Semester  
Spring 2017

Class code  
RUSSN-UA9832001

Instructor Details  
Professor Tomáš VRBA  
tv18@nyu.edu

Tuesday 2:00–3:00 P.M., NYU Professors’ Room

Class Details  
CONTEMPORARY CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN LITERATURE  
(From Kafka to Kundera)

Mondays and Tuesdays, 3:00–4:20 P.M.

Kafka classroom

Prerequisites  
No specific prerequisites

Class Description  
Course description: The idea of this course is not to bring a full and detailed picture of modern and contemporary Central and East European literature, but rather to take advantage of the unique occasion and offer students a more focused view. Examining Czech literary history as a specific example of the European history of national, cultural and political emancipation plans to guide “newcomers” along the most important cultural streams influencing the face of Czech literature in the 19th and 20th century. The larger cultural context includes the political role of art and literature in Czech history, language, religion, social and national currents and crosscurrents, as well as its Central and East European dimension.

Monday sessions: professor’s lecture/comments; class discussions.

Tuesday sessions: reading presentations; class discussions.

Several field trips (short literary walks) corresponding with respective themes may be included.

One or two guest lectures may be included, possibly by prominent Czech authors, and the order of scheduled lectures may change slightly according to the guests’ availability.

Desired Outcomes  
Improvement of understanding, analyzing and interpreting a literary text;

Ability to interconnect information retrieved from a literary work with relevant historical facts and events;

Developing a personal concept of Central Europe with all its geographical, historical, multilingual and multicultural complexity.

Assessment Components  
Class attendance: 30%

Reading presentation or other assignment: 20%

Mid-term paper and test: 20%

Final paper: 30%

Students will be given detailed instruction about themes and number of pages of written work in time. Students will be assigned at least three individual reading presentations (about 15 minutes each). Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class. This must include number of pages of written work and time of oral presentations.

Assessment Expectations  
Grade A: excellent work

Grade B: good work

Grade C: satisfactory work

Grade D: poor, but still passable work

Grade F: failure

Attendance Policy  
Absences only for medical reasons and for religious observance will be excused. To obtain an excused absence, you are obliged to supply either a doctor’s note or corroboration of your illness by a member of the housing staff (either an RA or a Building Manager). To be excused for religious
To observe holiday observance, you must contact the instructor and the Academic Director via e-mail one week in advance of the holiday. Your absence is excused for the holiday only and does not include days of travel associated with the holiday. Unexcused absences will be penalized with a 2% percent deduction from your final course grade for every week of classes missed.

Please note that Friday, April 7 (9am – 5pm) is reserved as a make-up day for missed classes. Do not schedule any trips for this day.

Late submission of work results in awarding a lower grade.

According to the Liberal Studies Program Student Handbook, plagiarism is defined as follows:

Plagiarism is presenting someone else’s work as though it were one’s own. More specifically plagiarism is to present as one’s own a sequence of words quoted without quotation marks from another writer, a paraphrased passage from another writer’s work; facts or ideas gathered, organized and reported by someone else, orally and/or in writing. Since plagiarism is a matter of fact, not of the student’s intention, it is crucial that acknowledgment of the sources be accurate and complete. Even where there is no conscious intention to deceive, the failure to make appropriate acknowledgment constitutes plagiarism.

The College of Arts and Science’s Academic Handbook defines plagiarism similarly and also specifies the following:

“presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written), writing a paragraph which, despite being in different words, expresses someone else’s idea without a reference to the source of the idea, or submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both teachers have given their permission in advance).

Receiving help on a take-home examination or quiz is also cheating – and so is giving that help – unless expressly permitted by the teacher (as in collaborative projects). While all this looks like a lot to remember, all you need to do is give credit where it is due, take credit only for original ideas, and ask your teacher or advisor when in doubt.”

“Penalties for plagiarism range from failure for a paper, failure for the course or dismissal from the university.” (Liberal Studies Program Student Handbook)

Required Text(s)

see the Schedule of classes

Supplemental Texts(s) (not required to purchase as copies are in NYU-P Library)

No mandatory supplemental texts. All further reading can be discussed with the professor on the individual basis.

Internet Research Guidelines

Students are expected to do their individual research.

Additional Required Equipment

No additional equipment required.

Session 1

Monday, January 30

1a. Time: Historical background of Czech national culture.
Start reading Hašek, Jaroslav: The Good Soldier Švejk
Start reading Kafka, Franz: America /The Man Who Disappeared/

Session 2

Tuesday, January 31

1b. Time: Historical background of Czech national culture.

Session 3

Monday, February 6

2a. Humor: Kafka, Hašek, Hrabal. Irony, the grotesque and the absurd, the political implications of Kafka’s work in the 60’s, the Czech New Wave cinema and absurd theater.

Session 4

Tuesday, February 7

Reading presentation: Kafka, Franz: America /The Man Who Disappeared/
Start reading: Němcová, Božena: Grandmother

Session 5

Friday, February 10

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<tr>
<th>Session 6</th>
<th>Monday, February 13</th>
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| **3a. Space:** Geography, geopolitics, Czech patriotism, landscape, the physical world, beer and food. (Božena Němcová, Franz Werfel, Viktor Dyk, Ota Pavel). Austrian, Hungarian and Polish neighbors (Karl Kraus, Peter Esterhazy, Witold Gombrowicz).  
Start reading: Mácha, Karel Hynek: May  
Start reading: Hrabal, Bohumil: Closely Observed Trains  
Start reading: Hrabal, Bohumil: Too Loud a Solitude |

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<tr>
<th>Session 7</th>
<th>Tuesday, February 14</th>
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| **3b. Space:** Geography, geopolitics, Czech patriotism, landscape, the physical world.  
Reading presentation: Němcová, Božena: Grandmother  
Reading presentation: Hašek, Jaroslav: The Good Soldier Švejk |

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<th>Session 8</th>
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<td><strong>4a. Existential writing I.:</strong> Romanticism, Decadence. (Karel Hynek Mácha, Arthur Breisky</td>
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<th>Session 9</th>
<th>Tuesday, February 21</th>
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| **4b. Existential writing I.:** Romanticism, Decadence.  
Reading presentation: Mácha, Karel Hynek: May  
Start reading: Čapek, Karel: Talks with TGM |

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<th>Session 10</th>
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<td><strong>4c. Existential writing I.:</strong> Romanticism, Decadence.</td>
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<th>Session 11</th>
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<th>Session 12</th>
<th>Friday, March 3</th>
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| **5b. Spiritual context:** Genius loci. Czech literacy. Czechs and Germans.  
Reading presentation: Hrabal, Bohumil: Closely Observed Trains  
Reading presentation: Hrabal, Bohumil: Too Loud a Solitude  
Start reading: Lustig, Arnošt: Dita Saxova  
Start reading: Havel, Václav: Garden Party  
Start reading: Kundera, Milan: Life is Elsewhere |

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<th>Session 13</th>
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<td><strong>6a. Conceptual writing I.:</strong> Political thought, political satire (Karel Čapek).</td>
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<th>Session 14</th>
<th>Tuesday, March 7</th>
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| **6b. Conceptual writing I.:** Political thought, political satire.  
Reading presentation: Čapek, Karel: Talks with TGM  
Start reading: Klima, Ivan: Love and Garbage |

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<th>Session 15</th>
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| **7a. Existential writing II.:** Ladislav Klima, Egon Hostovský, Arnošt Lustig  
MIDTERM TEST WRITTEN IN CLASS MARCH 13 (TODAY) |

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<th>Session 16</th>
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| **7b. Existential writing II.:**  
Reading presentation: Lustig, Arnošt: Dita Saxova  
MIDTERM PAPER DUE OCTOBER 20 (TODAY) |

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<th>Session 17</th>
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<td><strong>8a. Conceptual writing II.:</strong> Václav Havel, Milan Kundera.</td>
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<th>Session 18</th>
<th>Tuesday, March 21</th>
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| **8b. Conceptual writing II.:** Václav Havel, Milan Kundera.  
Reading presentation: Havel, Václav: Garden Party  
Reading presentation: Kundera, Milan: Life is Elsewhere |

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<th>Session 19</th>
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<td><strong>8c. Conceptual writing II.:</strong> Václav Havel, Milan Kundera.</td>
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### March 27
#### Session 20
Tuesday, March 28


Start reading: Viewegh, Michal: *Bringing Up Girls in Bohemia*

Start reading: Topol, Jáchym: *The Devil’s Workshop*

9b. *Dissent and Exile*.

#### Session 21
Monday, April 3

9c. *Dissent and Exile*.

Reading presentation: Klima, Ivan: *Love and Garbage*

Start reading: Ash, Timothy Garton: *Two Essays on Central Europe*

Make-up Day
Friday, April 7 (9am-5pm)

Make-up day for missed classes

#### Session 22
Tuesday, April 4


#### Session 23
Monday, April 10

10b. *A new social role for Czech literature after 1989*

Reading presentation: Viewegh, Michal: *Bringing Up Girls in Bohemia*

Reading presentation: Topol, Jáchym: *The Devil’s Workshop*

(No classes)

#### Session 24
Tuesday, April 11


#### Session 25
Monday, April 24

11b. *Central Europe recreated*: Concentric circles, multiple identity.

Reading presentation: Ash, Timothy Garton: *Two Essays on Central Europe*

#### Spring Break
April 15-23

#### Session 26
Tuesday, April 25

11c. *Central Europe recreated*: Concentric circles, multiple identity.

#### National Holiday
Monday, May 1

No Classes.

#### Session 27
Tuesday, May 2

No Classes.

#### Session 28
Monday, May 8

12. *Persistent message*: Summary

[Click and enter essay deadlines/work due]

[Click and enter co-curricular activities, etc.]

FINAL PAPER DUE MAY 15 (TODAY)

FINAL INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS IN CLASS

#### Session 29
Tuesday, May 9

(last day of classes)

FINAL INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS IN CLASS

#### Session 30
Tuesday, May 16

Preferably no food in the classroom.