

Modern Bulgarian History and Culture

Instructor: *Dr. Bozhil Hristov*

This course offers a broad overview of Bulgarian history and culture in the 20th and 21st centuries, with a special focus on the narrative arts of fiction and cinema. The course aims to familiarise participants with Bulgaria and the vibrant and diverse region of South-Eastern Europe by inviting them to explore a selection of fiction and non-fiction texts (in English translation), as well as by screening films and discussing some landmarks of the visual arts and architecture. It is through the prism of these products of culture and some major historical figures that we will be investigating some key moments of the past which continue to shape Bulgarian identity in the present.

1. Introduction and roadmap: key moments and major events in modern Bulgarian history, culture and society. The changing landscape of the new Bulgarian capital in the art of Joseph Oberbauer
2. The leadup to the events of 1944 in Expressionist poetry – Geo Milev’s *September*
3. Georgi Markov – the truth that killed
4. A red princess. Think of me as fire – the strange life and death of Lyudmila Zhivkova. The changing landscape of Sofia – a people’s palace of culture; Royal vs Socialist residences – Vrana and Boyana
5. The grittier side of society – Vladislav Todorov’s *Zift* (novel), Javor Gardev’s *Zift* (film); Kamen Kalev’s *Eastern Plays* (film)

Course objectives and expected outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- identify and explain major political and social turning points in Bulgaria (c. 1908/1912–present) and situate them in broader European history;
- apply close reading and film-analysis techniques to Bulgarian texts/films and relate form, genre and reception to historical context;
- analyse Bulgarian literary and cinematic works, as well as symbolic buildings, within their historical and ideological context;
- critically examine themes of national identity, ethnic and social diversity, memory, nostalgia, and East-West positioning in Bulgarian culture and art;
- engage with primary sources in translation and develop skills in literary and cultural analysis.