

Kafka by Nicholas Murray. Little Brown 2004

Franz Kafka occupies a unique place in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, and few who have read his novels have failed to experience a range of emotions, inevitably involving a profound sense of curiosity about what sort of a man the author was.

Nicholas Murray's highly readable new biography answers many of those questions as well as being a compelling retelling of a troubled, disturbed and enigmatic life.

Murray details Kafka's tortured relationship with his father, his complex, self-hating and yet absorbed relationship with his Jewish heritage, the ill health which ended his life at the early age of forty, and his relationships with women, none of which ended in marriage.

As well as detailing Kafka's life Murray paints a vivid picture of the cultural milieu in which he lived, and the cities which also influenced him profoundly; he also comments in an illuminating way on Kafka's works, subtly encouraging the reader to face again the intellectual and emotional demands that they pose.

Nicholas Murray deserves much praise for shedding so much light on such a 'dark' individual, and for humanizing someone who emerges from the pages of his novels with such a forbidding persona.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh