RUSSN–UA 9832-001

Professor Tomáš VRBA
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Tuesday 3:00–4:00 P.M., NYU Professors’ Room

CONTEMPORARY CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN LITERATURE
(From Kafka to Kundera) – SPRING 2015
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30–2:50 P.M.
Location: Kafka classroom

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.

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

Assessment Components

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<th>Components</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class attendance</td>
<td>30 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading presentation or other assignment</td>
<td>20 %</td>
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<td>Mid-term paper and test</td>
<td>20 %</td>
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<td>Final paper</td>
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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).

Grade A: excellent work
Grade B: good work
Grade C: satisfactory work
Grade D: poor, but still passable work
Grade F: failure

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 observance, you must contact the instructor and the Associate 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 two percent deduction from your final course grade for every week of classes missed.

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 Texts
see the Schedule of classes

Students are expected to do their individual research.

Overview of course

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/

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

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.

Reading presentation: Kafka, Franz: America /The Man Who Disappeared/
Start reading: Němcová, Božena: Grandmother
Continue reading: Hašek, Jaroslav: The Good Soldier Švejk


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

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</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading Presentation</th>
<th>Start Reading</th>
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<tr>
<td>9b</td>
<td>Feb 26</td>
<td>4b. Existential writing I.: Romanticism, Decadence.</td>
<td>Reading presentation: Mácha, Karel Hynek: <em>May</em></td>
<td>Čapek, Karel: <em>Talks with TGM</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tuesday, March 3</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>March 5</td>
<td>4c. Existential writing I.: Romanticism, Decadence.</td>
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<td>Reading presentation: Hrabal, Bohumil: <em>Too Loud a Solitude</em></td>
<td>Start reading: Havel, Václav: <em>Garden Party</em></td>
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<td>Start reading: Kundera, Milan: <em>Life is Elsewhere</em></td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Tuesday, March 17</td>
<td>6a. Conceptual writing I.: Political thought, political satire (Karel Čapek).</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Tuesday, March 24</td>
<td>7a. Existential writing II.: Ladislav Klíma, Egon Hostovský, Arnošt Lustig</td>
<td>MIDTERM TEST WRITTEN IN CLASS MARCH 24 (TODAY)</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Thursday, March 26</td>
<td>7b. Existential writing II.</td>
<td>Reading presentation: Lustig, Arnošt: <em>Dita Saxova</em></td>
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<td>MIDTERM PAPER DUE MARCH 26 (TODAY)</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Tuesday, March 31</td>
<td>8a. Conceptual writing II.: Václav Havel, Milan Kundera.</td>
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<td>Reading presentation: Kundera, Milan: <em>Life is Elsewhere</em></td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>April 6-10</td>
<td>8c. Conceptual writing II.: Václav Havel, Milan Kundera.</td>
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<td>Thursday, April 16</td>
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<td>Start reading: Topol, Jáchym: <em>The Devil’s Workshop</em></td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Tuesday, April 21</td>
<td>9b. Dissent and Exile.</td>
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### Session 22
**Thursday, April 23**

**9c. Dissent and Exile.**
Reading presentation: Klima, Ivan: *Love and Garbage*
Start reading: Ash, Timothy Garton: *Two Essays on Central Europe*

### Session 23
**Tuesday, April 28**


### Session 24
**Thursday, April 30**

**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*


**11b. Central Europe recreated: Concentric circles, multiple identity.**
Reading presentation: Ash, Timothy Garton: *Two Essays on Central Europe*

### Session 25
**Tuesday, May 5**

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

### Session 26
**Thursday, May 7**

**12. Persistent message: Summary**

### Session 27
**Tuesday, May 12**

### Session 28
**Thursday, May 14**
(last day of classes)

**FINAL PAPER DUE MAY 19 (TODAY)**

**FINAL INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS IN CLASS MAY 19 (TODAY)**