



Prague Palimpsest: Writing, Memory, and the City

Alfred Thomas

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A city of immense literary mystique, Prague has inspired writers across the centuries with its beauty, cosmopolitanism, and tragic history. Envisioning the ancient city in central Europe as a multilayered text, or palimpsest, that has been constantly revised and rewritten—from the medieval and Renaissance chroniclers who legitimized the city’s foundational origins to the modernists of the early twentieth century who established its reputation as the new capital of the avant-garde—Alfred Thomas argues that Prague has become a paradoxical site of inscription and effacement, of memory and forgetting, a utopian link to the prewar and pre-Holocaust European past and a dystopia of totalitarian amnesia.

Considering a wide range of writers, including the city’s most famous son, Franz Kafka, *Prague Palimpsest* reassesses the work of poets and novelists such as Bohumil Hrabal, Milan Kundera, Gustav Meyrink, Jan Neruda, Vít?zslav Nezval, and Rainer Maria Rilke and engages with other famous authors who “wrote” Prague, including Guillaume Apollinaire, Ingeborg Bachmann, Albert Camus, Paul Celan, and W. G. Sebald. The result is a comparative, interdisciplinary study that helps to explain why Prague—more than any other major European city—has haunted the cultural and political imagination of the West.

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