing an "other" is needed while creating a post-communist identity. As a conclusion, this paper argues that Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest* explores that overthrowing a political regime is not enough to influence identity formation that is created in the minds of people.

Elif Körpe is a lecturer at Kütahya Dumlupınar University, Türkiye. She is a PhD candidate at Hacettepe University, Türkiye. She completed her bachelor's and master's degrees in English Language and Literature at Kütahya Dumlupınar University. Currently, she is working on her dissertation about contemporary British drama. Her research interests include contemporary British playwrights, women writers, and gender studies.

Martin Makara

“...and in every detail they recognised advantages of the West against the East.” Pictures and Stories of Communism in Contemporary Slovak Historical Fiction from the Anasoft Litera Award

The most prestigious Slovak literary award, Anasoft Litera, has just celebrated its twentieth anniversary. The expert jury of five members, unique each year, annually announces a shortlist of the best ten books of that year, which usually features one or more historical fictions. Since it is a literary award with the highest media coverage, it influences the general reader's audience and broader social discourse. Shortlisted books form a modern canon of Slovak literature and can be considered especially significant works of opinion-making art. Historical fiction that is substantially represented in Anasoft Litera shortlists documents how both popular and “high” literature contribute to historical discourse about the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia regime.

The proposed paper attempts to capture the diverse panorama of contemporary Slovak fiction shortlisted for the Anasoft Litera award that focuses on or significantly engages with the social life during the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia regime, or, simply put, “under communism.” Special attention is devoted to relations with the political establishment and its ideology, which range from staunch anticommunism to lenient “Ostalgie.” The paper does not omit literary-critical polemics about the value of the shortlisted books regarding the representation of post-war history of Czechoslovakia, and it also notes literary methods of conservative- or liberal-hegemonic explications of history corresponding to respective ideological interpretations of developments in the second half of the 20th century. Represented perspectives cover the whole spectrum of partial themes, from everyday life during various phases of the so-called communist regime, through the dialectics of personal and social history on the geographical and socio-political periphery, to reflections on communism from a spatial or temporal distance. The paper is primarily focused on the comparison of significant social modernisation and transformation of Slovakia and its population after the Second World War (regarding the Slovak historical particularities, such as low degree of industrialisation and urbanisation, major inequalities between the various centres and peripheries or weak class of intelligentsia) with the so-called “constrained individual” centred literary representation of late 1940s till late 1980s era, especially regarding “winners” and “losers” of forty-years’ Slovak experience with the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia regime.

Martin Makara is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Slovak Literature of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. He is a founding member of the newly established Department of Literary Culture, which focuses on developing socio-critical approaches to Slovak literature. He is a member of the editorial board of the Slovak left-wing magazine *Kapitál*. He translated Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism* and *Postcapitalist Desire* into Slovak, and his translation of Tim 'S Jongers' *Poverty Explained to People with Money* is scheduled for publication in 2026

Olesia Isaiuk

Ukrainian Historical Fiction as a Way of Comprehending the Deformation of Identity in the Communist Reality

One of the most important challenges for Ukrainian society during the communist totalitarian regime was the erosion of national identity and the imposition of a specific model of socialization by this regime, which was fundamentally hostile to Ukrainian political identity. That led to the formation and spread of a specific type of a person who had mostly completely lost his or her Ukrainian identity in favor of the “Soviet person” identity, which in practice implied cultural and political Russification. This model implied both the loss of the usual ethnocultural model of identity and a specific model of socialization, based primarily on violence, the hierarchy of the system, and the rigid ideological indoctrination. In practice, such people represented a deeply traumatized personality type characterized by a lack of basic trust, constant subconscious search for a sense of support outside the hierarchical totalitarian system, and a gap between the image of a defender and the repressive reality. They usually lacked a sense of purpose in their existence and activities, as the ideological meaning of the regime was imposed artificially and to a large extent by force.

This deformed identity threatened to displace Ukrainian ethnocultural identity and led to the collapse of the horizontal social structures under totalitarian conditions which left almost no room for reflection and counteraction. Thus, historical fiction became one of the ways to explore this phenomenon. This genre allowed writers to mask their explorations under the veil of other cultures and political systems, and hence avoid repression. The standard technique is to combine a large number of details that referred to the chosen era or system, under which an accurate description of the practices of the communist regime and the motivations of its supporters were hidden; with their deformed identity at the level of social structures, motivations, worldview, and behavioral patterns. An external indicator of the use of this technique is usually a large number of discrepancies in descriptions in terms of historical research, as well as the system of allegories built on the structural similarity of techniques of social influence throughout history.

The prime example of the described technique is the use of the Ottoman Empire and, more importantly, the practice of the “yeni çeri”¹ (new army) in which young men were separated from their parents and raised in special schools. That resulted not only in simply receiving an education, primarily military, but also in being raised as unconditional servants of the empire. This kind of upbringing inevitably involved a forced, systematic change of identity, in which the ethnocultural identity inherited from one’s native community was replaced by the identity of a servant of the empire.

Due to the prevalence of this technique, “yanychary” has become synonymous in Ukrainian culture with a deformed personality with a changed ethnocultural identity. The theme of the proposed speech is, in fact, the theme of the “awakened yanychar”—that is, the phenomenon of a double deformation under the pressure of the repressive communist regime—its awareness and more or less successful overcoming in Ukrainian historical fiction concerning the last two decades of the USSR’s existence. For this purpose, the texts of the stories *The Secret Ambassador [Taiemny posol]* (1968-1977) by Volodymyr Malyk, *The Malvy [Mallows]* (1968) and *The Fire Pillars*

¹ This word was transformed into “yanychary” (singular form “yanychar”) in Ukrainian and part of Slavic languages of Balkan peoples.

[*Vohniani stovpy*] (2002) by Roman Ivanychuk, and *The Blue Sea Splashes and Foams* [*Hraie synie more*] (1971) by Stanislav Telniuk are analyzed. It is worth noting that some of these texts were the cause for repressions against their authors, namely, Roman Ivanychuk's and Stanislav Telniuk's texts were not published for several years.

Olesia Isaiuk is a researcher at the Center for Liberation Movement Studies, and, since 2012, she has also been a researcher at the National Museum-Memorial "Lontsky Prison." Since 2015, she has been researching the subject of Ukrainians as victims of the punitive system of the Third Reich; she is currently working on a list of Ukrainian Auschwitz prisoners and the formation and operation of a network of resistance among Ukrainian political prisoners in Auschwitz. She has published a number of scientific/popular science articles and is the coauthor of the exhibition "Human Triumph: Residents of Ukraine Who Survived Nazi Concentration Camps" (Kyiv, 2018-2019). In 2023, she had a research residence at the National Museum "Auschwitz-Birkenau" archive (supported by PROMETHEUS Foundation, USA) and published a popular biography of Roman Shukhevych (Nash Format, 2023). She cooperates with such Ukrainian media, as *Zbruch*, *Lokal'na istorija*, and *Espresso*.

The presentation examines Valerian Pidmohyl'ny's intellectual vision in the context of the literary debates of the early 1920s in Kyiv regarding the role of literature in Soviet Ukraine. At first, the focus will be on Pidmohyl'ny's speech, titled "The Paths of Contemporary Literature Development" ["Shliakhy rozvytku suchasnoi literatury"], which was delivered at the meeting of Ukrainian authors on May 24, 1925. The speech will be considered alongside the speeches of other key authors and critics from contemporary Ukrainian literary organizations, including Borys Kovalenko, Mykola Zerov, Borys Antonenko-Davydovych, and Samiilo Shchupak.

Then, the presentation will analyze a series of Pidmohyl'ny's short stories, including "Did lakym" ["Grandpa lakym"], "Na seli" ["In the Village"] (1919), "Komunist" ["The Communist"] (1921), "Viiskovyy litun" ["The Military Pilot"], "Istoriia pani livhy" ["The Story of Mrs. livha"] (1923), "Tretia revoliutsiia" ["The Third Revolution"] (1925), and "Z zhyttia budynku" ["From the Building's Life"] (1933), all of which directly address themes connected to communism. By presenting these short stories in chronological order, the study will trace the evolution of Pidmohyl'ny's literary methods and topics as Soviet ideological pressure intensified. In doing so, the analysis will include a close reading of Pidmohyl'ny's texts, his biographical experience, and the analysis of the socio-cultural context of that period.

Diana Bota is a PhD student at the University of Verona, researching the depiction of urbanism and the social environment in Ukrainian modernist literature. Her research centres on the works of Valerian Pidmohyl'ny, focusing on psychologism and the complex relationships among individuals, society, and the city in his writings. She holds a master's degree in Publishing and Journalism from the University of Verona, where she wrote her thesis on the translation and analysis of the novel *The City* by Pidmohyl'ny. Before that, she earned a bachelor's degree in Languages and Cultures for Publishing from the same university, completing a thesis on the representation of genocide in graphic novels, particularly the Holodomor as depicted in Igor's *Quaderni Ucraini*. Diana actively participates in academic conferences and seminars, presenting her research on Pidmohyl'ny and Ukrainian modernist literature. She is also involved in organizing events within the Sliv@ series at the University of Verona.

Barbora Vinczeová, Marianna Bachledová and Richard Gramanich Štromajer “Us” and “Those in the West”: Interpersonal Relationships and Self-Worth in (Post)Communist Slovakia

This paper explores the legacy of communist and post-communist conditions in interpersonal relationships and perceptions of self-worth in Central Europe using Jana Karšaiová's novel *Zamatový rozvod* [*The Velvet Divorce*] (Literárna bašta, 2023). The Slovak-Italian author depicts life in Czechoslovakia before the Velvet Revolution and coming to terms with the following societal transformation through the lens of an emigrée.

Under communism, systems of surveillance, ideological conformity, and limited mobility fostered strong in-group cohesion (“us”) while simultaneously constructing the capitalist West as a distant, idealized “other.” This divide influenced not only geopolitical identity, but also everyday psychological patterns: mistrust, self-censorship, and a reliance on close-knit networks became survival strategies that later conditioned how individuals navigated intimacy, autonomy, and emotional expression. In the post-1989 period, the symbolic gap between “East” and “West” persisted as economic inequality, migration, and cultural comparison reshaped concepts of success and personal value. Many individuals internalized feelings of inferiority or inadequacy when measured against the perceived superiority of Western lifestyles, while others reclaimed a sense of identity rooted in historical resilience and local belonging (Kabát 2011). By examining these dynamics, the study shows how political history penetrates private life and how self-worth in post-communist societies continues to be negotiated between inherited collectivist norms and the pressures of Western-oriented individualism.

This study employs a qualitative, interpretative methodology that combines close textual analysis, historical contextualisation, and interdisciplinary cultural theory. Given its qualitative and interpretative nature, the study does not attempt to generalize its findings to all post-communist societies. Instead, it uses Karšaiová's fiction as a lens through which to explore broader cultural tendencies and psychological patterns. While literary texts cannot serve as empirical evidence of social behaviour, they offer unique insight into the subjective experience of historical change, which this methodology aims to capture.

Barbora Vinczeová is a scholar specializing in translation studies, with research interests spanning literary comparison, translation criticism, and feminist theory. Her work explores how texts move across languages and cultures, focusing on questions of authorship, gender, and interpretation. Vinczeová's dual perspective as both researcher and practitioner allows her to bridge theory and creative practice, illuminating the complex dynamics of translation as an act of cultural negotiation and artistic re-creation.

Marianna Bachledová is a translator, translation scholar, and university lecturer. She has published scholarly research on translation theory and practice, including work on paratexts and literary reception, and has translated numerous books from English into Slovak. Her academic contributions include monographs and peer-reviewed articles in translation studies and related fields. She is actively involved in the professional community as a member of the Slovak Association of Translators and Interpreters and participates in editorial and organisational boards. Her work bridges scholarly enquiry,

teaching, and real-world translation practice, enriching both academic and literary discourse.

Richard Gramanich Štromajer is a PhD candidate at Matej Bel University. His research is focused on researching the competence profile of future translators and interpreters. His work focuses on understanding understatement as a multidimensional phenomenon, analysed through the pragmatic and intercultural competences of translation-studies students. He has published internationally and is also active in literary studies, particularly in exploring questions of identity in contemporary literature.

Ghayth Manhel Alkinani

Narrative Anthropology of a Failed Revolution: Ali Bader's *Chasing the Wolves* and the Iraqi Communist Odyssey in Africa

Communist ideology played a significant role in shaping modern day Iraq, making up most of the nationalist (cultural) intelligentsia up to the 1980s when the party's Nationalist Progressive Front alliance with the former Ba'ath Party ended in a blood bath to the disadvantage of the communists. Ever since, and for several other reasons, communists have been represented as the victims and fallen heroes in the story of modern Iraq. Their utopian commitment to achieving global justice and international solidarity with the anti-colonial revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s is usually idealized and romanticized, mainly because they have never been put to the trials of the after-revolutionary reality. In this paper, I argue that Bader's 2010 novel challenges this narrative by following the story of an Iraqi-American reporter tracing the participation of a group of Iraqi communist "freedom fighters" in the "Red Terror" campaign led by the Mengistu Haile Mariam regime in Ethiopia in the 1980s. Driven mainly by a post-ideological attitude against ideas of revolutionary change and the failed Cominterns, the narrator exposes the decadent, corrupt bohemian life experiences of these fallen heroes. The novel asks the question that most leftist/revolutionary intellectuals disregard which is "What should be done after the revolution?" Bader merges narrative (ethnographic) examination of the removed location of Ethiopia to both realistically and allegorically reflect the fallen revolutionary rhetoric of Iraqi revolutionary discourse. Bader uses the decadent bohemian life of the post-revolution Addis Ababa as an answer to what could have happened in the unachieved communist (and Islamist) utopias of revolutionary Iraqis. The paper highlights the superficiality of the claimed "anthropological approach," that fails to actually meet the main characters or examine them thoroughly, exposing the blatant discursive generalizations of the narrator's globalized post-ideological antirevolutionary attitude. Instead of analyzing realistic characters psychologically, the novel, as the title suggests, sticks to chasing these „wolves" of revolution nonstop.

Ghayth Manhel Alkinani is an Assistant Professor at the University of Kufa in Iraq. He has been working here since 2011. He had my Master's Degree from the University of Baghdad in 2010 and my Ph.D. from the University of Arkansas in the United States in 2019. He did my Doctorate Dissertation on Trauma in Iraqi and American fiction of the Iraq War. His most recent publication is "Iraqi National Identity as a Cultural Product in Contemporary Iraqi Novels: A Study of Ali Bader's *Papa Sartre* and *The Tobacco Keeper*." He also has a paper on "Narrative Dissociation in Response to Trauma: A Study in *Slaughterhouse Five* and *Closing His Eyes*," which is upcoming for publication soon.

Oana Marin

After 1989: Semi-Peripheral Transition, Uneven Development, and the Afterlife of Communism in the Romanian New Wave

Romanian New Wave cinema refuses to treat communism as a sealed ideological past. Instead, it renders state socialism as a regime of administrative time whose collapse reorganizes rather than abolishes structures of mediation and class power in the semi-periphery. In Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* [4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile] (2007), Cristi Puiu's *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* [Moartea domnului Lăzărescu] (2005), and Cristian Nemescu's *California Dreamin'* [Nesfârșit] (2007), communism appears not primarily as doctrine but as infrastructural governance: corridors, paperwork, rationed goods, minor authorities, stalled mobility. Under late socialism, reproductive prohibition and informal exchange expose a system managing scarcity through bureaucratic mediation. After 1989, that mediation mutates within the pressures of uneven incorporation into global capitalism. The hospital circuit in *Lăzărescu* and the procedural obstruction in *California Dreamin'* stage a semi-peripheral condition in which deindustrialization, labor migration, and fragmented service economies replace socialist industrial planning. Rather than narrating transition as rupture, these films reveal how regimes of governance persist across systemic transformation, recalibrated to new circuits of capital and sovereignty. The New Wave's durational realism with its long takes, suspended action, and confined interiors, materializes this historical condition. Time becomes the medium of uneven development: waiting replaces collective production; circulation replaces stable labor; procedural authority supplants ideological command. In this aesthetic grammar, communism survives as administrative habit, while neoliberalism intensifies precarity under the sign of modernization.

By situating Romanian historical fiction within a world-systems framework, this analysis argues that the films articulate communism as historical infrastructure rather than mere political failure. They register the afterlife of bureaucratic temporality in a region repositioned between former socialist planning and contemporary global dependency, revealing how class recomposition unfolds not through rupture but through uneven continuity.

Oana Marin is a performer, cultural manager, and Assistant Professor at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, where she teaches acting, directing, contemporary theatre, performance aesthetics, and research methodologies in the performing arts. Her research engages performance studies, disability studies, social and gender justice, and post-socialist cultural contexts, with a focus on marginalized communities, migration, and the politics of representation in Eastern Europe. She has developed institutional projects in disability arts, including *PerformAccess* (2024), centered on Deaf performers, and *EchoScapes* (2025), dedicated to blind narratives and sensory dramaturgies. She has edited two volumes on disability arts and has translated works on disability performance into Romanian, contributing to the dissemination of disability studies in Eastern Europe. Alongside her academic work, she has collaborated with the Sibiu International Theatre Festival and has coordinated the Sibiu International Performing Arts Market. She creates inclusive artistic initiatives that integrate non-professional and disabled artists into professional productions.

Nataša Simeunović Bajić and Anja Savić The Manager-Businessman Figure and the Legacy of Socialism in Serbian Television Fiction

In the cultural memory of societies undergoing transformation, certain figures crystallize the tensions of their time. In Serbia, the manager-businessman is one such figure. From the late 1950s to the present day, Serbian television fiction has portrayed this character in ways that reveal much about the changing relationship between ideology, economy, and everyday life. The trajectory is striking: from the humorous and somewhat powerless manager in the era of Yugoslav self-management, through the grotesque figure of the 1980s crisis, to the controversial businessman emerging from the margins of the 1990s, and finally to the post-socialist tycoon in recent television production.

The socialist self-management system, despite its well-elaborated theoretical foundations, produced specific cultural patterns reflected in television content. What began as mild satire of the self-governing workplace in early TV Belgrade productions gradually transformed into darker representations as the system itself deteriorated. The 1990s brought a particular shift: the manager-businessman became intertwined with crime, war profiteering, and the collapse of social values. Yet television series from this period did not always represent these connections through sharp ideological critique. Rather, they often offered escapism or processed social reality through humor and irony, similarly to what has been observed in research on domestic television series of the 1990s.

The adopted methodological framework combines historical analysis with qualitative content analysis of selected television fiction, including *Servisna stanica* [Service Station] (1966), *Tesna koža* [A Tight Spot] (1982), *Bolji život* [A Better Life] (1987-1991), *Srećni ljudi* [Happy People] (1993-1996), *Tajkun* [Tycoon] (2020). It turns out that, despite decades of visual storytelling, the manager-businessman remains an undesirable figure on Serbian television; a reflection of a society still wandering between its socialist past and unrooted capitalist present.

Nataša Simeunović Bajić, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, where she teaches courses in Media, Communication, and Cultural Studies, including Introduction to Socialist Media Culture. She has led and participated in numerous national and international research projects and is the recipient of several international research fellowships. Her academic work explores the intersections of communication, culture, and media, with a particular interest in popular culture, collective memory, and the creative industries in post-socialist and European contexts. Simeunović Bajić's research combines perspectives from media studies, cultural sociology, and heritage communication, analyzing how media narratives shape cultural identity, public discourse, and social transformation.

Anja Savić is a PhD student at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, in the doctoral program Media and Society. She completed her undergraduate studies as the top student of her generation and earned her MA in Communication and Media Studies in 2025. Her research focuses on socialism in Yugoslavia, media and advertising history, propaganda, and transnational popular culture. Her master's thesis explored the development and role of advertising in Yugoslavia within the framework of soft socialism, examining the relationship between ideology, consumer culture, and media communication.

Michiel Rys

Rehearsing Communism. Activist Learning and Political Affect in Bertolt Brecht's *Die Tage der Commune* (1948)

The events surrounding the Paris Commune of 1871 hold a central place in the cultural memory of socialist activists. Despite being defeated by the Prussian army, the Commune's enduring legacy lies in its vision of a community radically different from liberal and capitalist societies, with a strong commitment to principles of solidarity, cooperation, and democracy. As Ann Rigney has demonstrated, the Commune thus became a symbol of hope rather than of failure and despair, signalling that although social change is always possible, it is an ongoing process involving struggle, endurance, and learning from past mistakes. Nevertheless, activist learning fundamentally relies on concrete interventions by writers and artists who reframe deeply ingrained historical narratives, highlighting forgotten (or repressed) smaller moments of potential that put the political landscape of the present in new light.

My paper argues that Bertolt Brecht's 1949 play *Die Tage der Commune* [*The Days of the Commune*] is a crucial node in the reception history of the Commune. A radical critique of Nordahl Grieg's *Nederlaget* [*The Defeat*] (1937), *Die Tage der Commune* can also be regarded as an example of Brecht's concept of dialectical theatre, as set out in his *Kleines Organon für das Theater* [*A Short Organum for the Theatre*] (1948). While Brecht's theory emphasises the importance of participatory democracy, open-endedness, play, and joyous learning as key elements of a theatre envisaging social change, his drama links these factors directly to the Communards' attempts to effect social change. Focusing on the Commune as a rehearsal and a work in progress, Brecht invites us to reflect on the fragile performativity that his own notion of theatre shares with processes of activist learning. A brief coda will explore how Brecht's work on the Commune was staged in the context of Occupy Wall Street by Zoe Beloff in 2012, in an adaptation that prioritises fragility over certainty and process over outcome.

Michiel Rys is Assistant Professor in German at the University of Cambridge. His current research focuses on cultural memory and activism, literary imaginations of class, and representations of precarious lives in German literature around 1900. He has co-edited *Literary Representations of Precarious Work, 1840 to the Present* (2021, Palgrave MacMillan) and *Reimagining Class: Intersectional Perspectives on Class Identity and Precarity in Contemporary Culture* (2024, Leuven University Press). In his monograph, *Der Mythos des Unbestechlichen* (2024, WBG Academic), he retraced the reception of the French Revolution and Maximilien Robespierre in German and Austrian culture of the so-called "Gründerzeit."

Chinmaya Lal Thakur

Configuring Communist Pasts in the Present Or, Reading Representations of East Germany in the Writings of Jenny Erpenbeck

At the centre of the wide and vertiginous creative oeuvre of the German writer Jenny Erpenbeck is the 2021 historical novel *Kairos*. The novel's English translation by Michael Hofmann in 2023 received the International Booker Prize. The novel is set in time that is moving swiftly towards the dissolution of the Communist nation-state of East Germany or German Democratic Republic with the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989-90.

The passionate, turbulent, and ultimately disturbing love affair between the married and older Hans and the young Katharina becomes the way Erpenbeck presents her readers with the workings of East Germany—the pressures of the Soviet Union it endured, its suspicions of capitalism and Western influences, its insecurities about its own artists, writers, and activists, and its (Socialist) provisions of basic sustenance and requirements to its citizens. Erpenbeck's novel, in other words, is a realistic and detailed representation of life in Communist East Germany: life that was lived based on great promise, idealism, and aspiration that could not be sustained beyond 1990.

In the proposed paper, I would like to read specific instances from *Kairos* to argue that Erpenbeck's writing makes us aware of the depth and expanse of the fundamental contradiction that characterised East Germany, the contradiction that it was a (so-called) failed state whose citizens were relatively happy, satisfied, and enjoyed fulfilling emotional lives. To this end, I will also peruse selected pieces from her collections *Not a Novel: A Memoir in Pieces [Kein Roman: Texte 1992 bis 2018]* (2020) and *Things That Disappear: Reflections and Memories [Dinge, die verschwinden]* (2025) that deal with her contemporary engagement with objects, memories, and relationships that originate in East Germany.

In conclusion, I would also suggest that the protagonist Richard of Erpenbeck's novel *Go, Went, Gone [Gehen, ging, gegangen]* (2015)—himself an erstwhile East German subject like the author—is able to (insufficiently) orient himself hospitably towards African refugees in contemporary Berlin precisely because he himself does not feel at home in the megapolis and keeps remembering the time that he spent in the Communist country with his now deceased wife.

Chinmaya Lal Thakur is an Assistant Professor of English at Shiv Nadar University (Institution of Eminence), Delhi/NCR, India. He has published widely in the fields of the contemporary novel, postcolonial literatures and cultures, modernist afterlives, and Deconstruction. His first book, a study of the novels of David Malouf, is under contract with Liverpool University Press, UK. Currently, he is developing a project on the articulations of post-secularism in the contemporary Anglophone novel.

Kleo (2022), a fictional Netflix series, portrays a loyal Stasi agent jailed to hide a conspiracy in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In 1989, “Die Wende” released the title character from prison into the recently reunified nation. The dark comedy-thriller exemplifies mainstream entertainment’s often academically overlooked ability to explore cultural memory. This chapter demonstrates how the show engages with the period in two significant ways; it defamiliarises the experience for witnesses and makes it familiar for “learning viewers” with indirect or no previous knowledge by storytelling in an emerging, popular style. For witnesses, reimagining seismic upheaval through humour invites reconsideration of official or widely circulated narratives, unlike the drama *The Lives of Others* [*Das Leben der Anderen*] (2006), which reinforces the atmosphere of terror. Indeed, “[t]he greatest enemy of authority, therefore, is contempt, and the surest way to undermine it is laughter,” (Arendt, 1970). For learning audiences, such as those born after reunification (including the main actor), *Kleo* is one of a growing number of filmic texts to address times of fear and uncertainty through postmodern parody and pastiche (see *Jojo Rabbit*, *The Death of Stalin* and *Hunters*). Contemporary conventions construct a more accessible “prosthetic memory” to integrate the past into the learning viewers’ private experience, fostering the connection to cultural heritage and identity (Landsberg, 2004). *Kleo* does not replay communism, but rather asks spectators born during, after, or outside of the GDR to look with fresh perspective upon a tumultuous time so we do not tire from learning its lessons.

Rebecca Carr wrote her PhD (2021) on trauma and cultural mythology in films from the genre she calls “aftermath cinema.” She holds BAs in Psychology, and in Film, Literature and Drama, and an MPhil in Textual and Visual Studies. Carr teaches in the European Studies Department at Trinity College Dublin, where she has been nominated for two teaching awards. Carr also started a film club for the Centre for Resistance Studies and contributes to the Trinity Access Programme, which facilitates university entry for students from underserved backgrounds. She researches identity, culture and trauma narratives in cinema.

Soumia Bentahar

Two Narrative Communisms, One Logic: Historical Authority and Ventriloquised Confession in Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* and Julian Barnes's *The Noise of Time*

Recent Anglophone historical fiction has increasingly returned to communism to probe the conditions under which history becomes narratable. While much existing scholarship frequently frames literary engagements with communism through the paradigms of memory, trauma, nostalgia, or ideological critique, such approaches risk reifying communism as content rather than interrogating its persistence as a “structuring logic of narration.” This paper addresses that critical gridlock by asking how communism persists in historical fiction as a narrative infrastructure that governs voice, agency, and historical intelligibility long after its political disintegration. Reading Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* (2015) alongside Julian Barnes's *The Noise of Time* (2016), the paper demonstrates how both novels render communism legible as a governing logic of narration that compels confession, disperses authorial agency, and subjects historical truth to recursive revision. The comparative analysis is mediated by relational asymmetry: juxtaposing a diasporic postwar Vietnamese perspective with a late-modernist reimagining of Soviet cultural life reveals communism as a transhistorical formal command that structures narrative possibility, rather than a coherent or self-contained ideology. Guided by questions of how narration is coerced, how voice is ventriloquised, and how historical authority is disciplined, the paper undertakes close textual reading informed by Foucault's theorisation of confession, Rancière's notion of dissensus, and White's reflections on historical emplotment. It finds that both novels stage history as a field to be repeatedly told under pressure, corrected under surveillance, and authorised through external power, rendering historical fiction a site where communism's narrative disciplines are simultaneously enacted and contested. By reconceptualising communism as an epistemological condition that reorganises narrative form, this paper shifts the discussion from what communism means to how it continues to structure the possibilities and limits of historical knowledge.

Dr. **Soumia Bentahar** is Associate Professor of Contemporary Anglophone Literature in the Department of English at Amar Telidji University of Laghouat, Algeria. She earned her PhD from Belabbes University and specializes in contemporary Anglophone literature and women's writing. Her scholarship deals with Black women's narratives, notably in her articles “Mapping Geographies of Resistance in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*” and “Reading Heterotopia as a Site of Resistance in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*.” Her research continues to engage in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary investigations into the intricate dimensions of Black women's realities as featured in contemporary Anglophone and Francophone literatures.

Craig Frayne

Quiet Containment: Cold War Cultural Governance and the Reconfiguration of Labour in National Film Board of Canada Cinema

This paper examines how Cold War liberalism in Canada managed the legacy and perceived threat of communism through state-supported cultural production, focusing on fiction films produced by the National Film Board of Canada between the late 1940s and the 1980s. Building on existing scholarship that documents the Popular Front-influenced, class-political orientation of wartime NFB cinema and its subsequent reorganization under Cold War conditions, the paper shifts attention to how social conflict was rearticulated rather than simply suppressed in the postwar period.

Drawing on a stratified, decade-based sample of NFB fiction films, the analysis identifies a recurring representational logic in which structural antagonisms—particularly those related to labour, class, and collective struggle—are displaced into psychological, moral, communal, or familial registers. Labour disputes are framed as problems of communication or civic balance; economic hardship is rendered as environmental adversity or pioneer endurance; dissent and inequality are addressed through pedagogy, affect, or individual adjustment. By the 1970s and 1980s, overt political conflict increasingly appears as identity rupture, domestic drama, or allegory, with only occasional strain points where containment proves incomplete.

Rather than direct censorship or blanket repression, the paper suggests that Cold War cultural governance in Canada operated primarily through redirection and normalization. Radical or communist-inflected critiques remained visible only in narrative forms compatible with liberal consensus and national mythmaking. In this sense, Canadian Cold War cinema offers a distinct but revealing parallel to Eastern European contexts—not as lived communism, but as a cultural site where communism functioned as an absence to be managed, historicized, or translated into acceptable representational forms.

By situating Canadian state-funded fiction film within broader Cold War dynamics of legitimation and memory, the paper contributes a comparative perspective to discussions of communism in historical fiction, highlighting how ideology can be contained as much through narrative form as through overt prohibition.

Craig Frayne is an interdisciplinary researcher, writer, and educator with a PhD in Applied Linguistics and Intercultural Communication. His research spans discourse analysis, ecolinguistics, and the cultural politics of technology, with a focus on how language and media shape social and ecological inequalities. He has published in journals including *Discourse & Society*, *Metaphor and the Social World*, and *Environmental Philosophy*, and has presented internationally across linguistics, media, and cultural studies.

The central philosophical problem in Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's novel *Insatiability* [*Nienasyceńie*] (1996 [1930]) is on the order of what Alain Badiou, in *The Century* [*Le Siècle*] (2005), calls a "passion for the real" (p. 32). This passion, indicated by the novel's title, is crystalized in characters' absolute disdain for illusion and their customary indifference to violence, whether this be in romantic couplings, political commitments, or artistic experiments. Even the Zenlike, drug-induced unity brought to communist Poland in the novel's finale shows an absolutism of inebriation and an indifference to psychological dissolution. What plagues these various attempts at grasping the "absolute"—and marks them as failures—is the impossibility of presenting socio-historical totality as Lukács (1971 [1923]) defines it. Witkiewicz's novel relentlessly exposes this very rift between the pursuit of absolute knowledge (as representation) and the pursuit of absolute experience (as presentation), where the attainment of one prevents the simultaneous attainment of the other. The wager of this paper is that this rift between the representation of knowledge and the presentation of experience is homologous to the split between the historical actuality of capitalism and any given individual empirical consciousness. And further, that this homology is exposed through a dialectic of populations during periods of communist upheaval. Two other works explore this dialectical rift in the same decade as Witkiewicz: German playwright Ernst Toller's *Masses and Man* [*Masse-Mensch*] (1923 [1920]), which explicitly juxtaposes the concrete particular individual to the phantom nameless masses, and Isaac Babel's stories in *Red Cavalry* [*Конармия*] (1926), which both de-anonymize the masses and de-concretize individualities. By considering these three works of literature together—each written in the aftermath of the victory of Soviet communism and the global spread of its politics—we can see how Witkiewicz, Toller, and Babel approach the remaking of I-We, I-They, and I-Nothing relations as the de-reification of human consciousness.

Nicholas Fazio is a PhD candidate at York University's Communication and Culture program in Toronto, Canada where he is finishing a dissertation on industrialized language capture in big tech firms and its relationship to cognitive rentiership and nonprogrammatic communism as seen through the lenses of German idealism (Hegel, Hamann), French poststructuralism (Hyppolite, Badiou, Stiegler), and American neopragmatism (Donald Davidson). He also studies the historical connection between literature and numismatics, and has an upcoming paper in *Culture & Critique* (Spring 2026) on large language models, the *longue durée* of human literacy, and the fiction of Jean-Paul Friedrich Richter, Robert Walser, and William Gaddis. Fazio's research has previously appeared in *Theory, Culture & Society*.

Blanka Pillár

(Re)Framing Nostalgia: The Aesthetics of Duplicity in Socialist Hungary

In my paper, I explore the amelioration of socialism's perception by contemporaries and posterity through engagement with Hungarian media from/about the Kádár era, with a special focus on the 1997 film *Dollybirds [Csinibaba]* and archive footage from the 1960s. With my research, I aim to thoroughly examine how pieces of media about the absurdity of the "soft dictatorship" can be and are often viewed as positive and nostalgic in the eyes of both those who lived through this system and those who only participate in the reception process as consumers of culture (typically people from generations X and Z). To illustrate the depth of the issue, I use qualitative research methods to show that this perception is not only present in the layman's point of view, but also in film aesthetics literature by repeated genre miscategorization and visual reductionism. My analysis draws on the intersection of film aesthetics, sociology, and history. Besides analysis, I also attempt to provide possible explanations for the phenomenon. As critical assessment of the reception of media from (or about) the socialist era is a less explored area in the aforementioned fields of study, the research aims to present an impactful intersection between historical fiction in the media and nostalgia.

Blanka Pillár is a writer, journalist, and independent researcher from Budapest, Hungary. Her main research interests are the intersections of film, literature, representation and 20th-century history. Her original interdisciplinary research was published in the peer-reviewed academic journal *Jakobsleiter*.

Yago Paris

István Szabó's Historical Fictions: Power, Agency, and the Limits of Post-Communist Betterment

There is a broad scholarly consensus that Eastern European cinemas tend to encode communism negatively (Iordanova, 2003; Hames, 2004; Mazierska, 2012; Imre, 2012). In Hungary, Portuges's (1993) study of Márta Mészáros clarifies that tendency. At the same time, work on "Ostalgie" (Todorova & Gille, 2010) complicates the assumption that regime change unequivocally improved everyday life—a critique visible in Polish and Romanian cinemas (Mazierska, 2012; Haliliuc & Schlotterbeck, 2017) and also present in the Hungarian context (Cunningham, 2004; Margitházi, 2020).

This paper reads István Szabó's historical fictions—*Mephisto* (1981), *Colonel Redl* [*Redl ezredes*] (1985), *Sunshine* [*A napfény íze*] (1999), alongside films that represent historical contexts rather than discrete events (*Confidence* [*Bizalom*] (1980); *Dear Emma, Sweet Böbe* [*Édes Emma, drága Böbe*] (1992))—as narratives that interrogate both communist rule and post-communist alternatives. Through close qualitative analysis, it shows how Szabó recurrently depicts power (imperial, fascist, socialist, capitalist) as morally corrosive, constraining agency and rendering survivalist ethics and strategic withdrawal as the limited forms of action available to his protagonists—forms that nevertheless fail to protect them.

The argument proceeds in two steps. First, it derives from Szabó's historical fictions his core vision that any form of power is harmful for the individual. Second, it applies this finding to the rest of his oeuvre, demonstrating that its depictions in non-strictly historical fictions are consistent with those in historical works. The analysis yields two tentative conclusions. First, Szabó could be read as a pessimist who would not believe in the transformative potential of political involvement. Furthermore, it engages with Cunningham (2014) and Suleiman (2024), who read Szabó's oeuvre as one of survivalist negotiation with power, and contends that, although negotiation is contemplated, for Szabó there would ultimately be no possible negotiation with power. Thus, his films would imply that the individual should avoid political involvement and hide from power to survive—an outcome that, in his cinema, would never be guaranteed.

Yago Paris (Tenerife, 1989) is a Ph.D. student in Humanities at King Juan Carlos University (Madrid). Member of the High-performance Research Group in Visual Arts and Cultural Studies (GIAVEC). He has published papers in academic journals such as *Studies in European Cinemas* or *Studies in Eastern European Cinemas*. Author of book chapters and papers in numerous conferences. Co-editor and co-author of the book *Lo que nunca volverá: La infancia en el cine* (Applehead Team Ediciones, 2022). As a film critic, he writes in *Cine Divergente* and *El Antepenúltimo Mohicano*, and has collaborated with the newspapers *InfoLibre* and *Ctxt*.

The fall of the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic had a great radicalising effect on Hungarian society. The short-lived Bolshevik state had threatened the Hungarian upper classes to suffer the same fate that the Russian elite did under Lenin, and after this fear was finally gone, a wave of anti-communist rage swept through Hungary. Even after the retaliatory wave calmed down, Communists remained the number one enemy of the Hungarian state and society, both in practice and in the popular imagination.

In my contribution to the seminar, I would like to single out the most famous and influential book of this era of anti-communist fervour, the *Bujdosó könyv* of Hungarian novelist Cécile Tormay. Even the title of the 1920 book needs a bit of an explanation. *Bujdosó* has a very specific meaning in Hungarian, as “someone who is in hiding because of dissident political views or state-induced persecution.” Therefore, the title could be roughly translated to *Book of a Dissident*—dissident from the Hungarian revolutions of 1918-1919, which the author harshly condemns.

Bujdosó könyv takes the form of a faux diary, in which the POV character—who herself is in hiding—assembles information from the news and the stories of her associates about the events of the Soviet Republic. These “reports” have very anti-Semitic tones and are often exaggerated or outright false. Historian Péter Csunderlik argues that *Bujdosó könyv* is unreliable to the point that it should be treated as a horror fiction akin to the German horrors of the time and cannot be used for historical research. In my contribution, I will analyse how *Bujdosó könyv* uses communism as horror and how a scholar of the early Communist movements could differentiate between tall tales and factual information.

M. Mag. **András Szeibert-Erdős** (b. 1995.09.30) is a Hungarian historian and international relations expert. He is a doctoral candidate of Eötvös Loránd University and a research fellow of the Budapest-based Erőszakutató Intézet (Institute for Violence Studies), which specializes in analysing both state-sponsored and individual political violence in Hungary during the World Wars and the Interwar period. His main fields of interest are social history, crime history, political violence and the history of socialism. Currently his research mainly concerns the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic and its aftermath, which was a period of swift regime changes, political upheaval and violence in Hungarian society, still barely known in its details.

Dorota Heneghan
A Convenient Shield: Communism and Politics in Sofía Casanova's Interwar Fiction

The early 1920s and 1930s in Spain witnessed the radicalization of the anarcho-syndicalist movement and strikes and riots in the rural and industrial sections of peninsular society. Attentive to the interest in communism and post-revolutionary Russia on the Iberian Peninsula in the early decades of the twentieth century, this paper explores the strategy of the Spanish author, Sofía Casanova, of weaving into the fabric of her narratives her experiences as the Eastern European correspondent for the Spanish journal ABC from 1915 to 1936 to address the complexities of Spain's then-current sociopolitical affairs. Specifically, by drawing attention to the author's cross-cultural approach to communism in her narratives, *Kola, the Bandit* [*Kola el bandido*] (1923) and *The Catacombs of Red Russia* [*Las catacumbas de Rusia roja*] (1933), this study points to the ways in which Casanova, who spent most of her life in Poland since her marriage in 1887 to the Polish philosopher, Wincenty Lutosławski, deployed her criticism of post-revolutionary Russia and the Soviet system as a shield from repercussions for her commentary on Spain's national affairs. Informed by her articles on communist brutality and repression of religious life in Stalinist Russia and her essays on agrarian reforms, secularization, and female suffrage in pre-Civil-War Spain, this paper also examines Casanova's deployment of Slavic communist and anti-communist heroes as a cover beneath which she pointed to hypocrisy and faults on both sides of political spectrum in her homeland. An overview of the sociocultural and political circles in which Casanova moved during the 1920s and 1930s in Poland and Spain will shed light on shifts in her perspectives on peninsular society's demands for democratization. The study will also link the author's rejection of communism to her frustration with conservative and liberal segments of Spanish society over their inadequate approach to improvements of socioeconomic life in Spain and her dashed hopes for compromise.

Dorota Heneghan is Associate Professor of Spanish and Director of the Comparative Literature Program at Louisiana State University. She earned her Ph.D. in Spanish from Yale University. Her areas of specialization include Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Spanish Literature and Culture, Interdisciplinary Approaches to Modern Spanish Culture, Comparative Literature, Gender Studies, Transatlantic Studies, and Art History. She is the author of *Striking Their Modern Pose: Fashion, Gender, and Modernity in Galdós, Pardo Bazán, and Picón* (Purdue University Press, 2015) and has published on the interconnections between gender, politics, and modernization in Spain in journals such as *Anales Galdosianos*, *Hispanic Review*, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, *Hispanófila*, *Siglo Diecinueve* and *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*. She currently prepares for publication her monograph, *Sofía Casanova: Gender Relations, Nation, and Politics in Spain 1913-1933*.

In recent years, Italy and its national cinematic landscape have expressed a renewed and attentive interest in the so-called First Republic. The Italian communist experience is no exception, particularly through the figure of party leader Enrico Berlinguer.

If, as Hayden White recalls by citing Michel de Certeau, “fiction is the repressed other of historical discourse,” then fictional engagements with the figure of Berlinguer should “fill out the domain of the possible and the imaginable.”

In this sense, works such as the biopic *Berlinguer—La Grande Ambizione* [*The Great Ambition*] (2024) become a sharp articulation of contemporary Italian left-wing thought, namely a form of nostalgia directed toward an unresolved past, one that was never able to fully actualize itself. In narrative and in fictional cinema, nostalgia thus emerges as a form of historical stagnation, a surrogate for utopian thought, and an immutable confirmation of the present order of things.

This paper proposes to develop its analysis through a comparison between the funeral sequence of the renowned communist politician Palmiro Togliatti in Pasolini’s *Uccellacci e uccellini* [*The Hawks and the Sparrows*] (1966) and *Berlinguer—La Grande Ambizione* (2024), focusing on the figure of Berlinguer and his premature death, in order to foreground this possible stagnation. At the same time, the paper seeks to highlight potential alternatives within the Italian cinematic landscape, such as the example offered by Nanni Moretti’s works.

De Certeau further argued that fiction is the space in which the repressed possibilities of history return in narrative form. Yet in contemporary Italian cinema, fictional engagements with national communism often affirm the left’s incapacity to act, instead of producing simulacra of possible action through which new political scenarios might be imagined.

Edoardo Rugo is a researcher working at the intersection of film studies, philosophy of history, and media theory. He holds a Master of Arts in Cultural Studies and Critical Theory from the University of Brighton (2022, with distinction) and a Bachelor of Arts in Cultural Heritage from Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (2020, cum laude). His scholarly work includes peer-reviewed articles and essays published in journals such as *PHILM*, *Filosofia*, and *IDEA*. In 2024, he presented his research at the international Spring Seminar History(ies) of Art held at Universidade Católica Portuguesa in Porto. In November 2025, he presented at University College Cork for the Ethics and Spectatorship in Film and Screen Media conference his paper “For Just One Tear You Carry Off Their Deathless Part: Spectatorship in the Age of AI Images,” where he investigated the relationship between the ontology of the image and the philosophy of history, engaging with thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze.

Andrei Makine, who arrived clandestinely in France in 1987, and Dimitri Bortnikov, who settled in Paris by chance in 1998, are two French-writing novelists, born in the USSR and now French citizens. Their most recent novels, *Prisonnier du rêve écarlate* [*Prisoner of the Scarlet Dream*] (Makine, 2025) and *L'Agneau des neiges* [*The Snow Lamb*] (Bortnikov, 2012), are historical fictions that paint a picture of the history of the USSR from a contemporary perspective. Combining fiction and reality, these novels play with history, sociology, and the imaginary of communism. Based on both memory and history, they offer an uncompromising portrait of the ideology without denying its achievements. Indeed, these historical novels are also biographical fictions and play with metatextuality. Their narrative hybridity allows them to confront subjectivity and objectivity, small and grand narratives (Lyotard 1979), West and East, past and contemporary eras. The interplay of these oppositions compels a clear-eyed look at this now-vanished society and exposes its myths in order to better rediscover its aspirations and promises. Caught between critique and nostalgia, these novelistic constructions compel an oblique perception of communism while simultaneously claiming a truthful portrayal of the phenomenon for the benefit of the Western reader.

We will therefore propose to study the dynamic and noetic narrative construction of a wilfully “objectified” imaginary of communism in order to determine to what extent, these historical fictions transcend what might be called a literature of defectors, viewed through the lens of exile, that is to say, how they oppose both Western and Soviet metanarratives, attempt to redraw a more peaceful image of communist thought, stripped of negative historical baggage, and turned to the future.

Holding a doctorate in Comparative Literature and a member of the European Society of Comparative Literature as well as of the French Society of General and Comparative Literature, **Katia Hayek Nováková** is an Assistant Professor in Philology at the University of Economy and Business in Bratislava, in Slovakia. Her publications and research focus on the relationship between fiction and history, and more specifically on the philosophical and political discourses in popular marginal novels from the 19th to the 21st century in the Francophone and Slavic areas. Her most recent studies to be published in Canada (PUM 2026) and Portugal (Carnets 2026) concern the memories of the East and the imagination of the West in French-language fictions of exile.

