

UTOPIAS GONE AWRY:

CONFLICT AND PARADISE IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

In this course we will explore the Black Sea Region, which Plato once called a small pond around which we, frogs, all croak. Many of the countries in the region have imagined themselves as Utopias—places of paradise with near tropical lushness, exquisite flora and exotic fauna, the birthplace of wine, cradles of civilization. Many have also seen themselves as forming the border between East and West, and these seeming havens, devastated, have been the sites of repeated conflict and invasions. Focusing on literature from the last half of the 20th century—short stories from Romania, novels and films from the Crimea, the Republic of Georgia and its disputed territory, Abkhazia, and Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red*—we will discuss the dynamics of power and history that have affected the area, weaving in issues of gender politics and environmental degradation. We will look for signs of cultural continuities as well as differences between these countries. We will imagine how the area and its history could be affected if we think of it in terms of the dynamic flow of cultures, of an extended boundary layer where turbulence seems inevitable, yet could possibly be better managed. And we will ask questions: Do we need traditional concepts such as East and West? Whose needs do they serve? How do countries maintain their identities, celebrate their differences, yet cooperate without conflict? How can these countries begin to reclaim their utopian visions of themselves?

