

Advanced Readings in World Literature
ENGL 3325
CRN 14165
Fall Semester
Richard T. Gaughan
Irby 310
Course Syllabus

Unbearable Lightness: Kafka and Kundera

In some respects, Kafka and Kundera couldn't be more different. Kafka (1883-1924) was a Jew (albeit an assimilated Jew) and a subject of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Kundera, born five years after Kafka's death, is a thoroughly secular man who was a subject of the old Soviet Empire and is now a citizen of France. Kafka's stories tend to be unsettling and strange, dream-like and incomplete, while Kundera's are carefully crafted and usually feature philosophical meditations. If Kafka is often associated with dread and guilt, Kundera is famous for the "lightness" his characters often aspire to. However, different as they are in some respects, both writers wrote as outsiders to the dominant European cultural tradition and both were deeply interested in forces that threaten the individual. Whether the source of the threat comes from the Court and Castle or from Soviet tanks and Western self-indulgence, Kafka and Kundera see the modern individual as menaced by power, orthodoxy, or simply the inner contradictions of modernity. In this course we will read some of Kafka's and Kundera's most important works to see how two writers from the same part of the world but at different ends of the same century saw the human condition.

Required Texts:

Kafka, *"The Metamorphosis", "The Penal Colony," and other Stories*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, Schocken Books.

Kafka, *The Sons*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, Schocken Books.

Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, Schocken Books.

Kafka, *The Castle*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, Schocken Books.

Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. Michael Henry Heim, Penguin.

Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim, Harper.

Kundera, *Immortality*, trans. Peter Kussi, Harper.

Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, trans. Linda Asher, Grove.

Reading Schedule:

Kafka: "Letter to His Father"

"The Judgment"

"The Metamorphosis"

"In the Penal Colony"

"Hunger Artist"

The Trial: Chapters 1-2; 3-4; Chapter 5-p. 130; pp.130-180; and pp. 180-229.
The Castle: Chapters 1-3; 4-6; 7-11; 12-14; 15-p. 273; “Petitions”-18; 19-20.

Kundera: *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*: Parts One and Two; Parts Three and Four; Part Five; Part Six; Part Seven.

The Unbearable Lightness of Being: Part One; Part Two; Part Three; Part Four; Part Five; Part Six; Part Seven.

Immortality: Part One; Part Two; Part Three; Part Four; Part Five; Part Six; Part Seven.

The Art of the Novel” “The Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes,” Dialogue on the Art of the Novel,” “The Jerusalem Address.”

There will be three exams and one paper in this class. There will be one exam on Kafka, one exam on Kundera, and the final will cover both writers. All the exams will be in class and will ask you to analyze and interpret the works we are discussing.

The paper will give you a chance to write a more detailed analysis on any work you choose. Though it will involve a little research, it will be primarily your analysis and interpretation of the work. The paper will be 5-7 pages long. I would like to have the paper due late in the semester, but not at the very end. I will consult with each of you about what your paper topic will be.

Your final grade will be determined largely by your performance on the exams and the paper, but your attendance and participation can help your grade if it is a borderline grade.

Since this is an upper-division class, I assume you all know how to behave. If you take an interest in what we are doing, treat each other and me courteously, and do not cheat, you should do just fine. For the record, though, if you cheat, I will fail you for the course.

I don't allow electronic devices in my classes. They scare me. If you have any, please keep them out of sight.

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