Czech and Jewish Culture in Bohemia: Poetry, Thought, Film and Novel

This class covers the highlights of Czech and Jewish culture produced on the territory of today’s Czech Republic. It starts with comparing the educational teachings of Rabbi Loew and the well-known educational reformer Jan Amos Comenius, two outstanding personalities of the 17th century Bohemia. We then quickly move into the 20th century comparison of Czech and Jewish Poetry, as well as such outstanding Czech and Jewish novelists as Capek, Kafka, Poláček, Werfel, Kundera and others. Special emphasis is laid on the comparison of Czech and Jewish humor and philosophy of life. The famous Prague School thinkers like Trubetzkoy, Jakobson and Mathesius and their revolutionary theories of language and literature are a part of this class as well. Holocaust Jewish writers, such as Arnošt Lustig, Ladislav Fuks et al. are analyzed. The class concludes with sessions on Hrabal and Havel. Two films are watched during the class and two outside the class, portraying the Czech and Jewish humor as well as the Jewish tragedy of the 20th century.