

Maymester in Prague, 2013

Reading Prague: Literature, Art, and History

CL 323, EUS 347, GRC 327E, HIS 362G, REE 325, CZ 324

Unique number 44965

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The Spring 2013 course CZ 324, *Prague as a Literary Topos*, taught by Veronika Tuckerova, is recommended to students enrolled in the Maymester course.

Course Description:

The course will focus on “Prague” as the locus of diverse literary, architectural, and artistic influences, as a site that engendered writers such as Jaroslav Hasek, Franz Kafka, and Bohumil Hrabal, and as a creation of their imagination. We will also examine how Prague was perceived by outsiders; among them the writers Bruce Chatwin, Philip Roth, John Banville, Gary Shteyngart, and W.G. Sebald. Artistic and cinematic representations will complement the literary representations of the city. Our readings will take us across languages (texts written originally in German, English, Italian), historical periods (medieval, Renaissance, nineteenth century, modern), as well as across different districts of Prague. We will examine some prevailing images and stereotypes connected to Prague: Prague as a dead city, as a magical city, as an island; Prague as a provincial town or as a crossroad, a modern European metropolis.

We will supplement our textual readings by reading the city of Prague as a text: its layered architectonic texture, distinct districts, monuments, cemeteries, individual buildings, the churches and the Castle, but also its topography and geography; its hills, trees, and river. We will “read” these places as testimonies to the city’s traumas and memories. We will consider Prague sites as an inspiration for writers. Which places in Prague were most inspiring for poets and painters? We will inspect how the most recent monuments commemorate the past, and consider the question of to what extent contemporary Prague builds on its historical legacy.

For most of its history, Prague was not a homogenous Czech city. A strong component to our explorations of Prague will be its rich Jewish history. We will include literature and discussions on other minorities as well: Roma (Gypsies), Germans (the Prague/Czech Germans), and the currently thriving Vietnamese community. We will examine how Prague/Czechs have been capable of incorporating strangers (the prime example is, of course, the Jewish ghetto), through historic and cultural sites, but also by reading literary works, watching contemporary films, and exploring recent works of art.

The course will include visits to the following sites and institutions: The Jewish Museum, The New Jewish Cemetery, Franz Kafka Society in Prague, the Loos Villa,

DOX Center for Contemporary Art, the Prague Fairgrounds, as well as lectures by some renown Czech scholars, journalists, architects (possibly the UT architectural historian Christopher Long), and representatives of non for profit organizations.

Additional excursions to several locations outside of Prague will be included: Terezin Ghetto, Kutna Hora, Vrchotovy Janovice.

Course Format:

The course will be conducted as a combination of lectures, in-class group work, site visits, and excursions.

Assignments and Grading:

Participation in all class discussions, excursions and other activities are required.

Students will be expected to maintain a Fieldwork Journal, prepare a presentation on the topic of their interest, and write a paper. Czech language instruction will be a part of the course.

Readings:

The Czech Reader. History, Culture, Politics. Ed. Jan Bazant, Nina Bazantova, and Frances Starn.

Prague: A Traveler's Literary Companion; Ed. Paul Wilson.

Alfred Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest: Writing, Memory, and the City*

Natalie Berger, ed. *Where Cultures Meet: The Story of the Jews of Czechoslovakia.* (Tel Aviv: Beth Hatefutsoth, MOD Publishing House, 1990)

Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism.* (2012)

Cathleen M. Giustino, *Tearing Down Prague's Jewish Town: Ghetto-Clearance and the Legacy of Middle-Class Ethnic Politics Around 1900.* (2004)

John Banville, *Prague Pictures: Portrait of a City* (2003)

Laurent Binet, *HHhH* (FSG 2012)

Bruce Chatwin, *Utz* (1988)

Paul Eisner, *Kafka and Prague.* (New York 1950.

Jaroslav Hasek, *Svejk* (1923)

Bohumil Hrabal, *Too Loud a Solitude*

Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (1925)

Franz Kafka, *Description of a Struggle* (1903-1907)

Franz Kafka, *Contemplation* (1912)

Ivan Klima, *Love and Garbage* (1986)

Gustav Meyrink, *Golem* (1914)

Jan Neruda, *Prague Tales* (1877)

Rilke, selection of poems

Philip Roth, *The Prague Orgy* (1985)

W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (2001)

Gary Shteyngart, *Russian Debutante's Handbook* (2003)

Jiri Weil, *Mendelssohn is on the Roof* (1960) and *Life with a Star* (1949)

Dr. Veronika Tuckerova, a native of Prague, is a Lecturer and Texas Chair in Czech Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Veronika specializes in Czech/German/Jewish literature of Central Europe and teaches classes on various aspects of Czech literature, culture, and history. Previously, she taught at Columbia University and the Prague Center of the New York University.