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S-FILM 241/S-CZEC 240 YSS 2022

**KAFKA’S PRAGUE: FILM AND FICTION**

“I believe that every moment in a film, every word and every reaction, should carry psycho-logical truth. It may be embedded in a very imaginative and fanciful frame, but anything that you hear and see on the screen must be humanly convincing. If you try to cheat with behavioral and motivational implausibility, the audience will always see through it and you will lose them.” (Milos Forman, *Turnaround*, 1994)

“Everyone is wrong about the future. Man can only be certain about the present moment… But is that quite true either? … the mind [is] always myopic about what goes on, with no reason or logic, down below: two great armies are battling to the death over sacred causes; but *some* *minuscule plague bacterium comes along* and lays them both low.” (Milan Kundera, *Ignorance,* italics not in the original, 2000)

“One morning, as Gregor Samsa was waking up from anxious dreams, he discovered that in bed he had been changed into a monstrous verminous bug. … ‘What’s happened to me, he thought. It was no dream. His room, a proper room for a human being, only somewhat too small, lay quietly between the four well-known walls.” (Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 1915)

“… I was sitting, stooping forward, head bowed, alone in front of this black, knotty mass, entirely beastly, which frightened me. Then I had this vision. It left me breathless. Never, until these last few days, had I understood the meaning of *existence*.” (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea,*1938)

*Classes held* TTH 6:00-9:15 pm

*Dates* Session A: May 30- July 1, 2022

*Instructor* Dr. Karen von Kunes

*Office hours* After class, byappointment in person or on zoom

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*COURSE DESCRIPTION*

An introduction to Prague’s intellectual culture and the Holocaust through contemporary film, fiction, and basic overview of history, online cultural research/sightseeing, and students’ film projects (screenwriting and intro to logistics of making short films). Historical position of the Czech Republic within former Austro-Hungary will be brought through the past upheavals: WWI, democratic Czechoslovakia, WWII Holocaust, Communist regime, Prague Spring of 1968, Velvet Revolution of 1989, split into Czech and Slovak Republics in 1993 to 21st century, diaspora, and multi-ethnic globalism, including Romani, Vietnamese, and Ukrainian influences. Emphasis remains on Kafka's influence on today’s Prague through readings and films, including virtual visits of Prague synagogues and other cultural monuments, such Terezin concentration camp. The Holocaust period will be studied in class and through a guest lecture, as well as through virtual visiting. Transition from totalitarianism to democracy will be discussed through assigned readings (novels, short stories, critical articles) and films viewing, discussed in class.

Analyzed films include Miloš Forman: *Loves of a Blond, Firemen’s Ball*, Jan Kadár: *Shop on the Main Street*, Jiří Menzel: *Closely Watched Trains*, Jan Hřebejk: *Divided We Fall*, and Jan Svěrák: *Kolya*. Readings include Franz Kafka: *The Metamorphosis,* and *The Trial*, and works by work Arnošt Lustig, Bohumil Hrabal, Milan Kundera, and Václav Havel. Possible guest lectures by cinematographers Josef Lustig and Gary Griffin to talk about how to create a short film. Sstudent can complete a creative screenplay (or another project of choice, such as short story, theater play, etc.), and a final course essay based will be based on the materials studied in class.

*ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING*

The seminar consists of discussion lectures and student participation. Each week on Friday students e-submit a one-page (please, only one page—up to 350 words) response-short essay based on the assigned reading and/or film viewing, which will count for 25% of the final grade. Additional grading is based on class participation 25% (absences have to be justified), and 25% writing a midterm screenplay or short story/theater play (5-7 pages), and 25% final paper (8-10 pages). Readings and screenings are in English, and students should access films online and purchase books.

*STRUCTURE*

Each class discussion is initiated by the instructor, and gradually taken over by students with the instructor functioning as a coach. Readings include all novels and viewing all the films on the syllabus and additional materials will be provided electronically. Students are expected to complete the reading of the assigned work or viewing the film before the class during which it is discussed. If for a serious reason, a student is unable to finish the work, he or she should inform the instructor.

*ONLINE ACCESS*

Screenings are planned before each class in which the films are discussed. Clips will be reviewed in class during discussion. Franz Kafka’s novels can be accessed in e-form through (free) planetebook.com, or possibly through other sites. Additional required materials will be available on Canvas.

For the midterm, students will write a creative piece, either a film script (5-7 pages) or possibly a short story or a play. Materials and practice how to write creatively will be discussed in class. The final essay will consist of analysis of 3+ works discussed in class, based on a common topic with a strongly presented and defended thesis on which the paper is to be based. It should include the brief historical and/or political background and a bibliography of existing scholarship.

Personal integrity and academic honesty are the key component to education, and the strength of the university environment. Plagiarism is taken seriously and consequence are dire while at Yale and even past college education. If you take ideas from another person or source, you must acknowledge its author and the title of the source, including page numbers. Please review Yale’s Academic Integrity Policy:

<http://catalog.yale.edu/undergraduate-regulations/policies/definitions-plagiarism-cheating/>

*READINGS (reading to be completed before each class to be discussed in class)*

Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* [*https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/the-metamorphosis.pdf*](https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/the-metamorphosis.pdf)

Franz Kafka, *The Trial* [*https://www.kafka-online.info/the-trial.html*](https://www.kafka-online.info/the-trial.html)

Arnošt Lustig’s short story “Tanga” will be provided by the instructor

Bohumil Hrabal, *I Served the King of England*

Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*

Václav Havel, play *Largo Desolato*

Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*

Paul Argentini, *Elements of Style for Screenwriters* (a reference guide)

Peter Demetz’s *Prague in Black and Gold* excerpts will be provided online

Additional materials (criticism, journal articles, etc.) will be provided online

*FILMS (to be watched before each class to be discussed in class)*

Jan Kadár and Elmar Klos: *The Shop on Main Street*

Jiří Menzel: *Closely Watched Trains*

Jan Hřebejk: *Divided We Fall*

Jiří Menzel: *I Served the King of England* (if available)

Miloš Forman: *Loves of a Blond*

Miloš Forman: *Firemen’s Ball*

Philip Kaufman: *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (possibly, depending on available time)

Jan Svěrák: *Kolja*

THIS PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS WILL BE READJUSTED

**THE CLASS-BY-CLASS SYLLABUS**

*1st week*

**Class 1 Tuesday, May 31**

Introduction to culture/history of the Czech Republic and its current position within the European Union. Overview of former Czechoslovakia & Austro-Hungary Empire. Position of Franz Kafka within the Czech culture, the tragedy of Holocaust and formation of the communist state in 1948, its 40-year domination resulting in the Velvet Revolution of 1989.

Intro to Kafka’s life and work. Discussion of Kafka’s ***Metamorphosis****,*its literary value, meaning, blend of surrealism with effects of realness, the novel’s interpretations within our current society. Reasons for this short novel remaining one of the most read books. A close-up examination of Kafka’s writing style and translators’ liberty.

**Class 2 Thursday, June 2**

Discussion of Kafka’s ***The Trial****,* and his existential approach to writing; visiting online of his Prague residences, Café Louvre where he discussed his writing with Max Brod. Meaning of Josef K.’s journey. Structure of the novel. Impact of *The Trial* on international literary scene. Homework assignment is to research synagogues in Old Town Square and former Jewish Ghetto and visit Old Jewish cemetery.

*2nd week*

**Class 3 Tuesday, June 7**

The Holocaust period studied. Discussing film ***Shop on the Main******Street****,* by Slovak director Jan Kadár about the deportation of Jews to Terezin. Impressions from virtual visit of Terezín Ghetto. Additional material will be posted online. Discussing Arnošt Lustig’s story “**Tanga**”: Tanga’s strength in Terezin as a prostitute, her impact on the narrator’s vision and perception.

**Class 4 Thursday, June 9**

Discussing Jiří Menzel’s classic: ***Closely Watched Trains***. Analysis of the war theme mingled with Czech subversive humor and film characters’ erotic desire. Culmination of Czech idleness into an act of political courage against the Nazis. Our Holocaust period is ending with Jan Hřebejk’s film ***Divided We Fall***. Comparing cinematic elements of the three war-time films: directors’ vision and cinematic approach, actors’ performance, directors’ perception of historical upheavals influenced by generational gap among film directors.

*3rd week*

**Class 5 Tuesday, June 14**

Analysis of Bohumil Hrabal’s surrealist novel ***I Served the King of England***. His approach to pre-war, war & post-war times in Czech lands, Sudetenland and in Europe. An anti-hero going through historical periods with optimism and congruence with nature and everything that surrounds him. Clips from the film of the same title made by Jiří Menzel (unless we could obtain and watch his whole surrealistic film).

**Class 6 Thursday, June 16**

Intro to Czech New Wave. Milos Forman’s cinematic vision in his Czech classic ***Loves of a Blonde***, and his allegory: ***Firemen’s Ball***. Study films composition and structure, non-actors’ acting, use of dialogues, surprises and climaxes relying on Forman’s approaches to screenwriting, camera angles, colors, and choice of details. Introduction to general screenwriting and how screenplay composition differs from story playwriting and story writing. Guest lecture on aspects of screenplay writing and actual making a short film based on a screenplay will be virtually introduced by actual filmmakers. Students will be presenting ideas on their screenplay.

*4th week*

**Class 7 Tuesday, June 21**

**Midterm papers draft** (mainly the idea/structure of your own screenplay or a story, which will be 5-7 pages long) by midnight on Monday, July 20. Students’ idea will be presented during class and after receiving comments for improvement by the instructor and the guest filmmakers, the final screenplay (or story) will be submitted by Wednesday night, July 22. Guest lecture continues on aspects of the actual making a short film based on students’ screenplay ideas will be virtually continued by actual filmmakers. Each student presents ideas on his/her screenplay.

**Class 8 Thursday, June 23**

Communist system introduced. Studying the Post-Warsaw Pact period in Czechoslovakia: Václav Havel as a dissident playwright. Discussing his work ***Disturbing the Peace*** with focusing on his struggle and literary achievements during the period of Normalization (1970s and 1980s). Covering Václav Havel’s political, economic and artistic views, and discussing his play ***Largo Desolato***as a piece documenting his time as a political prisoner, leading to his becoming first post-Communist President of Czechoslovakia.

*5th week*

**Class 9 Tuesday, June 28**

Discussing Milan Kundera’s classic ***The Unbearable Lightness of Being***: Parmenides’s idea to lightness/weight and Nietzsche’s doctrine of the Eternal Return, the metaphor of Grand March, role of misunderstanding, the author's meditation on kitsch, the political canvas of the novel and its characters’ development and search for meaning in life. Compare with Philip Kaufman’s film ***The Unbearable Lightness of Being*** of the same title: the leitmotif of predestination, the vertigo of weakness, use of film techniques, “the unbearable long/ness of the film.” The role and function of Beethoven’s music in the novel.

*Last class*

**Class 10 Thursday, June 30**

The history turns around: discussing Jan Svěrák’s film ***Kolja*** to conclude the period of Soviet occupation and renewed hope in the Velvet and post-Velvet Revolution times. Discussing Milan Kundera’s novel ***Ignorance***: emigration and home return in the view of Odysseus’s journey. Issues of the subconscious, memories, illusions, revenge, and ideas of forgetting. Influence of Kafka and Freud. The everlasting impact of European history on Kundera’s fiction, and his return to it.

**Final Papers due on Friday, July 1, 2022, by midnight.** While the topic is free, it is necessary to cover several works studied during the course and/or by using subsidiary comparative works (not necessarily studied in this course). The final paper should be 8-10 pages long.

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