



CET ACADEMIC
PROGRAMS

Syllabus of Record

Program: CET Prague

Course Code / Title: (PR/CEST 320) Franz Kafka and Central European Literature

Total Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings: Literature / History, Central & Eastern European Studies

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites / Requirements: None

Description

This course focuses on Franz Kafka within the greater context of Central European literature. More specifically, Kafka is examined within the framework of the modernist culture of *fin de siècle* and early 20th century Vienna and Prague, and in relation to other Central European authors of the expressionist and avant-garde movements. Using both literary and intellectual history, the course approaches Kafka's work as a possible 'passage into modernity,' and, alongside the work of other contemporaries, tackles the problems of modern urban identity, cultural problems linked with the rise of nationalism and Jewish emancipation, assimilation, and integration.

Part of the course will focus on the conception of Central Europe itself both as a historically specific system of institutions, ideologies, networks, careers and dispositions, and as an imaginary space of creative memory. Following a roughly historical chronology, the course covers the changing concepts of individual and collective identity from before World War I through to the 1930s, with emphasis on the works of Prague-based and Viennese writers. Given Kafka's own background and the unique literary and intellectual landscape of the period, particular attention is dedicated to issues related to Jewish identity and experience during this period.

All readings contribute to a better understanding of Kafka's and his contemporaries' grappling with the human condition and turn-of-century modernity in Central Europe.

Objectives

During this course, students:

- Develop basic knowledge about modern Central European culture
- Learn to interpret Kafka's work as both a representation of and departure from its historical and literary context
- Gain an overview and basic knowledge of modern literary movements, themes and ideas
- Learn to read literary modernism, both in terms of understanding the use of figurative language and representation, and as an expression of the quest for identity
- Understand the Jewish condition as a specific, irreplaceable contribution to the meaning of the Central European experience, and one that is related to historical bonds of politics and its institutions, arts and literature, ideology, science and religion

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Course Requirements

The course is designed as a series of guided discussions outlined by brief lecture-based introductions to the assigned readings. Students read approximately 200 pages per week and should come to class prepared to discuss actively. In addition, each student serves as discussion facilitator for one class session and introduces the reading to the class in an oral presentation.

Over the course of the term, students submit several short response papers. These are an average of 1 page in length and demonstrate the student's thorough reading of and engagement with the material before the class session.

Students submit a final analytical paper of about 10 pages that focuses on, questions, and examines a specific aspect of the text. Students should include a discussion of relevant reference materials where possible.

Students are expected to abide by CET's Attendance Policy.

Grading

The final grade is determined as follows:

- Oral presentation 15%
- Participation 25%
- Response papers 30%
- Final paper 30%

Readings

Primary Texts (in translation)

Čapek, Karel. *Crossroads*. North Haven: Catbird Press, 2002.

Ebner-Eschenbach, Marie von. *Karambuli. The District Doctor*. New York: Mondial, 2008.

Hašek, Jaroslav. *The Good Soldier Švejk*. London: Penguin Books, 1973.

Hostovský, Egon. *The Arsonist*. Prague: Twisted Spoon Press, 1996.

Kafka, Franz. *Collected Short Stories*. New York: Schocken, 1996.

Kafka, Franz. *The Trial*. New York: Schocken, 1995.

Karásek, Jiří. "Stagnant Waters" (*Stojaté vody*.) In *Slovo a smysl / Word & Sense* 14. Translated by Kirsten Lodge. <http://slovoasmysl.ff.cuni.cz/node/226>

Klíma, Ladislav. *The Sufferings of Prince Sternenhoch*. Prague: TSP, 2000.

Kundera, Milan. *The Tragedy of Central Europe*. Translated by Edmund White. New York: New York Review of Books, 1984.

Langer, Jiří M. *Nine Gates to the Chasidic Mysteries*. Translated by Stephen Jolly. Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993.

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- Leppin, Paul. *Other's Paradise: Tales of Old Prague*. Prague: Twisted Spoon Press, 2016.
- Meyrink, Gustav. *The Golem*. Riverside: Ariadne Press, 1995.
- Poláček, Karel. *What Ownership's All About*. North Haven: Catbird Press, 1993.
- Roth, Joseph. *The Radetzky March*. New York: Abrams Books, 2002.
- Roth, Joseph. *Three Novellas*. New York: Overlook TP, 2003.
- Roth, Joseph. *The Wandering Jews*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001.
- Schnitzler, Arthur. "Professor Bernhardt." In *Round Dance and Other Plays*. Translated by J. M. Q. Davies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Schnitzler, Arthur. *Lieutenant Gustl*. Sun and Moon Press, 1993.
- Schulz, Bruno. *The Street of Crocodiles*. London: Penguin Classics, 1992.
- Ungar, Hermann. *Boys and Murderers*. Prague: Twisted Spoon Press, 2006.
- Ungar, Hermann. *Maimed*. Prague: Twisted Spoon Press, 2005.
- Weber, Ilse. *Mendel Rosenbusch: Tales for Jewish Children*. Westbury: Bunim & Bannigan Books, 2013.

Supplementary Texts

- Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund. "Notes on Kafka," In *Prisms*. Translated by Samuel and Shiery Weber. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983.
- Anderson, Mark M. *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin-de-siècle*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Franz Kafka" and "Some Reflections on Kafka." In *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward Minor Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Gilman, Sander L. *Franz Kafka, The Jewish Patient*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Johnston, William M. *The Austrian Mind – An Intellectual and Social History 1848-1938*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.
- Kafka, Franz. *The Cambridge Companion*. Edited by Julian Preece. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Kahl, Frederick. *Franz Kafka: Representative Man*. Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1991.
- McCagg, Jr, William O. *A History of Habsburg Jews 1670-1918*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.

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Pawel, Ernst. *The Nightmare of Reason: A Life of Franz Kafka*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1984.

Politzer, Heinz. *Franz Kafka. Parable and Paradox*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966.

Robertson, Ritchie. *Kafka: Judaism, Politics and Literature*, 1985.

Spector, Scott. *Prague Territories. National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka Fin-de-Siècle*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2000

Outline of Course Content

Topic 1 – The Relevance of Central European Conditions

- The distortion of experience
- Central Europe as a concept
- The Jewish experience
- Roth, Kundera

Topic 2 – Overview of the Literary and Cultural Landscape, some basic themes

- Modern parables of existence
- Accident and necessity
- Expulsion from paradise, the collapse of established structures
- Nature vs. culture
- Towards a new objectivity: spectators, performers, the show and the point of view
- Bastards, animals and other monsters
- Psychoanalysis and its impact on fiction
- Schnitzler, Ebner-Eschenbach, Roth

Topic 3 – Prague and Vienna, circa 1900

- Nationalism, modernity, identity, ideology
- Anti-Semitism in Modern Central Europe
- The modern intellectual at the frontier
- Representations of the city
- The opening of new perspectives
- The intersection of identities
- Schnitzler, Karásek, Roth

Topic 4 – German-language Literature in Prague

- The Prague Circle
- Leppin
- Meyrink

Topic 5 – Kafka's Early Writings

- Modernity and Alienation

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- Anxiety as a Limit of the Human Condition

Topic 6 – Kafka's *The Trial*

Topic 7 – Kafka's Czech Contemporaries

- Hašek
- Klima
- Čapek

Topic 7 – Kafka's Later Writings

- Creation of the self
- Art and performance
- Crises of meaning and identity

Topic 9 – Czechoslovak-German Literature after Kafka

- Ungar
- Weber

Topic 10 – The Rising Storm: Central European Literature in the 1930s

- Irony, satire, parody: a grotesque version of modernity
- Schulz, Poláček, Hostovský, Langer