

Title: The responsibility of the spectator: Milan Kundera's reading of Tolstoy  
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Many European writers and thinkers favor the position of the spectator of history over that of the active participants. This is due to the fact that the passive observers are the only ones who can retain their state of freedom and soundness of moral judgment. Consequently, in this unspoiled purity of judgment lies the very responsibility of the spectator.

The sympathy for abstinence from action and direct involvement in the violent course of history seems to be shared by Leo Tolstoy as well. In 'Anna Karenina' one of the main characters, Levin, discovers faith, and the need to live for what is good. This life-changing and striking in its simplicity realization leads Levin to another, much more concrete conclusion. In the final pages of the novel, Levin participates in a conversation about the Russian volunteers who are preparing to go to Serbia and fight against the Ottoman Empire in support of the orthodox uprisings in the mid 70s of the 19th century. Levin states that he does not share the popular excitement and is not willing to sacrifice his life when helping his Slav brothers. While Tolstoy, with Levin's voice, refuses to fight for the common Slavic cause, Milan Kundera makes one of his most-known characters, Teresa from 'The Unbearable Lightness of Being', carry Tolstoy's novel upon her arrival in Prague, shortly before the Soviet Union's invasion in 1968. Overall, I will argue that both novels question the motives behind proactive historical action and narrate the obstacles (psychological and civic) that the spectators must overcome in order to bear witness to the evolving private and public events. The paper will also deal with the question: what could happen, if, as in Kundera's novel, the position of the observer is threatened with political eradication?