

## **‘Masaryk, Čapek, Forman, Kundera, Havel: Czech Names, Global Legacies’**

This lecture course considers five of the biggest names in 20<sup>th</sup> century Czech history and culture.

First on the list is T.G. Masaryk, professor of philosophy and an embodiment of the principals of liberal democracy and humanism, who in 1918 became the first Czechoslovak president.

Our discussion of his legacy will be followed by a consideration of his close friend Karel Čapek, author of sci-fi works that have startled and mesmerised generations of readers and writers. In his play *R.U.R.* (1920) he introduced the word ‘robot’ to the world.

The next personality to discuss will be the inimitable film director Miloš Forman. We shall examine his contribution to the 1960s Czechoslovak New Wave, as well as works from his American period – including his Oscar-winning films *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975) and *Amadeus* (1984).

After that we shall focus on Milan Kundera, perhaps the most famous Czech writer. In the case of his career there are also two parts – the Czech and the French – to consider, as well as his conception of a European writer.

Closing our list is Václav Havel, the playwright and once-political prisoner, who in 1993 became the first Czech president.

What these five personalities have in common is that their point of departure, and the essence of their life’s work, was distinctly Czech – but that they also, thanks to their strength of character and unique vision, made their distinctive mark in the world. Five Czech giants – five world-conquering stories.

## **‘Czech Literature in the 21st Century: National Roots and Global Influences’**

This course considers several of the most significant and exciting writers from the contemporary Czech literary scene, including Emil Hakl, Jan Balabán, Irena Dousková, Magdaléna Platzová, Marek Šindelka and others.

We shall examine the main themes of their works and discuss what in today’s globalised world characterises a Czech author or a Czech book. We shall also consider the legacy of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Czech national revival and identify specific reflections of that period in today’s literary production.

Special attention will in this context be paid to *Kytice* (Bouquet, 1853) – a collection of scary folk-tales written in verse form. This crucial work of the revival movement has recently been translated into English, and there will be an opportunity to meet the translator, Susan Reynolds, at the end of the course.