Karel Čapek: *The White Disease*, handout

* Karel Čapek (1890-1938) was an influential Czech writer, playwright and critic. He has become best known for his science fiction, including his novel *War with the Newts* (Válka s mloky, 1936) and play *R.U.R.* (*Rossum's Universal Robots*, 1920), which introduced the word *robot*. He also wrote many politically charged works (especially plays) dealing with the social turmoil of his time. Influenced by American pragmatic liberalism, he campaigned in favor of free expression and strongly opposed the rise of both fascism and communism in Europe.
* *The White Disease (*Bílá nemoc)was written in 1937 as a response to the growing threat of Nazism.
* Adapted for the screen in the same year, directed by an prolific actor and director Hugo Haas.

QUESTIONS (you can rewatch the movie or its parts – link is in the interactive syllabus. Please read the play as well, we will work with it in class on March 30)

1. What is the structure and language of the play? Where and when is it set?
2. What does the name of the main character Galén refer to? Do other names of characters refer to something or someone?
3. When reading/watching the play, do you see some parallels with real historical events? Do some characters remind you of someone?
4. How do you understand the ending? What do you think Čapek is trying to say?
5. Based on the knowledge of the play, what do you think was Čapek´s life philosophy? What is his message?
6. Do you think the play would be relevant today? Should theatres stage it? Why? Why not?