

Title: Milan Kundera and Wang Xiaobo: Sexuality as an Expression of Rebellion Against Oppressive Authority

Author: Karen von Kunes, Yale University

Abstract:

Search for happiness and struggle to find hope and intact spirit in most oppressive situations is tied to questions of morality and responsibility, and to rebellion against these values in works of 20th century writers, Franco-Czech Milan Kundera, and Chinese Wang Xiaobo, culturally distant yet philosophically and thematically related.

While in their novels sub-tones of sex act are politically related, sexuality itself can be examined as human spirit over the imposition of conformity with a theoretical approach to existentialism. Both Kundera and Wang depict sexuality in unsentimental but innovative ways. Kundera's Kafkaesque playful style that the author describes as light in form and heavy in its inquiry is close to Wang's. Wang in *Love and Bondage* is written in *zawen*, a satiric genre that easily provokes social and political arguments. If viewed as an emotional platform only, sexuality in Kundera's and Wang's writings is easily perceived as a detached motion of repetition, cruel lack of sentiments and morality. However, their erotic wit is a rebellion, absurd comedy aimed to flatten the cruel, provoke laughter and preserve sanity, creativity and individuality in politically oppressive situations.

The question of sexuality attached to morality is complex, multi-leveled and subjective, reflecting one's perception and purpose. Kundera calls for restraining from the reader's own morality when judging novel's characters' actions, and Steven Pinker, a cognitive scientist, goes even further by claiming that a society might benefit more from human individuals being engaged less in moralizing. It is these issues that are addressed in this paper in order to closely examine in what ways Milan Kundera's and Wang Xiaobo's novelistic characters find their individuality and freedom of spirit through sexual rebellion against social and political conformity.