CIEE Prague, Czech Republic

Course title: Modern Czech Literature
Course code: LITT 3001 PRAG
Programs offering course: Central European Studies, Communication, New Media, and Journalism
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3.00
Contact hours: 45.00
Term: Spring 2021

Course Description

The course offers a survey of modern Czech literature in all its genres: poetry, prose and drama. The selection of the studied texts aims to offer examples of the most substantial trends and movements of Czech culture in general and Czech literature in particular over the past approximately 180 years (e.g., Romanticism, Realism, Symbolism and Decadence, Avant-garde, the Theatre of the Absurd). The emphasis is put on analysing individual texts, in the end, however, by the means of abstraction, the students acquire an overview of modern Czech history and culture. Although the course materials aim to provide students with as much variety as possible, there are some recurring topics, including various conceptions and forms of humor, grotesque, tragic, absurd, utopia, dystopia, love, and art as they are conceived and represented in literary works of different periods and genres.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- discuss and evaluate the specifics of Czech culture in general and Czech literature in particular;
- apply the specifics of different literary periods, movements and schools of thought to the Czech literary context;
- develop and strengthen their ability to analyze and interpret literary texts;
- expand their critical vocabulary;
- and improve their ability to lead critical discourse both in its oral and written forms.

Course Prerequisites

The course is open to everyone who has interest in literature and enjoys reading it, discussing it, and writing about it.

Methods of Instruction

The course is built around a structured class discussion. The discussions are based on questions posed either by the presenters or the instructor. A variety of discussion activities will be used: buzz group, pyramid discussion, peer critique, role-playing, picture-making, brainstorming, etc. The aim of discussions is to examine each text from various viewpoints and in some detail.

N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.

Assessment and Final Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. One in-class presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Short written responses</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>3. Final Paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Midterm Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Class Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
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Course Requirements

One in-class presentation
Each student will give one oral presentation (15-20 minutes), analyzing some aspects of a particular work and introducing the author and his or her work. The topic of the presentation is chosen in the beginning of the term. The presenter should also consult the professor about the structure of his or her presentation at least one week before the date it is due. The presenter should prepare several questions, which will inspire class discussion.

**Short written responses**

*(Length: 2 paragraphs - up to 250 words)*

Students will be asked to produce written responses (about 10) throughout the course. These lie in answering one of the questions posed by the instructor and are meant to develop students’ writing abilities as well as to provide them with feedback on their reading of the required texts. The responses should also help students with preparation for the Midterm Test and Final Paper. Each student must submit 75% of responses. Otherwise it will proportionately affect the relevant part of the final grade.

**Final Paper**

*(Length: 2000-2500 words)*

It is an analytical paper that properly uses quotations of the primary texts and – where possible – brings in some secondary sources. The topic and the available secondary sources should be consulted with the teacher.

**Midterm Exam**

There will be one in-class written examination: the mid-term test. It consists of approximately 6 questions concerning the works studied up to the Midterm. Relevant quotations from the works are provided in order to help students to answer the questions. The examples of the test from previous terms can be consulted with the professor.

**Class Participation**

- Students are obliged to read all required reading for each class and prepare some answers to the questions posed by the presenter of the text and then actively engage in various forms of class discussion.
- Reading of secondary sources is strongly recommended (these may also inspire some ideas about possible topics for in-class presentations).

**CIEE Prague Class Participation Policy**

Assessment of students’ participation in class is an inherent component of the course grade. Participation is valued as **meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom**, utilizing the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Students are required to actively, meaningfully and thoughtfully contribute to class discussions and all types of in-class activities throughout the duration of the class. Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared, as directed, in advance of each class session. This includes valued or informed engagement in, for example, small group discussions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on co-curricular and outside-of-classroom activities.

Students are responsible for following the course content and are expected to ask clarification questions if they cannot follow the instructor’s or other students’ line of thought or argumentation.

The use of electronic devices is only allowed for computer-based in-class tests, assignments and other tasks specifically assigned by the course instructor. Students are expected to take notes by hand unless the student is entitled to the use of computer due to his/her academic accommodations. In such cases the student is required to submit an official letter issued by his/her home institution specifying the extent of academic accommodations.

Class participation also includes students’ active participation in Canvas discussions and other additional tasks related to the course content as specified by the instructor.

Students will receive a partial participation grade every three weeks.

**Attendance**

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program.
If you will miss a class for any reason, notify the Program Coordinator and your instructor beforehand via Canvas. You are responsible for any materials covered in class during your absence, and except in the specific cases listed below, credit will not be granted for missed assessments.

Excessive absences will result in a notification letter, and finally a warning letter, sent to you and your home school, based on the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of course hours missed</th>
<th>Number of CEE classes</th>
<th>Minimum penalty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 10%</td>
<td>One to Three 90-min. classes; or One 180-min. class</td>
<td>No penalty</td>
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<tr>
<td>10% - 20%</td>
<td>Four 90-min. classes</td>
<td>Written notification* to the student, followed by a warning letter to the student and home school; 3% reduction in the final grade</td>
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<td>Five 90-min. classes</td>
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<td>Two 180-min classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than 20%</td>
<td>Six 90-min. classes; or Three 180-min. classes</td>
<td>Automatic course failure, and possible expulsion with notification to the home school</td>
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* The notification letters are intended to ensure that you are well advised in advance of any potential for failure or dismissal, so that you can take steps to avoid this.

As the table shows, **missing more than 20% of any class (e.g., due to undocumented illness, travel delays, flight cancellations, over-sleeping, etc.) results in automatic failure of the course.**

If you miss an assessment in class due to an absence, you will be able to make it up in the following instances:

- You provide a relevant doctor’s note from a local medical professional to your Program Coordinator within 24 hours of your absence (a scan or photograph sent via e-mail are acceptable)
- A CIEE staff member verifies that you were too ill to attend class.
- You provide evidence of a family emergency to your Program Coordinator.
- You have an approved absence related to the observance of a religious holiday from the Academic Director based on a request submitted before you arrived onsite.

**Please note:** Absences incurred due to documented illness, documented family emergency or the observance of a religious holiday approved before arrival onsite do not count towards the total of absences. Students may self-certify one absence due to illness without providing a doctor’s note as long as they notify the Program Coordinator within 24 hours of their absence by e-mail or a text message.

**Other attendance-related policies**

If you transfer from one CIEE class to another during the Add/Drop period, you will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of the new class provided you were marked present for the first session(s) of the original class.

If you are over 15 minutes late for a class, the instructor is required to mark you absent.

In case of class conflicts (irregularities in the class schedule, including field trips and make-up classes), always contact the Academic Department to decide the appropriate course of action.

Please remember to track your attendance on the Canvas Course Sites and report any errors in the record to the Academic Department within one week of the discrepancy date, as later claims may not be considered.

These attendance rules also apply to any required co-curricular excursion, activity, or event, and to for-credit internships.

CIEE staff does not manage absences at partner institutions providing direct enrollment classes (FAMU, ECES and FSV), but they have similar attendance policies and attendance is monitored there. Grade penalties may result from excessive absences.

*N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.*

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1**

Class: 1.1 Introductory class.
Class:  1.2  Mácha’s May, the Masterpiece of Modern Czech Poetry

Portrayal of Nature in Mácha’s poem.

Required reading: K. H. Mácha, May, 1st Canto

Recommended literature: Vladimír Macura: “Problems and paradoxes of the national revival”, in: Bohemia in History; Robert B. Pynsent: “Characterisation in Mácha’s Máj”

Week 2
Class:  2.1  Mácha’s May, the Masterpiece of Modern Czech Poetry

Conceptions of human action, guilt, freedom and responsibility in Mácha’s poem.

Required reading: Mácha: May 2nd Canto

Class:  2.2  

Mácha’s poem as a tragedy, various interpretations and visual representations of the work

Required reading: Mácha: May, the rest of the poem

Week 3
Class:  3.1  Short stories of early modernism

Realist and naturalist short story. Representation of village community, gender and social relations, role of public opinion, notion of evil.

Required reading: Preissová: “Eva”; Tilschová: “Sad Time”


Class:  3.2  


Required reading: Karásek: “Stagnant Waters”.


Week 4
Class:  4.1  Fin de siècle conceptions of art and love, life as an art: dandy.


Class:  4.2  Kafka’s The Trial.

Law, guilt, absurdity and humor in Kafka’s novel.

Required reading: Kafka, The Trial (Chapters 1-5).

Recommended literature: Politzer, “The Trial”

Week 5
Class:  5.1  Law, guilt, absurdity and humor in Kafka’s novel.

Required reading: Kafka, The Trial (Rest of the novel).

Class:  5.2  Technological dystopia

Reason, love, work and sacrifice in Karel Čapek’s drama.

Required reading: Čapek, R. U. R.
Recommended literature: Ivan Klíma: Karel Čapek.

Week 6
Class: 6.1 Midterm Test

Midterm Exam Period

Class: 6.2 Midterm Discussion

Midterm Exam Period

Week 7
Class: 7.1 Jaroslav Hašek’s The Good Soldier Švejk

Humor and absurdity in Hašek’s novel, human being and authorities.
Required reading: Hašek: The Good Soldier Švejk, 1st part (first half of it)
Recommended literature: Entry on Hašek in DLB.

Class: 7.2 Josef K. and Švejk, some comparisons.
Required reading: Hašek The Good Soldier Švejk, 1st part (the rest of it)

Week 8
Class: 8.1 Avant-Garde Poetry

Czech contribution to Avant-Garde movements: Devětsil and Poetism
Required reading: Seifert: On the Waves of TSF.
Recommended literature: Švácha, Rostislav (ed.): Devětsil: the Czech Avant-Garde of the 1920s and 30s

Class: 8.2 Nezval’s myth of poet and poetry
Required reading: Nezval: Akrobat.

Week 9
Class: 9.1 Halas’ response to Avant-garde optimism.
Required reading: Halas: “Selected poems”.
Recommended literature: Ludvík Kundera: “František Halas”

Class: 9.2 Ladislav Klíma’s original contribution to Czech literature and philosophy

Klíma’s employment of high and low genres of literature, narrative devices, dream, madness and reality in the novel
Required reading: Klíma: The Sufferings of Prince Sternenhoch. (1st half of the novel)
Recommended reading: Josef Zumr in The Sufferings of Prince Sternenhoch

Week 10
Class: 10.1 Some aspects of Klíma’s philosophy

as represented in the plot and characters of his novel, egoism and altruism
Required reading: The Sufferings of Prince Sternenhoch (rest of the novel)

Class: 10.2 1960s Literary concerns with identity, alienation,

and political misuse of Language
Identity, mind and body dualism and the notion of game in Milan Kundera’s short stories

Required reading: Kundera: “The Hitchhiking game” and “Nobody will Laugh”

Recommended reading: Maria Němcova Banerjee, Terminal Paradox. The Novels of M.K., John O’Brien, Milan Kundera and Feminism.

**Week 11**

Class: 11.1 Czech contribution to the Theatre of the Absurd

**notion of identity and workings of language in Havel’s drama**

Required reading: Havel: The Garden Party

Recommended reading: Esslin: The Theatre of the Absurd

Class: 11.2 What matters?

Books, morals, technology and socialism in Bohumil Hrabal’s novel

Required reading: Hrabal: Too Loud a Solitude (First half of the novel).

Recommended literature: Josef Škvorecký: Introducing Bohumil Hrabal in J. Š.: Talkin’ Moscow Blues.

**Week 12**

Class: 12.1 Hrabal’s narrative technique, mind and body, Shoah, guilt and love

Required reading: Hrabal: Too Loud a Solitude (Second half)

Class: 12.2 Jáchym Topol’s fictional account of Prague post 1989 transformation

Required reading: Topol: A Trip to the Train Station


**Week 13**

Class: 13.1 Revision and end-of-course discussion

Class: 13.2 Final Exam Week

Final paper submission deadline.

**Course Materials**

**Readings**

Breisky, Artur: “Quintessence of Dandyism” (draft translation by Kathleen Hayes) (reader)


Recommended literature


Czech and Slovak Writings in Translation, http://users.ox.ac.uk/~tayl0010/transl.html; (MCL. Selected articles)


Klíma, Ivan: Karel Čapek: Life and Work.(CIEE library)

Kundera, Milan: The Art Of the Novel, London, Faber and Faber, 1990 (CIEE library)


Novák, Arne: Czech Literature, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 1986. (CIEE library)


