

# IAH 241C: Understanding Eastern Europe through Literature and Cinema

**Instructor:**

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Off hours: M 10:00-11:00 / W 11:00-  
12:00 or by appointment (email me!)

**Course:**

IAH 241C, Section 002  
MW 8:30-9:50  
ONLINE  
Fall 2020

**Note on class timing Fall 2020.** This class normally meets MW from 8:00 to 9:50. The move to online complicates this timing. I am going to move certain pieces of the course to D2L, including lectures and films. Since I am moving this material to D2L, we will be able to start class at 8:30 and we will not meet on the five days when a film is scheduled. In exchange, you promise to watch all of the lecture videos (without being too critical about the production values) and films attentively. So the assignment lists will look more crowded than usual, but that is because they include things that we normally do in class. NOTE that there will still be assignments due on the days we do not meet – follow the schedule and submit as assigned.

**What is IAH?** The mission of Integrative Studies in the Arts and Humanities is to help students become more familiar with ways of knowing in the arts and humanities and to be more knowledgeable and capable in a range of intellectual and expressive abilities. IAH courses encourage students to engage critically with their own society, history, and culture(s); they also encourage students to learn more about the history and culture of other societies. They focus on key ideas and issues in human experience; encourage appreciation of the roles of knowledge and values in shaping and understanding human behavior; emphasize the responsibilities and opportunities of democratic citizenship; highlight the value of the creative arts of literature, theater, music, and art; and alert us to important issues that occur among peoples in an increasingly interconnected, interdependent world. IAH courses:

- Cultivate habits of inquiry and develop investigative strategies from arts and humanities perspectives;
- Explore social, cultural, and artistic expressions and contexts;
- Act as culturally aware and ethically responsible citizens in local and global communities;
- Critically assess, produce, and communicate knowledge in a variety of media for a range of audiences; and
- Recognize and understand the value of diversity and the significance of interconnectedness in the classroom and beyond.

**IAH and the MSU Diversity Requirement.** This course is designated as International (I) and has been approved as fulfilling one course toward the University Diversity Requirement. Courses designated as International (I) emphasize international or global issues, ideas, and perspectives. The “I” designates a focus on one or more non-U.S. contexts and diversity topics as they unfold in these contexts. Non-U.S. examples and

readings play a dominant role in shaping the lens through which diversity is addressed. The learning objectives and outcomes of the course will emphasize this designation and provide a guide for how this course furthers understanding of diversity at MSU and beyond.

**Course Description.** This course aims, through an examination of literature and film, to explore Eastern Europe and its central place in European history, art, and culture. One major focus will be the ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity of the area. Another will be the experience and response of the people of Eastern Europe to the horrors of World War II and oppressive rule after the war. We will also look at the effect of exile from Eastern Europe on many of the writers and filmmakers in the course.

**Course Goals.** The basic goals are to increase student knowledge of the major names and themes in Eastern European literature and film, increase understanding of how ethnic and religious diversity shaped history and culture here, increase awareness of the experiences and responses of the people to World War II and subsequent communist rule, and study the theme of exile from one's native land and the effect it has on writers, filmmakers, and others as creative artists. Of special emphasis will be the choices that ordinary people were forced to make on a daily basis; this course will explore the role that regular people (can) play in creating and maintaining the very system that oppresses them.

**Fall 2020 and COVID-19:** On August 18 we found out our course would be taught entirely online. Some of what we usually do face to face will be conducted online through D2L. Here are some basic guidelines for how we will conduct classes by Zoom:

- Be on time as you would for any face-to-face class (that means starting the login process a few minutes before the start time);
- Try to find a dedicated space where you can focus on what we are doing in a distraction-free environment;
- Be aware of what is around you and behind you; we can all see it;
- Your screen name can easily be changed in Zoom, please place your preferred name there;
- Do not eat during class, it is highly distracting to others (an occasional sip of coffee is fine, but in general be aware that on Zoom we are all facing each other);
- Be aware of your microphone – is it on or off? Can others hear you / Do others want to hear what is going on around you?
- Your camera should be on; remember also the importance of providing visual feedback like smiling or nodding to whomever is speaking.
- Let me know as soon as you can about any problems you're having completing the assignments and attending class – we will work something out!
- Take care of your health and let me know if you have any concerns about your health or those around you (both physical and mental).

**Submitting Assignments Online.** Being able to provide good written feedback is important to me and essential for your experience in this class. The feedback mechanism in D2L is clunky, so all written assignments will be submitted and “returned” to you through Google Drive. For the fall semester of 2020, you will have your own folder

inside my Google Drive, to which you will submit all of your written assignments. Using Google Drive like this will make feedback easier and allow me to make the feedback more substantial and meaningful. You will receive a link, and only you and Prof. Merrill will have access to your folder (using your MSU email).

**File Types:** Please submit all work in .doc or .pdf format. It is very hard to give feedback on .jpg files so please submit them only as a last resort. For journals and papers I highly recommend using ONE Google doc all semester for each type of assignment, putting the newest journal or paper at the top. The result will be a really nice portfolio of all the writing you have done all semester. If you write journals by hand you are welcome to submit .pdf scans. THE EASIEST WAY for all of us will be for you to create a google doc within the folder and use that every time (rather than uploading a .doc file, which I then have to convert)!

**Grades:** The actual grades will be kept on D2L; please check your D2L gradebook to make sure you have received the proper credit for everything you have done.

**Naming Files:** Please give all files or sections of files clear names: Last name, short date, and short description.

**How to scan .pdf from your phone:**

- iPhone (must have “to my iPhone” enabled under Notes:

<https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT210336>

- Android:

<https://support.google.com/drive/answer/3145835?co=GENIE.Platform%3DAndroid&hl=en>

**BOOKS.** The following books have been ordered for this course. Please try to obtain the editions listed below, because we will be making frequent reference to page numbers in class as we do close readings of the text:

Hupchick, Dennis P. and Harold E. Cox. *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Eastern Europe*. Palgrave: 2001. ISBN 0-312-23985-8.

Borowski, Tadeusz. *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*. Penguin, 1992. ISBN 978-0140186246.

Kundera, Milan. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. HarperCollins Perennial Classics, 1999. ISBN 0-06-093213-9.

-----, *The Joke*. HarperCollins Perennial Classics, 1993. ISBN 006099505X (complete edition, which is over 300 pages).

Tišma, Aleksandar. *The Book of Blam*. Harcourt (Harvest Books), 1998 or newer edition. ISBN 0-15-600841-6.

In addition, you should be following current events in Eastern Europe in at least one major newspaper. I recommend the BBC. We will spend time in class discussing major stories that concern Eastern Europe.

**Films.** We will view and discuss the following films. All are available in the library to take out and view. Films marked \*are available streaming through the MSU library:

Kadar, Jan. *The Shop On Main Street* (Obchod na korze, 1965)

Kaszyński, Oskar. *Segment '76* (2003)

\*Polanski, Roman. *Knife in the Water* (Nóż w wodzie, 1962)  
Forman, Milos. *The Firemen's Ball* (Hoři, má panenka, 1967)  
\*Chytilová, Vera. *Daisies* (Sedmikrasky, 1967)  
Dragojevic, Srdjan. *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (Lepa sela lepo gore, 1997)

### **Course requirements (% of grade)**

**0. Syllabus quiz (1%).** On D2L you will find a quiz about the syllabus. Read through the syllabus, pay attention on the first day of class, and take the quiz before the start of the second day of class. This quiz closes at the end of the Add/Drop period.

**1. Attendance and participation (10%).** Attendance means being physically present in the room **for the entire class period**. You will not succeed academically if you do not come to class. Even if you have not done the assignment for a given day, come to class – skipping only compounds the problem. Calling me after you missed class and telling me you were sick does not excuse your absence. Being absent does not excuse you from doing the assigned work. Leaving during class will be considered an absence.  $29/29 = 100\%$ ;  $28/29 = 96.5\%$ ;  $27/29 = 93\%$ , and so on. It is up to you to keep track of work you may have missed while absent. Participation means coming to class prepared and ready to contribute, no matter what the format of the day's class happens to be. The more you actively participate, the more you will get out of the class.

**2. Reading quizzes (7%).** The course D2L page contains multiple-choice reading quizzes that should be completed before the class in which we will be discussing the assigned pages. The goal of these quizzes is to check your comprehension of the reading. You may take each quiz as many times as you need to achieve a score of 100% (5 of 5). The quizzes will close after the reading is due.

The reading quizzes cover:

- *The Joke*: each chapter has a separate quiz
- *This Way for the Gas*: larger stories have separate quizzes
- *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*: each chapter has a separate quiz (7)
- *The Book of Blam*: chapters 1-5, 6-8, 9-11, 12-end (so they do not always line up with the assignments)

**3. Oral reports (4%).** For each of the four sections of the course you will have one oral report topic assigned to you (by last name). The point of these reports is to provide valuable context to the books we are reading. You should prepare your oral report as you would a journal. I will call on students randomly to say what they learned about their topic; everyone will hand in their notes for their report and it will be graded the same way the journals are graded.

**4. Journals (15%).** I will ask you to keep a journal of your reactions to the literature we read. You may keep the journal in notebooks or as a series of loose pages (typed is fine). You should complete a journal for every day's reading (except the maps). So there is an entry due for every day when we are completing any reading (poems, articles, one of our four books - not just one entry per book!). Make sure your name is on it. Clearly label each entry with the date and the pages you read for that day. The content of the journal is

up to you. You may discuss something about the reading that caught your attention, something you enjoyed, or important themes you see developing. If you are stuck, you may start by saying whether you liked the reading and why / why not. Try for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a page, or more if you have small pages or large handwriting. Each entry should do (at least) two things: convince the reader that you did the reading, and convince the reader that you thought about the reading. They are also a good place to ask questions that you did not ask in class. Journals will be collected each class. Journals not in my hand by the end of class will be considered late; if I receive them before the next class you will receive  $\frac{1}{2}$  credit for them. After that, no credit will be given for journals more than one class late. From time to time class discussion will be started by calling on someone randomly to share the contents of their journal with the class.

**5. Film quizzes (4%).** As with the readings, after each film there will be a short quiz consisting of five random questions from a larger bank of questions about the film. You may take the quiz as many times as you need to receive a score of 100%.

**6. Historical Context Quizzes (8%).** There will be four short quizzes in class based on ID's from the four sections of our course. The *Historical Atlas* and class lectures will be all you need to answer the ID's. There will be some overlap among the sections. Quizzes will consist of four IDs (maximum 6 points each) and a 25<sup>th</sup> point from current events.

**6. Position Papers (28%).** Almost every week (mostly Mondays) you will turn in a position paper that asks you to briefly research a topic and then respond. The response will usually include choosing a side and providing a rational argument for why you chose that particular side. See the separate sheet on D2L that lists topics and provides grading criteria.

**7. Final Paper (12%).** In this course we will write one final paper of 3-4 pages. You will have a choice of topics (see below). These papers will ask you to carefully consider the works we examined in this course and come to conclusions that are supported by the texts. In this paper you should clearly and concisely state your thesis and then support it with evidence from the books and films (and any other texts). The first goal of these papers is to have you think in depth about the meaning of these works in a comparative way; what do they say about one larger topic? The second is to help you effectively convey that meaning to your reader in clear and concise writing that has a clear thesis and has no filler. You do not need (and should not use) any outside courses for these papers.

**8. Final exam (10%).** The final exam for this course will be on Monday, December 14, 7:45-9:45 am. Mark your calendars now. The final exam will include a map quiz (same material as the first day of class) and an instructor's choice section (which will include, among other things, quotes from the novels we read). **2020: This year's final will be online so the format is subject to change. We will discuss before Thanksgiving.**

**NOTE ON LATE ASSIGNMENTS:** All assignments are due in class on the day specified on the syllabus (please note all days NOW). Late assignments that receive number grades will lose two points (i.e. 86 to 84) for each **day** (24-hour period, not class

day) they are late. Journals will receive half credit if turned in one class day late, after that they receive no credit. If there is a problem that will prevent you from handing in an assignment on time, arrangements must be made before the due date.

**GRADE SCALE:**

90-100 = 4.0	75-79 = 2.5	60-64 = 1.0
85-89 = 3.5	70-74 = 2.0	00-59 = 0.0
80-84 = 3.0	65-69 = 1.5	

**Plagiarism.** Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be dealt with as such in this course. We will discuss plagiarism before writing our first paper. Before then, familiarize yourself with the MSU Ombudsman’s resources on plagiarism:

<http://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/plagiarism.html>

The best way to avoid plagiarism in this course is to not put yourself in a position where it could occur, even “accidentally.” Only the position papers ask you to research a topic; the novel papers, film papers, and journals involve only you and the text.

**Evaluations**

Michigan State University takes seriously the opinion of students in the evaluation of the effectiveness of instruction and has implemented the Student Instructional Rating System (SIRS) to gather student feedback (<https://sirsonline.msu.edu>). This course utilizes the online SIRS system, and you will receive an e-mail during the last two weeks of class asking you to fill out the SIRS web form at your convenience. In addition, participation in the online SIRS system involves grade sequestration, which means that the final grade for this course will not be accessible on STUINFO during the week following the submission of grades for this course unless the SIRS online form has been completed. Alternatively, you have the option on the SIRS website to decline to participate in the evaluation of the course. We hope, however, that you will be willing to give us your frank and constructive feedback so that we may instruct students even better in the future. If you access the online SIRS website and complete the online SIRS form or decline to participate, you will receive the final grade in this course as usual once final grades are submitted.

**Students with disabilities.** If you have a disability that may prevent you from completing the course requirements to the best of your abilities, see me as soon as possible so that we can ensure your successful completing of this course.

**FINAL PAPER TOPICS.** When you are writing, use specific examples to support your points. This is a good way to review the semester.

1. The books and films we examined explore human nature and human responses to repressive environments. As part of their exploration, they look carefully at the dynamic between individuals and groups. What conclusions do they reach about human nature? What role does human nature play in leading to the oppression they describe? Use at least three films or books in your discussion.

2. Our books and films closely examine the question of guilt. In their worlds, who is guilty and of what? What happens to the guilty (even years later)? Why? Is the world divided into innocents and guilty or is it more complicated than that? What do our books and films say about guilt and responsibility? Who is guilty and who is not? Of what? Who is judged, and who judges? Use at least three films or books in your discussion.

3. Our books and films explore questions of memory and history. What events do their characters (and narrators!) recall and how? Are people trapped in history? Who remembers past events (and how) and who does or does not remember them, or tries to forget them? Why is memory so important in this region and time period? Use at least three films or books in your discussion.

#### COURSE SCHEDULE:

### Introduction and Context

**1. Wednesday, September 2:** Introduction to our course. Why study Eastern Europe? Eastern Europe on the map. Eastern Europe today.

Assignment for 9/9:

- Purchase at least *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Eastern Europe* and *The Joke* (the first two books we will need).
- Read over this entire syllabus; read the schedule very carefully. Note what assignments are due when. Take the syllabus quiz on D2L.
- Read Slavenka Drakulic's "The First Person Singular" ("Pronouns" on D2L) (first journal entry due Wednesday)
- Quick thought assignment to warm up for the semester. In one paragraph, answer this question: what is more important, freedom or security? Why? Give concrete examples. Is this an easy or difficult question? Why? (this will be a separate journal from Drakulic).
- Watch Lecture Video: Early History of Eastern Europe Part I

**Monday, September 7: No class, Happy Labor Day!**

**2. Wednesday, September 9:** The Roman Empire, Christianity, and the early history of Eastern Europe. Eastern Europe on the eve of World War II.

Assignment for 9/14:

- Read *Historical Atlas* Maps 1-9 and 47-50 (read the text on the left and study the map on the right carefully). Start working on the first set of ID's.
- Watch Lecture Video: Early History of Eastern Europe Part II
- First weekly position paper due
- Read **these two poems** (also on D2L) and bring copies of the poems to class so we can do a close reading (this is a journal entry):
  1. Czeslaw Milosz, "Campo Dei Fiori"  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49751/campo-dei-fiori>
  2. Wladyslaw Szlengel, "It Is About Time"  
<http://www.zchor.org/szlengel/poems4.htm#juz> (scroll down a little for English)

**3. Monday, September 14:** Eastern Europe and World War II. The Holocaust. How to read. Discuss poems. Your position papers. Start *The Shop On Main Street*

Assignment for 9/16:

- Read *The Joke*, Parts One and Two (journal due, as are reading quizzes for chapters 1 and 2). Make sure you look at the discussion questions so you can be thinking of them as you read.
- Prepare your topic for **Oral Report 1 (we'll go over next Monday)**.
- Watch Lecture Video: WWI to the Rise of Communism

**4. Wednesday, September 16:** NO CLASS: View *The Shop On Main Street* on your own and be ready to discuss. Remember to complete the film quiz.

Assignment for 9/21:

- Read *The Joke*, Parts Three and Four (journal due, also reading quizzes for parts 3 and 4).
- Next position paper due Monday.
- Watch Lecture Video: Communism

**5. Monday, September 21:** Eastern Europe after World War II. Communism. Stalinism. The Cold War. Discuss *The Joke* and *The Shop on Main Street*.

Assignment for 9/23:

- Read *The Joke*, Part Five (journal and reading quiz due next class – **no more reminders**).
- Prepare for Quiz 1

**6. Wednesday, September 23: Quiz on ID sheet 1** (Background / World War II and Communism). *The Joke* and Eastern Europe under Communism.

Assignment for 9/28:

- Finish *The Joke*.
- Next position paper
- The Shop On Main Street quiz (as soon as we have finished viewing the film)

**7. Monday, September 28:** *The Joke*. Life under Communism.

Assignment for 9/30:

- Prepare your oral report for *This Way for the Gas* (**Oral Report 2**)
- Read *This Way for the Gas* (pages 11-26 “Intro” and 29-49 “This Way”). Make sure you look at the discussion questions NOW so you can be thinking of them as you read.
- Watch Lecture Video: Polish History I

## Poland

**8. Wednesday, September 30: Oral report 2.** The history of Poland. Tadeusz Borowski and *This Way for the Gas*.

Assignment for 10/05:

- Next position paper



- Read *This Way for the Gas* 50-97 (“Harmenez,” “People who”).
- Read *Historical Atlas* Maps 19, 23, 26, 29-31, 40-43.
- Watch Lecture Video: Polish History II.

**9. Monday, October 5:** Borowski and *This Way for the Gas*. Polish history continued. The Holocaust.

Assignment for 10/7:

- Read *Historical Atlas* Maps 49, 50.
- *This Way for the Gas*, 98-142 (“Our Home”)
- Watch Lecture Video: Polish History III

**10. Wednesday, October 7:** *This Way for the Gas*. Roman Polanski.

Assignment for 10/12:

- Next position paper
- Finish *This Way for the Gas*.

**11. Monday, October 12:** NO CLASS: View Polanski’s *Knife in the Water*.

Assignment for 10/14:

- Prepare for Poland ID quiz (add Drakulic Monsters pieces somewhere with no journal)

**12. Wednesday, October 14: Poland ID Quiz.** *Knife in the Water*.

Assignment for 10/19:

- Next position paper
- Read *Historical Atlas* Maps 19-21, 27, 30, 31, 33, 34, 40-42, 48, 49, 50.
- Prepare **Oral Report 3** (*Unbearable Lightness of Being*)
- *Knife in the Water* quiz as soon as we have finished the film

**13. Monday, October 19: Oral Report 3.** Czech history.

Assignment for 10/21:

- Read *Unbearable Lightness* 1-35 (Part One) CAREFULLY
- Watch Lecture Video: Czech History I

## Czechoslovakia

**14. Wednesday, October 21:** Milan Kundera and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Review map.

Assignment for 10/26:

- Reread *Unbearable Lightness* 1-35 (Part One). Make sure you look at the discussion questions so you can be thinking of them as you read. Write a second journal about these pages. How is it the second time?
- Next position paper
- Watch Lecture Video: Czech History II

**15. Monday, October 26:** Czech history continued. Vera Chytilova and *Daisies*.  
Assignment for 10/28:

- Read *Unbearable Lightness* 37-78 (Part Two).
- Watch Lecture Video: Czech History III

**16. Wednesday, October 28:** NO CLASS: View Vera Chytilova's *Daisies*.  
Assignment for 11/2:

- Read *Unbearable Lightness* 79-127 (Part Three).
- Next position paper
- *Daisies* quiz as soon as we have finished the film

**17. Monday, November 2:** Discussion of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.  
Assignment for 11/4:

- Read *Unbearable Lightness* 131-171 (Part Four).

**18. Wednesday, November 4:** NO CLASS: View Milos Forman's *The Firemen's Ball*.  
Assignment for 11/9:

- *Unbearable Lightness* 175-278 (Parts Five, Six).
- Next position paper

**19. Monday, November 9:** Discussion of *Unbearable Lightness*. Making a film version.

Assignment for 11/11:

- Finish *Unbearable Lightness of Being*
- Prepare for the Czech ID quiz
- *Firemen's Ball* quiz as soon as we have finished the film

**20. Wednesday, November 11: Czech ID Quiz.** Final discussion of *Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

Assignment for 11/16:

- Next position paper
- Read *Concise Historical Atlas* Maps 16-18, 22, 24, 25, 28.
- Prepare **Oral Report 4**
- Watch Lecture Video: Balkan History I

## Yugoslavia

**21. Monday, November 16: Oral Report 4.** The History of the Balkans.  
Assignment for 11/18:

- Read *Concise Historical Atlas* Maps 31, 32, 35-39, 42, 47, 50-52.
- Read *The Book of Blam* pages 1-7 (Chapter 1)
- Watch Lecture Video: Balkan History II

**22. Wednesday, November 18:** Aleksandar Tišma and *The Book of Blam*. Yugoslav history.

Assignment for 11/23:

- Read *The Book of Blam* 1-92 (Chapters 1-7; **Reread** Chapter 1). Make sure you look at the discussion questions so you can be thinking of them as you read.
- Next position paper
- Watch Lecture Video: Balkan History III

**23. Monday November 23:** The breakup of the former Yugoslavia. Begin *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*.

Assignment for 11/30:

- Read *The Book of Blam* 93-132 (Chapters 8-9).

**Wednesday, November 25:** No class, view *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*. Happy Thanksgiving!

**24. Monday, November 30:** Discuss *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*. Discuss film. The breakup of Yugoslavia.

Assignment for 12/2:

- The next position paper
- Read *The Book of Blam* 133-191 (Chapters 10-13).
- *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* quiz as soon as we have finished the film

**25. Wednesday, December 2:** Discussion of *The Book of Blam*. How to write an effective paper.

Assignment for 12/7:

- Finish *The Book of Blam*
- Yugoslavia/Balkans ID quiz
- Look at the topics for the final paper and think about which one you would like to write on. Prepare a thesis statement and outline (at least) for in-class discussion. The more you bring, the more feedback you will receive.

**26. Monday, December 7: Yugoslavia ID quiz.** In-class editing and brainstorming for the final paper. Final discussion of *The Book of Blam*.

Assignment for 12/9:

- Write final paper
- Bring all your books to the next class!

**27. Wednesday, December 9:** Final paper due. Semester summary. **IDs / stump the instructor**

Assignment:

- Study for the final exam

**Final Exam: Monday, December 14, 7:45-9:45 am**