



Kafka Americana: Fiction

Jonathan Lethem , Carter Scholz

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Previously published only in a signed, limited edition, *Kafka Americana* has achieved cult status. Norton now brings this reimagination of our labyrinthine world to a wider audience. In an act of literary appropriation, Lethem and Scholz seize a helpless Kafka by the lapels and thrust him into the cultural wreckage of twentieth-century America. In the collaboratively written "Receding Horizon," Hollywood welcomes Kafka as scriptwriter for Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*, with appropriately morbid results. Scholz's "The Amount to Carry" transports "the legal secretary of the Workman's Accident Insurance Institute" to a conference with fellow insurance executives Wallace Stevens and Charles Ives, to muse on what can and can't be insured. And Lethem's "K for Fake" brings together Orson Welles, Jerry Lewis, and Rod Serling in a kangaroo trial in which Kafka faces fraudulent charges. Taking modernism's presiding genius for a joyride, the authors portray an absurd, ominous world that Kafka might have invented but could never have survived.

Kafka Americana: Fiction Details

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Author : Jonathan Lethem , Carter Scholz

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From Reader Review Kafka Americana: Fiction for online ebook

M. Sarki says

I wrote a review of this book and it can be found here:

http://mewlhouse.hubpages.com/_1qsqsu...

Jamil says

the batman story in this is awesome.

Steev says

Sometimes a little too "clever" for its own good, but also a lot of fun.

Morticia says

Gregor Samsa ducked into a phone booth. "This looks," he said, 'like a job for a gigantic insect."

jessica says

Hilarious!

David Allen says

A neat idea, writing modern Kafka sendups, and the back cover story summaries made me laugh aloud. Of the five stories, though, I liked the first and last and found the middle three only intermittently amusing.

Lauren DeLong says

The two stories written by Carter Scholz were really a delight, and where the two stars come from. Jonathan Lethem is self-indulgent and far too pleased with himself as a writer (unduly, I would add.) The collaborative story was boring and trite; its attempts at meta-fiction fell woefully short of what I'm sure were very high hopes. Sincerely a disappointing read.

Isla McKetta says

This book left me torn. There were some brilliant passages, but I think I should have read it slower or with Kafka more present in my mind, or when I was in a better, more playful mood...Anyway, we didn't click the way I hoped we might. Though I will never look at my living room furniture the same way again.

Androo says

While not as good as Kafka, Lethem and Scholz's stories take him into the 21st century -- a time that knows of the Holocaust (something the Jewish Kafka did not live to experience), with a heaping dose of wit and a refreshing Kafkaesque sense of the absurd.

What's missing, or rather what I would have liked, would have been some sort of introduction, epilogue, or statement from the writers. Those unfamiliar with Kafka will not get the same enjoyment out of themes that pop up in more than one story.

Still, worth a read, especially for the Kafka aficionado.

Devin says

So po-mo that it seems a bit quaint now. Some of the pieces work better than the others, of course, but the premise of playing with Kafka is a compelling one that gives the overall collection a compelling momentum.

Ian says

This is a short and interesting book. It is a collection of five short stories written by two authors (Jonathan Lethem and Carter Scholz) in Kafka's bleak and straightforward style, complete with his darkness and humor. You do not have to be familiar with Kafka to read this, but it will help as many of the characters and situations contained within the book are pulled directly from the author these two are emulating. If you are looking for what Kafka's material might look like if he were writing today then you should check this book out.

Luci says

I wanted to love it. (I really like the idea of it.) But I just didn't. I probably would have appreciated it a lot more during my school years when I was obsessed with Kafka. Maybe there'll be time for it again in the future.

Shaun says

Somewhere it states this book of short stories by two obviously gifted writers has attained "cult status" not unlike "Catch-22." Well, to paraphrase Groucho Marx, "I wouldn't want to join a cult that would have me as a member." Admittedly, having read only one short story by Kafka -- "The Metamorphosis" -- I cannot profess to being well-acquainted with his paranoid inducing style of writing. Thus, something here has gotten lost in the translation. To be sure, both authors are exceptional writers. Perhaps if I were to spend the summer reading Franz Kafka's work, I too will see the humor and genius in this book ... and grudgingly join the club. Until then, I will wave the flag of ignorance and warning and give this book no more than two stars.

Mike Witcombe says

Strange and frequently beguiling, this collaborative short story collection (two apiece by Lethem and Scholz, one written together) is an intriguing curio. The pieces here range from deliberate cultural mashup (Lethem's 'The Notebooks of Bob K.') to dreamlike intertextual fable (Scholz's 'The Amount to Carry').

The range of reference is extensive - this is (unsurprisingly) best read by those with a reasonable knowledge of Kafka's work. Lethem's 'Notebooks', for example, splices Superhero mythology into Kafka's koan-like parables. Without knowledge of these parables, the story may seem disjointed and slightly pretentious - even with this knowledge, the story is at once overly forthright as a tribute and overly dense as a work in its own right. Scholz's tales, which rapidly ascend from banal realism to elegant fantasy, offer a more nuanced take on Kafka's legacy.

Best of the lot, however, is the jointly-written 'Receding Horizon' - a multi-layered and extraordinarily innovative alternative history, in which Kafka has emigrated to the United States and befriended filmmaker Frank Capra. The mechanisms of the story seem visible from the start, but the way the text intertwines divergent narratives makes these assumed structures change in front of the reader's eyes.

This is a quick read, and a rewarding one. Though by no means a classic (Philip Roth's 'Looking at Kafka' is a more elegant take on a similar range of topics), 'Kafka Americana' is a dizzyingly playful yet thoroughly enjoyable collection.

Derek Leedy says

enjoyable excursion... more like ballard without the bite, or kafka without the pathos... but give me stories that include Orson Welles and Rod Serling with Jerry Lewis's long hidden "day the clown cried" and there are enough insider references to rival Dennis Miller in his heyday.
