

Cultural History of the Czech Lands

The course will give the students an outline of Czech history and its connections with European developments. Attention will be given to the way in which history is reflected in Czech arts and literature, as arts and literature have often contributed significantly to the political life of the country.

A brief outline of the history of art and architecture will present the most important periods and will be supported with slides recommending the students the most significant places of interest in this country.

The course will also show the important role of music in the cultural life of this nation.

HISTORY:

- Celtic, Germanic and Slavonic tribes on the territory of the Czech state. The beginnings of the Czech state and its relations to the Holy Roman Empire. Přemyslid dynasty.
- The House of Luxembourg. Growth of national life under Charles IV and Wenceslas IV.
- Jan Hus and reformists after his death, religious wars of 15th century. King George of Poděbrady and his peace initiatives. Decline of royal power under the Jagiellon dynasty.
- The arrival of Habsburg dynasty. Catholicism and Protestantism. Rudolph II. The Thirty Years' War and defeat of the Czech estates in 1620.
- Enlightenment and reforms of Maria Theresa and Joseph II. The National Revival. Revolution of 1848 and reaction. Growth of Czech nationalism.
- Thomas Garrigue Masaryk and his revolt in exile. The establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918 and life between the wars. Munich Pact and its consequences. World War II. Communist coup in February 1948. Prague Spring 1968. November 1989.

FINE ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE:

- Romanesque Art – impressive, monumental. Architecture: rotundas, basilicas, burgher houses in towns. Painting: illuminated manuscripts, mural paintings.
- Gothic style in the Czech Lands. Architecture: Early Gothic, High Gothic, Late Gothic connected respectively with Přemyslid, Luxembourg and Jagiellon dynasties. Mural and panel painting. “Beautiful style” in painting and sculpture. Rosenberg court in South Bohemia. Gothic towns and castles.
- Renaissance - connection with preceding Gothic style. New life style: mansions, country houses. Renaissance towns in Bohemia and Moravia.
- Mannerism – Rudolph II and his court. Rudolph’s collections; melancholy of the age. Scientists in Prague: T. Hájek, Tycho Brahe, J. Kepler, J. Jesenius.
- Baroque – based on contrasts, principle of absolutism. Artistic dynasties from Italy, Bavaria, France.
Architecture: churches, monasteries, palaces, towns. Baroque Gothic as a specific element in the architecture of the Czech Lands – Santini, Dientzenhofer, Lurago, Carrati, Mathey, Fisher von Erlach. Sculpture: Brokoff, Braun. Painters: Škréta, Brandl, Kupecký, Reiner, etc.
- 19th century art & the National Revival. Architecture: historical styles (new Romanesque, new Gothic, new Renaissance). From the Estates Theatre to the

National Theatre. Sculptors: decorative style, monumental realism (Myslbek, Šaloun, Sucharda). Painting: first half of the century – romantic influence, later generation of the National Theatre; end of the century – inspiration from Paris for both classical tradition and Czech impressionism.

- **20th century art – modernism in architecture, development of arts between the wars. Contemporary trends.**

MUSIC (tapes will be played):

- **Early beginnings of music, church hymns (Lord Have Mercy, Hymn to St. Wenceslas), Latin liturgy (Budeč). German influence at royal court - minnesäng. Huss's influence.**
- **Reformation encouraged sacred music, “common” music. Literary fraternities. Court collegium musicum and Ferdinand I, Rudolph II; Rosenberg court in South Bohemia. Music as a part of general education and everyday life.**
- **Baroque music in churches and aristocratic palaces (instrumental music), needs of representation. Michna, Vejvanovský. Černohorský, Zelenka – “the Czech Bach”.**
- **Classical period saw fortunate fusion of European musical developments with typical features of Czech folk musical tradition. Fluent transition from Baroque into Classicism. Sacred music – F. X. Brixi; domestic tradition – cantores (Linek, Ryba). Mozart in Prague. Music moved into concert halls.**
- **Romantic influences. Smetana and Dvořák. 1894 – Czech Philharmonic (independent since 1901). Fibich, Foerster, Novák, Suk, Ostrčil, Janáček, Martinů.**

CZECH LITERATURE:

- **Czech literature is more than 1000 years old – the oldest of the Slavic literatures, can match French and German literatures in longevity. Medieval chronicles and legends reflect political and cultural tensions of the age (Cosmas, Dalimil). Beginnings of drama.**
- **Huss’s reform of Czech orthography, literature connected with Hussitism. The invention of printing press. Unitas Fratrum, est. 1457.**
- **Humanism in Bohemia (15th & 16th centuries) never reached a wider public and remained the property of the educated elite who had contacts with foreign centres. Books on systems of law; travel books.**
- **The Habsburgs defeated the Protestants of Bohemia in 1620, after which Protestantism was eradicated and Bohemia was brought under direct rule within the Austrian Habsburg domain. The (largely Protestant) Bohemian nobility was crushed and replaced by newcomers with little knowledge of Czech. Under the Habsburgs, the literary traditions of the past two centuries were proscribed, and it was only among political exiles that Czech literature survived at all.**
- **Jan Amos Comenius (1592-1670) – bishop of the Unitas Fratrum; his work was the synthesis of Humanism and Reformation. Famous for his innovations in methods of teaching, especially languages. He favoured the learning of Latin to facilitate the study of European culture. His aim – encyclopaedic knowledge of the world. Subordinated rational understanding to religion.**
- **Baroque literature addressed almost exclusively to the primitive popular masses and adapted to their interests and taste – inferior to the visual arts of the period.**

Elements of imagination & emotion, mysticism, expressiveness, paradoxes. Because of these paradoxes, the literature of Baroque writers was rejected “en masse” by the Enlightenment. Activities of the Jesuits; development of local history and geography.

- **National Revival: ideas of patriotism & national reawakening. Tendencies to learn & idealise the national past; penetrate into the essence of national soul and make it into a new creative principle; the pan-Slavic ideas. Development of the language, the drama became the vehicle of the new trends.**
- **Romantic wave – K. H. Mácha, the greatest Czech poet. Influence of Byron.**
- **Literature after 1848 wavered between romanticism & realism; writers fought on barricades, suffered imprisonment & interest in real life, attracted to social reform × previous idyllic tone. K. Havlíček – critical journalism; B. Němcová – beginnings of feminism; J. Neruda.**
- **End of 19th century – L’art pour l’art movement, oriented toward foreign literature, cosmopolitan spirit; Czech literature finally integrated into general European culture. Numerous translations; purpose – to catch up with Europe.**
- **Battle about the authenticity of the hoax “medieval” manuscripts.**
- **With the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, Czech literature flourished. Karel Čapek – novelist and playwright. His best plays exposed the problems of a centralized, mechanized society of the 20th century. Jaroslav Hašek (“The Good Soldier Schweik”), Vladislav Vančura.**
- **Before the destruction of Czech Jewry during the war and the expulsion of the German minority at the end of the war, Bohemia and Moravia had a strong German literary tradition. About the mid-19th century, Adalbert Stifter's descriptions of nature and the common people inspired local followers in southern Bohemia. The German-Jewish group of writers in Prague in the first half of the 20th century – Franz Kafka, R. M. Rilke, Franz Werfel, Max Brod – achieved international recognition.**
- **Between 1918 and 1945 – Josef Hora, František Halas, Vítězslav Nezval, and Jaroslav Seifert presented lyrical poetry of the highest quality. After WW2, however, the newly established communist regime suppressed free literary activity and permitted only works conforming to the restrictive tenets of Socialist Realism. Czech writing consequently underwent a marked decline.**
- **After the relaxation in the early 1960s, the novels of Josef Škvorecký and Milan Kundera, the short stories of Bohumil Hrabal, and the plays of Václav Havel began attracting international attention. In the wake of the Soviet-led invasion in 1968, many of these writers were suppressed in Czechoslovakia, though their reputations continued to grow abroad. Of the writers who emigrated to the Western nations, Kundera and Škvorecký soon attained prominence in their adopted countries. During that same period, belated interest was shown abroad in the achievements of Czech lyric poetry in the interwar period, and Seifert, its chief surviving representative, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984.**
- **After the democratic revolution of 1989, free literature flourished, and the playwright Václav Havel, who had been a dissident, became president of Czechoslovakia and, later, of the Czech Republic.**

Required reading:

- Petr Čornej: **Fundamentals of Czech History**, Práh Publishers, 1992
- Jiří Pokorný: **The Czech Lands 1918-1994**, Práh Publishers, 1994

Recommended reading:

- Derek Sayer: **The Coasts of Bohemia**, Princeton University Press, 1998
- Peter Demetz: **Prague in Black and Gold (The History of a City)**, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press 1997
- Angelo Maria Ripellino: **The Magic Prague**, Picador 1992
- J. V. Polišíenský: **History of Czechoslovakia in Outline**, Bohemia International, 1991

Prerequisites: None.

Instructor:

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Graduated at Prague University of Economics and at Faculty of Arts of Charles University (English and Sociology), studied in Great Britain, India, Ireland and USA. Member of the chamber orchestra of Charles University. Translated books for the foremost Czech publishing houses (R. Brautigan, B. Chatwin, J. Fowles, E. Hemingway, R. Kipling, H. Miller, V. S. Naipaul, T. Pynchon, J. Steinbeck, Thomas Wolfe).

In 1977 he became a member of the English Department at the University of Economics, Prague.

Since 1992 he has been involved in the Central and East European Studies Programme at the University of Economics, Prague, mainly as a guarantor of the course on Cultural History of the Czech Lands.

How to obtain credits:

70% – essay;

30% – attendance.