Franz Kafka

NOVEMBER 22, 2024 TO APRIL 13, 2025

LARGE PRINT LABELS

The Morgan Library & Museum

Kafka and the Bodleian Library

This exhibition first appeared under the title *Kafka: Making of an Icon* at the Bodleian Library, Oxford University, which holds a significant collection of Franz Kafka's manuscripts thanks to the generosity of the author's nieces, Gertrude Kaufmann and Marianna Steiner, who bequeathed their shares in the archive. His nieces Věra Saudková and Helena Rumpoltová kindly agreed to deposit their share at the Bodleian, and most of the archive is now co-owned with their heirs. The Bodleian is also grateful to Miriam Schocken, who on behalf of the Schocken family via the Bodley's American Friends, made a gift of further Kafka papers and photographs. In 2011 Kafka's letters to his sister Ottla were purchased jointly by the Bodleian and the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach with generous support from British and international donors.

Kafka: Making of an Icon **was planned and curated by a team at the Bodleian Library, including: the Co-Directors of the Oxford Kafka Research Centre, Professor Carolin Duttlinger; Professor Katrin Kohl; and Professor Barry Murnane; along with Dr. Meindert Peters, Leverhulme Research Fellow; and**

Dr. Karolina Watroba, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at All Souls College, Oxford. It was supported by Ritchie Robertson, Emeritus Schwarz-Taylor Professor of German at Oxford, and Malgorzata Czepiel, Archivist at the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

Kafka's Fiction

Kafka's earliest surviving story is from 1902, and overall around ninety fictional works survive, some of them published during his lifetime. They range from very brief texts to unfinished novels and include some texts that Kafka abandoned as fragments.

SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS

Meditation (1912)
A Country Doctor (1920)
A Hunger Artist (proofs May 1924, published August 1924)

STORIES PUBLISHED INDIVIDUALLY AS BOOKS

The Judgment (1912, published 1916)
The Stoker: A Fragment (1912, published 1913)
The Metamorphosis (1912, published 1915)
In the Penal Colony (1914, published 1919)

NOVELS (UNFINISHED, PUBLISHED POSTHUMOUSLY)

Amerika: The Missing Person (1912–14, published 1927)
The Trial (1914–15, published 1925)
The Castle (1922, published 1926)

Kafka in Translation

This exhibition draws from the following translations, which, unless otherwise noted, were published by Schocken Books.

Diaries, translated by Ross Benjamin

Letters to Ottla and the Family, translated by Richard and Clara Winston

Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors, translated by Richard and Clara Winston

Letter to the Father, translated by Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins

Letters to Milena, translated by Philip Boehm

Letters to Felice, translated by James Stern and Elisabeth Duckworth

The Castle, translated by Mark Harman

Amerika: The Missing Person, translated by Mark Harman

The Complete Stories, multiple translators

The Aphorisms of Franz Kafka, translated by Shelley Frisch (Princeton University Press, 2022)

Franz Kafka: The Drawings, edited by Andreas Kilcher, translated by Kurt Beals (Yale University Press, 2021)

When Franz Kafka was born in 1883, Prague was part of the multiethnic Habsburg Empire. Following the violent reconfiguration of Eastern Europe during World War I, it became the capital of the new state of Czechoslovakia. Though Kafka spent nearly his entire life in Prague, including the war years, his attitude toward the city was ambivalent. In a letter from 1902 he described Prague as “a little mother” with “claws,” who wouldn’t let him go.

In 1908, after years of construction, Prague’s Čech Bridge over the Vltava River opened right in front of the Kafka family’s apartment. This film, shot from a tram crossing the new bridge, cuts out just as their building comes into view on the right.

Jan Kříženecký (1868–1921)
***A Ride through Prague in an Open Tram*, 1908**
Digital black-and-white video, transferred from 35 mm film, silent, 2 min.
Národní filmový archiv, Prague

From 1907 onward the Kafka family lived in an apartment near the Altstädter Ring, Prague's historic central square. In this model Franz Kafka's bedroom is marked in red. Unlike his sisters, he was lucky to have his own space overlooking the Vltava River, though his parents had to go through his room to reach the rest of the apartment.

The apartment of the Samsa family in Kafka's story "The Metamorphosis" has a very similar layout. Yet its protagonist, Gregor Samsa, has a worse view: his room looks onto the facade of a hospital.

Ellie Sampson
Model of the Kafka family apartment, 2024
Based on a drawing by Hartmut Binder (b. 1937)

My father is gone, now begins the gentler more scattered more hopeless noise, led by the voices of the two canaries.

Diary entry, November 1911

How to concentrate when your family is making lots of noise? Written in 1911, Kafka's early prose piece "Great Noise" reflects his experience of living in close quarters with his parents, his younger sisters, and their domestic servants. In the text, based on this diary entry, he calls his bedroom the "headquarters of the noise of the whole apartment." Kafka published "Great Noise" in the October 1912 issue of the Prague-based literary journal *Herderblätter*.

Diary, October–November 1911
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 3, fols. 19v–20r

The apartment is spoiling everything for me. Today again listened to the French lesson of the landlady's daughter.

Diary entry, February 15, 1915

No matter where he lived, Kafka was sensitive to noise. During the First World War, his sister Elli, whose husband was at the front, moved back into the family apartment with her children, and Franz had to find another place to stay temporarily. But even the first apartment he had to himself came with problems. In this diary entry, Kafka includes a sketch of the unpleasant position he finds himself in. He is the puny figure at the desk, separated by a thin wall from the towering female on the right.

Diary, November 1914–May 1915
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 10, fols. 11v–12r

After several vigorous threats had failed to have any effect, you took me out of bed, carried me out onto the pavlatche, *and left me there alone for a while in my nightshirt, outside the shut door.*

“Letter to the Father”

Kafka had a fraught relationship with his father, Hermann, which he tried, unsuccessfully, to address by letter. In 1919 he composed a letter of over one hundred handwritten pages, accus- ing Hermann of years of bullying and emotional abuse. On this page from a facsimile edition, Kafka recalls a traumatic childhood episode in which his father locked him out on a balcony (for which he switches from German and uses the Czech word, *pavlatche*).

Page of facsimile manuscript from
Franz Kafka’s Brief an den Vater: Faksimile und Transkription
Transcription and commentary by Joachim Unseld (b. 1953)
Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1986
Bodleian Libraries; X.OUT.C.36

Ottla was Kafka's favorite sister. Independent and strong-willed, she wanted to make a life for herself outside of Prague. In 1918 she decided to study at an agricultural college, a highly unusual career choice for women at the time. Kafka, who admired his sister's daring and shared her interest in agriculture, encouraged her in these plans. Here, he describes the different colleges in the region to which he had written for information about their programs. Not only did he research the different schools, he also offered to pay for her studies.

Letter to Ottla Kafka, Prague, September 8, 1918
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 49, fol. 71r

I have already taken part in the great ski race in Polianka—surely you've read about it in the Tribuna. . . . *I have had myself photographed on Mount Krivan, as you can see on the back of this card.*

Postcard to Josef David, Tatranské Matliary, March 4, 1921

Though Kafka's mother tongue—and the language of his literary texts—was German, he was also proficient in Czech. While ill and staying in a sanatorium in the High Tatra Mountains, Kafka sent this sarcastic postcard in Czech to his brother-in-law Josef David, claiming to be the skier in the photograph.

David, who had married Ottla in 1920, was a Catholic and a nationalist who refused to speak German. Franz Kafka's mention of the *Tribuna* is another joke: it was a progressive Czech-Jewish newspaper that David disliked.

Postcard to Josef David, Tatranské Matliary, March 4, 1921 (with facsimile of verso)
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 50, fol. 4

Kafka began following a vegetarian diet in 1903, after a stay at a sanatorium run by Heinrich Lahmann, who advocated vegetarianism, unrestrictive clothing, natural healing, and other ideas current in the *Lebensreform* (life reform) movement. Kafka was conscious of how unusual his vegetarianism might seem to his contemporaries. In this letter, he defends the practice. Contrary to the perception that vegetarianism is "something isolating, something akin to madness," he describes it as "a wholly innocent phenomenon."

Letter to Ottla Kafka, Meran (Merano), April 17, 1920
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 49, fol. 110v

Corn salad sends regards.

Postcard to Ottla Kafka, Karlsbad, May 13, 1916

One can only imagine what Kafka's grandfather would have made of his vegetarianism. Jacob Amschel Kafka (1814–1889) was a Jewish butcher in the provincial town of Wossek (Osek). Referring to the type of fare Kafka generally ate, this postcard to his sister Ottla shows Kafka's sense of humor about his eating habits.

Postcard to Ottla Kafka, Karlsbad (Karlovy Vary),
May 13, 1916
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches
Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 49, fol. 27r

He swung himself over, like the distinguished gymnast he had once been in his youth.

"The Judgment"

From his early twenties onward Kafka performed exercises daily, nearly naked in front of an open window. This practice was among those endorsed by Danish athlete Jørgen Müller, whose "system" Kafka followed for as long as his health permitted. Müller also recommended fresh air and sunbathing in *The Fresh-Air Book*, prompting Kafka to visit retreats like Jungborn, a German nudist colony, in 1912. There he was so self-conscious of his circumcised penis, a marker of his Jewishness, that he was known as "the man in the shorts."

Jørgen Peter Müller (1866–1938)

My System: Fifteen Minutes' Work a Day for Health's Sake
Translated by G. M. Fox-Davies
Copenhagen: Tillge's Boghandel, 1905

The Fresh-Air Book
London: Health & Strength, 1908
Bodleian Libraries; 16751 e.25 and 16771 e.14

One unusual part of Kafka's health regime was his intermittent practice of Horace Fletcher's system of eating. An American nutritionist, Fletcher claimed to have cured his own obesity by reducing his food intake through a tortuous regimen of repeatedly chewing each bite of food: "Nature will castigate those who don't masticate." In order to extract maximum nutritional value through saliva, Fletcher advised that one must chew foodstuffs such as meat over seven hundred times.

Horace Fletcher (1849–1919)
Fletcherism: What It Is, or How I Became Young at Sixty
London: Ewart, 1913
Bodleian Libraries; 1682 e.113

About three weeks ago, I had a hemorrhage from the lungs during the night. . . . I thought it would never stop. . . . I got up, walked around the room, went over to the window, looked out, went back—still blood.

Letter to Ottla Kafka, August 29, 1917

Kafka woke on August 10, 1917, hemorrhaging blood into his mouth. This was probably the earliest sign of his pulmonary tuberculosis. He waited a few weeks, until after the hops harvest, but finally wrote to Ottla about it. The doctor he initially consulted tried to minimize the matter, telling him that "all inhabitants of big cities [were] tubercular," but from the first Kafka was convinced that he was seriously ill. He greeted this development with relief: for years he had suffered from symptoms without a clear cause. To Max Brod, he wrote: "Sometimes it seems to me that my brain and lungs came to an agreement without my knowledge. 'Things can't go on this way,' said the brain, and after five years the lungs said they were ready to help."

Letter to Ottla Kafka, Prague, August 29, 1917
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 49, fol. 43r

Kafka was given sick leave from the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute many times between 1917 and his death seven years later. His employers greatly valued his legal skills and allowed him to take repeated leaves of absence for treatment. On this postcard to Ottla, he made a drawing captioned "snapshots from my life," showing himself sleeping, writing, eating, and being weighed. The photograph of 1921 shows him (front, second from right) among patients and staff of a sanatorium in present-day Slovakia.

Postcard to Ottla Kafka, Schelesen (Želízy), December 1918
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 49, fol. 79r

Unknown photographer
Staff and patients at a sanatorium, Tatranské Matliary, June 1921
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 51, fol. 26

There is no having, only a being, only a being that yearns for its last breath, for suffocation.

Two tasks at the beginning of life: to keep reining in your sphere, and to keep checking whether you might have gone into hiding somewhere outside your sphere.

Zürau Aphorisms 35 and 94

In September 1917, seeking a healthy environment, Kafka moved to Zürau (Siřem), a village in northwest Bohemia, to stay with Ottla on a farm that she was managing. While living there for eight months, he produced his most condensed, enigmatic work, known as the Zürau Aphorisms. In contrast to Kafka's treatment of most of his manuscripts, he rendered the aphorisms with care, copying the final text from the notebooks in which he had originally composed them onto individual, numbered sheets of paper. Though difficult circumstances brought the two siblings together in Zürau, there they were fulfilling their dreams: Ottla was farming, and Kafka was at last devoting himself entirely to writing.

Zürau Aphorisms 35 and 94
Autograph manuscripts, November 24, 1917, and February 1, 1918
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 43, fols. 35 and 94

During these last decades the interest in professional fasting has markedly diminished.

"A Hunger Artist"

Despite illness, Kafka continued with his literary activities. He published "In the Penal Colony" in 1919 and the story collection *A Country Doctor* in 1920, while also working on projects including *The Castle*. He was editing his next book of short fiction, *A Hunger Artist*, on his deathbed.

The title story concerns an artist whose art is fasting. After having garnered great acclaim, the artist finds his audience has lost interest in his work, and he ends up as a sideshow act in a circus. This neglect is its own type of freedom: forgotten, alone, without an impresario to control him or audiences to entertain, he can pursue his art to its furthest extreme.

"Ein Hungerkünstler" ("A Hunger Artist")
Autograph manuscript, 1915
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 27, fols. 5v–6r

Kafka appears in two photos taken in Zürau (Siřem). One shows him with Ottla while another shows him in a bigger group: from left to right, they are a housemaid named Mařenka, Kafka's cousin Irma, Ottla, and Julie Kaiser, a secretary from his insurance company. Having just posed for the group photo, it was now Kafka's turn to pick up the camera. As far as we know, this third image (which includes Julie Kaiser's fiancé) is the only surviving photograph taken by Kafka.

Unknown photographer
Group at Zürau, 1917
Franz and Ottla Kafka, Zürau, 1917

Franz Kafka (1883–1924)
Group at Zürau, 1917
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 55, fols. 7, 8, and 9

The vast majority of Kafka's stand-alone drawings date from 1901 to 1907. This pencil portrait, which probably depicts Dora Diamant, is an exception. He drew it on the reverse of the last page of his final story, "Josephine the Singer, or The Mouse Folk."

Franz Kafka (1883–1924)
Portrait of a woman, possibly Dora Diamant, 1924
Graphite
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 46, fol. 39v

Kafka's last story, "Josephine the Singer, or The Mouse Folk," features a mouse who whistles or sings depending on one's perspective. It shows Kafka thinking about the relationship between an artist and their public. As his voice faltered due to his illness, Josephine is a fitting figure through whom he could explore his artistic legacy.

"Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse"
("Josephine the Singer, or The Mouse Folk")
Autograph manuscript, 1924
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 46, fol. 36r

This is the last photo of Kafka, taken for his passport in early 1924. He developed secondary tuberculosis in the larynx, leading to constant coughing and an increasing inability to speak. His condition also resulted in a loss of appetite and caused him agony when eating. By the end, he could only consume calorie-rich liquids, like beer.

Kafka was five feet and eleven inches tall and always slender, but according to medical records, he weighed only ninety-nine pounds at his death.

Unknown photographer
Franz Kafka, Berlin, 1924
Reproduction
PHOTO: © Archiv Klaus Wagenbach

Kafka’s health deteriorated over the winters of 1922 and 1923. As his laryngeal tuberculosis worsened, he left Berlin in March 1924 to begin an odyssey that would take him to a sanatorium in Ortmann, Lower Austria; the University Hospital in Vienna; and Dr. Hugo Hoffmann’s sanatorium in Kierling, near Klosterneuburg, where he died. From Kierling, Franz’s partner Dora Diamant writes to Ottla about “bright moments which allow some hope.”

Diamant was a Jewish woman from Poland who had fled a conservative family and made her way to Berlin, where she worked in a home for refugee Jewish children. She met Kafka at a Baltic seaside resort in the summer of 1923, when she was in her mid-twenties, and remained by his side throughout the last year of his life.

Dora Diamant (1902–1952)
Letter to Ottla Kafka, Kierling, May 1924
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 50, fol. 51r

Kafka's death on June 3, 1924, was barely registered beyond his closest family and friends and a handful of writers and publishers. Milena Jesenská, his translator and former lover, published an obituary in the Czech newspaper *Národní Listy* on June 6. Hermann Kafka published his son's death notices in both German- and Czech-language newspapers, with the latter including the Slavic rendition of Franz, František.

Death notices, in German and Czech
Reproductions
PHOTOS: © Archiv Klaus Wagenbach

I'm sitting here wrapped up in Franz's dressing gown . . . if I close my eyes, it's like I'm sitting on his lap.

Dora Diamant, Letter to Ottla Kafka, October 1924

In his final months Kafka arranged to publish *A Hunger Artist* with Die Schmiede, a new avant-garde press based in Berlin. He had broken with his publisher of many years, Kurt Wolff, hoping that the new partner would be able to produce the collection before his death. But Kafka's rapid decline frustrated these hopes. In this letter, written four months after his death, a grieving Dora Diamant writes to Ottla Kafka about both practical matters, including the sales of Franz's books, and her memories.

Dora Diamant (1902–1952)
Letter to Ottla Kafka, October 1924
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 50, fol. 52v

[U]ntil now we had our nose stuck in the stream of times, now we step back, former swimmers, present walkers, and are lost. We are outside the law; no one knows it and yet everyone treats us accordingly.

Diary entry, [ca. 1911]

As a young man Kafka regarded drawing as his main vocation and even took lessons, though he later claimed that his teacher had "spoiled" his talent. Kafka's early drawings are stand-alone sketches, but after about 1907, when writing became his focus, his drawings became increasingly auxiliary to his texts, often serving as illustrations.

The diary entry above appears on the same page as this drawing of a human figure passing through an ornate archway, as two other people, and a rider on horseback, are approaching from either side. The drawing doesn't exactly illustrate the text—the link between words and image is more associative, perhaps reflecting the dreamlike mood of both.

Diary, [ca. 1911]
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 2, folS. 8v–9r

The horse was led forward. . . . From the country road came a troop of horsemen.

Notebook A, November–December 1916

This text comes from the opening of a story and appears beside a drawing of a horse pulling a cart, possibly a hearse, in what would become known as one of Kafka's "Octavo Notebooks"—a reference to their larger size relative to the notebooks Kafka used for his diaries. The pages contain another fragment, "The Warden of the Tomb" (written in 1916 and published posthumously). Kafka crossed out both drafts but kept the drawing.

Notebook A, November–December 1916
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 19, fols. 17v–18r

From 1908 until his early retirement in 1922, Kafka was employed at the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute, a relatively new entity. The Habsburg Monarchy had made it compulsory for employers to pay for accident insurance for their workers in 1887. Seven regional institutes set premiums based on the level of risk involved in different jobs and workplaces, collected those premiums, and disbursed them to injured employees.

In Kafka's role he was confronted with all kinds of horrible industrial accidents. In this essay for the institute's annual report, he describes how switching to a different kind of wood-planing machine would drastically improve workers' safety.

***Amtliche Schriften* (*Office Writings*)**
Edited by Klaus Hermsdorf (1929–2006) and others
Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1984
Bodleian Libraries; RT.8928.A.10

The Second International Congress for Rescue Services and Accident Prevention took place in Vienna in the autumn of 1913. Kafka accompanied his director and his immediate superior, having drafted their speeches. While there, he also attended the Eleventh Zionist Congress, which was happening at the same time, and visited the Prater amusement park, where he posed for a photograph with friends behind a cutout airplane. From left to right they are Kafka, the poets Albert Ehrenstein and Otto Pick, and Lise Weltsch, the cousin of his friend Felix Weltsch.

Stamps honoring the Second International Congress for Rescue Services and Accident Prevention, 1913
Private collection

Unknown photographer
Franz Kafka with friends, Prater, Vienna, 1913
Reproduction
Photo: The National Library Of Israel, Albert Erhrenstein Archive

Kafka started to keep a diary in his mid-twenties. His diaries contain many types of writing, from self-reflections to records of daily events to drafts of literary works. The translator of the recent English-language edition of the diaries, Ross Benjamin, calls them Kafka's "workshop." The entries here are a perfect example: they include a draft letter to his boss Eugen Pfohl, explaining why he is not at work ("When I tried to get out of bed today I simply collapsed"); some thoughts on the nature of his literary inspiration; and several lines of dialogue which may be from a story in progress.

Diary, 1909–12
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 1, fols. 13v–14r

This story "The Judgment" I wrote at one stretch on the night of the 22 to the 23 from 10 o'clock in the evening until 6 o'clock in the morning. . . . Only in this way can writing be done, only with such cohesion, with such complete opening of the body and the soul.

Diary entry, September 23, 1912

Following a nap after his day working as an insurance lawyer, he would sit down to write once his family had gone to bed. In September 1912 he produced "The Judgment," his breakthrough story, over the course of a single night. It first appeared in 1913 in *Arkadia*, an anthology edited by Max Brod, and was published as a stand-alone book three years later in the multiauthor series *Der jüngste Tag* (Day of judgment) by Kurt Wolff Verlag.

Containing echoes of his legal training, the story tells of a sickly father who suddenly reasserts himself, sentencing his supposedly deceitful son Georg to death by drowning. Georg rushes outside to jump from a bridge—just like the one outside Kafka's own window.

Diary, May–September 1912
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 6, fols. 26v–27r

In the winter of 1911–12, Kafka became transfixed by the performances of a Yiddish theater troupe from Lemberg (Lviv, Ukraine). He kept the program from this performance of Jacob Gordin's *Der vilder Mentsh* and analyzed both the play and playbill at length in his diary. In *Der vilder Mentsh*, a young woman, Frau Selde, marries a wealthy older man and, along with her lover, proceeds to destroy the family. She erotically and psychologically torments the son Lemech, described on the playbill as "an idiot," until a dramatic finale.

Program for *Der vilder Mentsh* (The wild person),
October 24, 1911
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 1, fol. 38c

The Yiddish theater that Kafka experienced was international in scope. Born in Ukraine in 1853, the playwright Jacob Gordin made his name in New York, where his works were the most popular and dramatically innovative products of a flourishing Yiddish theater scene on the Lower East Side. This poster for a production of *Der vilder Mentsh* features two stars, the married couple Jacob and Sara Adler, in the main roles of Lemech and Lisa. The advertisement proclaims:

> If you want to see something fine and elevated but also realistic, don't miss the great artist Mr. Jacob P. Adler, alone in his generation, who gives an exceptional performance in the challenging role of the wild man, in which he outdoes even himself.

Poster for *Der vilder Mentsh* (The wild person)
New York: Y. Lipshits, 1902
New York Public Library, Dorot Jewish Division, Thomashefsky Collection, poster no. 43

I shone when she sang, I laughed and looked at her the whole time she was on stage, I sang the melodies with her, later the words.

Diary entry, November 1, 1911

In Yiddish theater women sometimes took on male roles. This picture postcard shows the actress Flora Klug in her role as a "gentleman impersonator." She is wearing Hasidic dress, a performance of Jewishness which appeared exotic to the assimilated Kafka. Klug twice refused to give the besotted Kafka her photograph, but he still managed to acquire a postcard of her for his diary.

Postcard depicting Flora Klug, ca. 1911
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 1, fol. 38b

Kafka learned some Hebrew as a boy—enough to get through his bar mitzvah—but in his mid-thirties he returned to the language and began to study it seriously, with the help of books and private lessons. In this letter, he supports one of his Hebrew teachers, a young woman who, against her parents' wishes, wanted to study in Berlin. He did not know how to write "Europe" in modern Hebrew, so here he wrote it out phonetically instead, followed by "laugh not" in brackets.

Draft of a letter to Puah Ben-Tovim, 1923
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 47, fol. 15r

As Kafka learned Hebrew, he kept various notebooks with German words and their modern Hebrew translations. These words give us an insight into Kafka's preoccupations at the time. Many concern matters of health. On this page we see "illness," "enema," and "I weigh." He also includes here vocabulary of war and hunting (like "armistice" and "to hunt") and the word for "carriage."

Notebook, 1917 or later
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 31, fols. 22v–23r

He devours the scraps falling from his own table; although this will make him more well-fed than the others for a little while, he forgets how to eat up at the table; yet that makes the scraps stop falling, too.

Zürau Aphorism 73

In Aphorism 73, written in Zürau (Siřem) five years after "The Metamorphosis," Kafka interrogated literary productivity in terms of eating habits. One can also read the aphorism as a comment on the habits underpinning human sociability and identity and draw connections between it and Gregor Samsa's transformation. As Gregor's story develops, his initial shock gives way to the realization of potential: he adapts to his new body, finding radically new forms of movement and different tastes in food.

Zürau Aphorism 73
Autograph manuscript, late December 1917
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 43, fol. 73

One of Kafka's early stories, "Wedding Preparations in the Country," written from 1907 to 1908, features a young man who imagines sending "my clothed body" to his own engagement party, as he stays in bed and "assume[s] the shape of a big beetle, a stag beetle or cockchafer." In "The Metamorphosis" Kafka takes this thought experiment further by making Gregor Samsa awake as an actual insect.

Wedding Preparations in the Country and Other Stories
Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1982
Translated by Ernst Kaiser (1911–1972) and Eithne Wilkins (1914–1975) and by Willa and Edwin Muir (1890–1970; 1887–1959)
Private collection

Honored members of the Academy! You have done me the honor of inviting me to give your Academy an account of the life I formerly led as an ape.

“A Report to an Academy”

Set against a background of European colonialism, “A Report to an Academy” tells the story of the ape Red Peter’s transformation into an almost human subject. Captured by animal traders on Africa’s Gold Coast, caged, and sent to Europe, he refuses to do as tasked: we learn more about a life spent imitating humans than about his existence as an ape. Kafka was inspired by real-life performing apes like Konsul Peter, the star of a world-famous vaudeville act. Red Peter’s story tells us as much about human brutality as it does about nonhuman ways of life.

***Ein Landarzt: Kleine Erzählungen* (*A Country Doctor*)**
Munich and Leipzig: Kurt Wolff, 1919
Bodleian Libraries; ARCH.8o.G.1919

How might a human who has turned into an insect experience the world? How might they move? Arthur Pita's award-winning 2011 ballet unlocked this strange physicality. Here, Pita's notebooks and costume designs show his adaptive process.

Starring principal dancer Edward Watson in the role of Gregor, the video you see nearby (of the 2013 restaging) shows Watson experimenting with the extremes of human movement. Extending his limbs in all directions, folding himself into knots, Watson embodies a mesmerizing hybrid of human and nonhuman form.

ON WALL:

Excerpt from *The Metamorphosis*, Royal Opera House, London, 2013
© ROYAL BALLET AND OPERA

Arthur Pita (b. 1972)
Costume designs for *The Metamorphosis*, 2011
Private collection

IN CASE:

Arthur Pita (b. 1972)
Production notebooks for *The Metamorphosis*, 2011
Private collection

The Russian American novelist, critic, and professor Vladimir Nabokov was an expert on butterflies. He applied his entomological knowledge to "The Metamorphosis" in a lecture he gave to undergraduates, later published as one of his *Lectures on Literature*. Nabokov used Kafka's precise description of Gregor Samsa's transformed body to speculate on exactly what type of insect he had become and added this sketch of the resulting bug to the title page of his copy of an American edition of the story.

The Metamorphosis
Translated by A. L. Lloyd (1908–1982)
New York: The Vanguard Press, 1946
Annotations and sketch by Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977)
New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, Vladimir Nabokov papers

Kafka wrote “The Metamorphosis”—his most famous work—over a series of nights in the fall of 1912. Look closely at the manuscript. The first sentences emerge fully formed: the flow of handwriting is swift; there are only minor corrections. We see him rushing to get his ideas on the page.

“Die Verwandlung” (“The Metamorphosis”)
Autograph manuscript, November–December 1912
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 18A, fol. 1r

And even if he did catch the train he wouldn't avoid a row with the chief, since the firm's porter would have been waiting for the five o'clock train and would have long since reported his failure to turn up. The porter was a creature of the chief's, spineless and stupid.

"The Metamorphosis"

Like Gregor Samsa here, modernist writers such as Maurice Maeterlinck and Hanns Heinz Ewers were alert to similarities between the social lives of insects and humans in modern industrial societies. The French historian Jules Michelet produced a trilogy about the lives of insects: *Metamorphosis*, *On the Mission and Art of Insects*, and *Insect Society*. One of Michelet's most innovative arguments regards the productive contribution insects make to the progress of human life, functioning as "world builders," a form of proto-ecological thought.

Hanns Heinz Ewers (1871–1943)
***Ameisen* (Ants)**
Munich: G. Müller, 1925
Bodleian Libraries; PX.81.A.1

Jules Michelet (1798–1874)
The Insect
Translated by W. H. Davenport Adams (1828–1921)
London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1875
Oxford University Museum of Natural History; 72 d. 44

Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949)
***La vie des termites* (*The Life of the White Ant*)**
Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1926
The Morgan Library & Museum, gift of the trustees of the Dannie and Hettie Heineman Collection, 1977; Heineman 393

Slowly, awkwardly trying out his feelers, which he now first learned to appreciate, he pushed his way to the door. . . . He had reached the door before he discovered what had really drawn him to it: the smell of food.

“The Metamorphosis”

“The Metamorphosis” contains many passages in which Kafka imagines how Gregor Samsa experiences the world as an insect. By 1900 improvements in microscopy and other technologies had made it possible to conduct detailed research into the physiology of insects, uncovering their specific ways of sensing and interacting with the world. The Swiss scientist Auguste Forel went far beyond the usual focus on insect classification in order to determine how ants perceive their environments and communicate with each other.

Auguste Forel (1848–1931)

The Senses of Insects
Translated by Macleod Yearsley (1867–1951)
London: Methuen & Co., 1908

The Social World of the Ants Compared with That of Man
Translated by C. K. Ogden (1889–1957)
London & New York: G. P. Putman’s Sons, [1928]
Bodleian Libraries; 16687 e.16 and 18949 d.285

As vermin, Gregor Samsa is viewed by his family as a parasite, a drain on their food and other resources. By the end his sister declares, “It has to go.”

During Kafka’s lifetime advancements in the study of insects were often motivated by an awareness of their role in agriculture and food security. The work of entomologists like Frederick Laing and William Wheeler speaks to the growing recognition of insects’ impact on the wellbeing of humans in modern industrial societies.

Frederick Laing (1890–1965)
The Cockroach: Its Life-History and How to Deal with It
London: printed by order of the Trustees of the British Museum, 1930

William Morton Wheeler (1865–1937)
Social Life among the Insects
Washington, DC: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1922–23
Bodleian Libraries; QX 4/Brit. and 18949 e.223

Your life as apes, gentlemen, insofar as something of the kind lies behind you, cannot be farther removed from you than mine is from me.

"A Report to an Academy"

If mankind descended from apes, might we not also regress into bestiality? Politicians, cultural critics, and writers responded to cutting-edge biological research in evolution and comparative zoology before and after 1900 with a mixture of fascination and dread. Charles Darwin and the German scientist Ernst Haeckel—the latter whose work Kafka read as a teenager—developed expansive theories of evolutionary development, including the idea that humans and apes shared a common ancestor. Stories such as "The Metamorphosis" and "A Report to an Academy" show that Kafka was acutely aware of the disruptive effects on human identities generated by these new scientific theories.

Charles Darwin (1809–1882)
On the Origin of Species
London: John Murray, 1859
The Morgan Library & Museum, gift of the trustees of the Dannie and Hettie Heineman Collection, 1977; Heineman 885

The study of insects—entomology—developed rapidly in the nineteenth century as the potentials and dangers of insects for agriculture and global prosperity became clear. Few scientists' names would have been more familiar to German-speaking readers than Alfred Brehm. His richly illustrated books were used in schools to introduce children to the wonders of the natural world. Another prominent figure, Edmund Reitter recruited specialists to complete his mammoth study of the "insects of the German-speaking countries." Reitter's work was a staple feature in secondary schools across all German-speaking territories.

Alfred Brehm (1829–1884)
***Les insects: Les myriopodes, les arachnides et les crustacés*, 2 vols.**
Paris: J.-B. Baillière et fils, [1882]
Bodleian Libraries; 18948 d.30

Edmund Reitter (1845–1920)
***Fauna germanica*, 5 vols.**
Stuttgart: K. G. Lutz, 1908–16
Oxford University Museum of Natural History; 83500 d.36

Overlooking the Sitges Bay near Barcelona stands Kafka's Castle, an iconic apartment complex designed by the Catalan architect Ricardo Bofill and completed in 1968. It pays homage to the amorphous and impenetrable structure at the heart of Kafka's novel, and, like its fictional inspiration, Bofill's castle looks more like an agglomeration of houses than a mighty fort. But while the building may appear somewhat chaotic, it invites people to explore the creative logic of its design.

For this exhibition, the Factum Foundation, in collaboration with Ricardo Bofill Taller de Architectura, re-created Bofill's lost concept model. Using the original architectural plans of the ninety modular apartments as reference, Factum crafted a precise 3D model at a scale of 1:125, then 3D printed it in resin.

Factum Foundation for Digital Technology in Preservation
Model of Kafka's Castle, Sant Pere de Ribes, Catalonia, Spain, 2024
3D-printed resin
PHOTO (ON WALL): © RBTA ARCHIVE

The powers crumbling away during the sleigh ride. One cannot arrange a life as a gymnast a handstand.

Diary entry, January 27, 1922

On January 27, 1922, Kafka arrived at the resort Spindlermühle in the Bohemian Giant Mountains (Riesengebirge) for a three-week stay. For the last stretch of his journey he had traveled by sleigh. Diary entries and the notebook containing the beginning of *The Castle* suggest that he began writing the novel on the evening of his arrival. The narrative mentions sleighs as a desirable mode of transport—although in the novel K. is unable to find anyone who can take him to the Castle.

Unknown photographer
Franz Kafka (at right), Spindlermühle (Špindlerův Mlýn), 1922
Reproduction
PHOTO: © Archiv Klaus Wagenbach

Here alone in Sp.[indlermühle], moreover on a forsaken road, on which one is constantly slipping in the snow in the dark, moreover a senseless road without an earthly goal.

Diary entry, January 29, 1922

When he was writing *The Castle* in the wintry Giant Mountains, Kafka was battling with fatigue, anxiety, breathlessness, insomnia, and nightmares, all the while imagining scenarios that opened up different worlds. His reading took him as far as the Arctic, experienced through the Danish explorer Ejnar Mikkelsen's *An Arctic Robinson*, a hair-raising account of his expedition to Greenland from 1909 to 1912.

Ejnar Mikkelsen (1880–1971)
Ein arktischer Robinson
Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1913
Bodleian Libraries

Kafka referred to “the castle story” but gave his unfinished novel no title. That was added by Max Brod. Following an abandoned beginning in which a guest arrives at a village inn, Kafka drew a short, thick line and started again. Brod later inserted, “Here the novel *The Castle* begins M. B.”

Kafka initially used the first-person pronoun “ich,” but while writing the third chapter he began referring to the protagonist as “K.” Going back to the beginning, he then turned “ich” into “K.” throughout. With the stroke of a pen the narrative becomes more elusively surreal.

***Das Schloss* (*The Castle*)**
Autograph manuscript, 1922
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 34, fols. 2v–3r

Kafka composed the novel in six notebooks. They contain twenty-five chapters and some fragmentary and deleted parts. This notebook became the victim of scissors or a knife, which poignantly severed the first word “Ab|schied” (farewell). The rest of the page is held at the National Library of Israel.

***Das Schloss* (*The Castle*)**
Autograph manuscript, 1922
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 35, fol. 7a

Each edition of *The Castle* represents a different approach to the unfinished manuscript Kafka left behind. While, for the first edition, seen here, Brod produced a text that appeared unified and complete, later editions, even those overseen by Brod, began to reflect the real nature of the manuscript, including fragments and deleted sections.

Das Schloss **(*The Castle*)**
Munich: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1926

Das Schloss **(*The Castle*)**
New York: Schocken Books, 1946
Bodleian Libraries; FIEDLER ADDS.IV.B.37 and CB.KAF5 - 5SCHL - E6S

Franz Kafka's name, so far as I can discover, is almost unknown to English readers.

Willa and Edwin Muir, introduction to *The Castle* (1930)

Kafka's posthumous rise to world fame was secured in the 1950s when Penguin published the first paperback editions of *The Trial* (1953) and *The Castle* (1957) using the 1930s English translations by Willa and Edwin Muir. Raised on Shetland and Orkney, respectively, Willa and Edwin Muir both grew up speaking Scots as their first language. Edwin has often been credited as the primary translator of the two, but new critical studies of the texts have emphasized Willa's role in their literary output.

The Castle
Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir (1890–1970; 1887–1959)
Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1957
Private collection

Prague Castle, n.d.
Photo: © Archiv Klaus Wagenbach

Simply to race through the nights with my pen, that's what I want.

Letter to Felice Bauer, July 13, 1913

Academic editing is at the other end of the spectrum from Kafka's spontaneous writing process. In the 1970s Malcolm Pasley gathered a team of scholars for a critical edition of Kafka's works, including diaries and letters. This ongoing project would take account of all the manuscript sources and establish definitive versions while documenting variants and deletions. In 1982 the two-volume edition of *Das Schloss* launched the project. Pasley dedicated this copy to Kafka's niece Marianna Steiner, who later presented it to the Taylor Institution Library, one of the Bodleian Libraries.

Das Schloss **(*The Castle*)**
Edited by Malcolm Pasley (1926–2004)
Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1982
Bodleian Libraries; TNR4585

I am moved by your faithfulness toward every little sentence, a faithfulness I would not have thought possible to achieve in Czech, let alone with the beautiful natural authority you attain. German and Czech so close to each other?

Letter to Milena Jesenská, April 1920

Fischer Verlag's release of the 1982 critical edition of *Das Schloss* prompted Schocken Books to commission an English translation based on the newly constituted text with all the fragmentary sections. Nobel Prize–winning author J. M. Coetzee hailed it as a "standard-bearer for a retranslation of the entire Kafka corpus." With it, Mark Harman joined the generations of translators who have given Kafka's texts new lives in new languages.

The Castle: A New Translation Based on the Restored Text
Translated by Mark Harman (b. 1951)
New York: Schocken Books, 1998
Bodleian Libraries

The Castle up there, oddly dark already, which K. had still been hoping to reach today, receded again.

The Castle

The visual potential of *The Castle* is fully realized in this graphic novel by the American writer David Zane Mairowitz, illustrated by the Czech artist Jaromír 99. The elusiveness of the Castle is matched by puzzling snippets of dialogue between K. and one of his assistants. Were his assistants really appointed by the Castle? And why do neither they nor K., purportedly a land surveyor, engage in land surveying?

The Castle
Adapted and translated by David Zane Mairowitz (b. 1943)
Illustrated by Jaromír 99 (b. 1963)
London: SelfMadeHero, 2013
Bodleian Libraries; XWeek 12 (14)

In contrast to the Pasley project, an alternative edition by Roland Reuss and Peter Staengle puts the manuscripts center stage. Instead of offering a “clean” printed text with a separate critical apparatus listing variants and deletions, this 2018 edition of *Das Schloss* features the manuscript pages in facsimile with a transcription on the opposite page. A future development might be an online edition with all the benefits of digital scholarship.

***Das Schloss* (*The Castle*)**
Edited by Roland Reuss (b. 1958) and Peter Staengle (b. 1953)
Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 2018
Bodleian Libraries; PT2621.A26 KAF 2018

From a certain point on, there is no turning back. This is the point that needs to be reached.

Zürau Aphorism 5

When does *The Castle* reach the point of no return? Is it when the protagonist “I,” or “K.,” crosses the bridge? Or when Kafka asks the one person to burn the manuscript who he knew would refuse to do so? Or when Brod publishes the novel and sets it on the path to becoming a world classic—translated into many languages and inspiring new transformations into other art forms?

Zürau Aphorism 5
Autograph manuscript, October 20, 1917
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 43, fol. 5

. . . it was difficult to understand her, but what she said

The Castle

What might the old mother of an acquaintance have said to K.? Perhaps Kafka couldn't decide—tantalizingly, his novel just breaks off at this point mid-sentence. Whether her utterance would have helped K. gain entry to the Castle remains as much of a mystery as K.'s place of origin and his motive for wanting to access the Castle in the first place.

***Das Schloss* (*The Castle*)**
Autograph manuscript, 1922
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 39, fols. 35v–36r

The castle in Friedland. The many ways to see it: from the plain, from a bridge, from the park, between leafless trees, from the woods through tall firs.

Diary entry, January 1911

Travel diary, January 1911–July 1912
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 13, fols. 4v–5r

Dear Ottla, I quite forgot about your being sick. Be careful and wrap yourself up before you take this card with its mountain air into your hands!

Postcard to Ottla Kafka, Friedland, February 1911

In January and February 1911, Kafka went on an extended business trip to the industrial region of North Bohemia. He stayed in a hotel in the town of Friedland, where the main attraction was a small castle, featured here on the front of a postcard he sent to Ottla.

Postcard to Ottla Kafka, Friedland (Frýdlant), February 1911
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 49, fol. 6v

In these postcards, Kafka teases his beloved little sister: on the postcard from Pilsen, he addresses her as “Sehr geehrtes Fräulein” (esteemed young lady) and writes a comically pompous message about how “the blissful hours passed with you . . . remain my only joy.”

When Ottla sent a postcard to her future husband, Josef David, several years later, Franz took the opportunity to add, on the picture side of the card, a humorous sketch of her chomping away on her “second breakfast.”

Franz Kafka (1883–1924)
Postcard to Ottla Kafka, Pilsen (Plzeň),
December 20, 1909

Ottla Kafka (1892–1943)
Postcard to Josef David, Ouvaly (Úvaly),
May 16, 1915

Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 49, fol. 4v and MS. Kafka 50, fol. 1v

Writing from a business trip to the Bohemian town of Kratzau, on the top postcard Kafka tells Ottla that in a restaurant on the square pictured, he was served “roast veal with potatoes and bilberries, followed by an omelet, and along with it and after it drank a small bottle of cider.” But he didn’t eat any of the veal—telling his sister, “as you know I cannot properly chew [meat]”—and instead used it “partly to feed a cat, partly just to mess up the floor.”

When he traveled, Kafka often sought out vegetarian or “reform” restaurants, such as the one pictured on the bottom postcard, to accommodate his diet.

Postcards to Ottla Kafka, Kratzau (Chrastava), February 25, 1911; and Warnsdorf (Varnsdorf), May 2, 1911
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 49, fols. 7v and 8v

Kafka and Brod's longest journey took them via Switzerland and northern Italy to Paris. In his postcard from Versailles, Kafka apologizes to Ottla for an earlier card in which he had chided her for not writing more frequently. To atone, Kafka writes that "in spite of these expensive times I may bring something pretty back for you."

Postcards to Ottla Kafka, Lake Lucerne, August 29, 1911; Lake Lugano, August 30, 1911; and Versailles, September 13, 1911
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 49, fols. 9v, 10v, and 12v

Today I was in Malcesine, where Goethe had the adventure which you would know about if you had read the Italian Journey, *which you ought to do soon.*

Postcard to Ottla Kafka, Riva, September 28, 1913

After attending the Second International Congress for Rescue Services and Accident Prevention in Vienna, Kafka took a detour through northern Italy, where he visited Trieste, Verona, Venice, and Riva, on Lake Garda. On the top card, sent from Riva, Kafka gently chides Ottla for not having read Goethe's famous travelogue—though he himself had in fact only just read about this "adventure" in a local newspaper, rather than in Goethe's original.

Postcards to Ottla Kafka, Riva, September 28, 1913; and Venice, October 2, 1913
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 49, fols. 17v and 18v

Please work hard in the shop so that I can enjoy myself here without worrying, and give my love to the parents.

Postcard to Ottla Kafka, Lake Garda, Italy, September 7, 1909

In September 1909 Kafka traveled to Italy for the first time, with Max and Otto Brod (Max's younger brother). The travelers cut their time in the Italian lakes short to attend an aviation show in Brescia, where the French aviator Louis Blériot, who had just made the first crossing of the English Channel by an airplane, and numerous other pilots demonstrated the capabilities of this new technology to a fascinated public. Franz and Max competed to write up accounts of the event for newspaper publication: Kafka's article came out first.

Postcard to Ottla Kafka, Lake Garda, Italy, September 7, 1909
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 49, fol. 1

Arriving Thursday afternoon, probably three o'clock, Staatsbahnhof.

Postcard to Ottla Kafka, Tetschen, September 22, 1909

After the excitement of Italy and the air show, Kafka came back to earth. In this postcard, he informs his sister about where and when he'll return from a business trip to North Bohemia—perhaps hoping she will pick him up from the station.

Postcard to Ottla Kafka, Tetschen (Děčín), September 22, 1909
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 49, fol. 2

Kafka did not serve in the First World War, as his insurance job was on a list of reserved occupations, but in 1915 he accompanied his sister Elli to Hungary, where her husband was stationed. Elli also signed this postcard, adding greetings to her children. On their way back they stopped off in Vienna.

Postcards to Ottla Kafka, Budapest (April 25, 1915) and Vienna (April 27, 1915)
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 49, fols. 24v and 25v

But next year we'll travel together into the, by then, I hope, free world.

Postcard to Ottla Kafka, Marienbad, July 12, 1916

In July 1916 Kafka and his fiancée Felice Bauer spent six happy days alone together in Hotel Balmoral in the Bohemian resort of Marienbad. In this message to Ottla, Kafka alludes to the ongoing war, and his hope for peace.

Bauer was a young professional woman from Berlin to whom Kafka became engaged twice, but never married. Kafka wrote her hundreds of letters, which she brought with her when she immigrated to the United States in the 1930s.

Postcard to Ottla Kafka, Marienbad (Mariánské Lázně), July 12, 1916
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 49, fol. 31v

In this postcard the roles are reversed: Ottla is traveling, and Kafka sends her a postcard from back home in Prague. It is also signed by their parents and by the family's much-loved housekeeper, Marie Werner, who adds a greeting in her native Czech.

Postcard to Ottla Kafka, Prague, November 27, 1918
Bodleian Libraries, jointly owned with Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; MS. Kafka 49, fol. 78v

A cage went in search of a bird.

Zürau Aphorism 16

This is probably Kafka's most famous aphorism. An inanimate object comes to life as it embarks on its search for a bird—an image that evokes a romantic (or perhaps a sinister?) quest.

Zürau Aphorism 16
Autograph manuscript, November 6, 1917
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 43, fol. 16r

One of Kafka's favorite books was Hans Heilmann's 1905 German translation of a selection of Chinese poems spanning several centuries. In a letter to Felice Bauer from November 24, 1912, Kafka quoted a poem from the Qing dynasty era he particularly liked, "Cold Night" by Yan-Tsen-Tsai (more commonly transliterated today as Yuan Mei). In the poem, the speaker, like Kafka himself, spends his nights absorbed in books.

Chinesische Lyrik
Edited and translated by Hans Heilmann (1859–1930)
Munich: Piper, 1905
Bodleian Libraries; W 5237 HEI

In the early 1900s drawing was Kafka's passion. He was deeply impressed by the work of Emil Orlik, a visual artist from Prague who traveled to Japan and later to China. Orlik created lithograph illustrations for this collection of Chinese stories in a German translation.

***Chinesische Abende* (Chinese Evenings)**
Translated by Leo Greiner (1876–1928?) and Tsou Ping Shou (d. 1955?)
Illustrated by Emil Orlik (1870–1932)
Berlin: E. Reiss, 1913
Bodleian Libraries; REP.G.13516

Set in ancient China, "An Old Manuscript" concerns language and translation: in it, "nomads from the North" occupy the central square of a city. The narrator, a cobbler with a shop on the square, says of them: "Speech with the nomads is impossible. They do not know our own language, indeed they hardly have a language of their own. They communicate with each other much as jackdaws do. A screeching of jackdaws is always in our ears."

In this draft of the story, Kafka included a playful metafictional postscript, describing the story as a "(perhaps overly Europeanizing) translation of some old Chinese manuscript leaves" (translation by Ross Benjamin). When he published the story in the collection *A Country Doctor*, however, he omitted the postscript.

"Ein altes Blatt" ("An Old Manuscript")
Autograph manuscript, February–March 1917
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 21, fols. 31v–32r

South Korean writer Bae Suah has translated some of Kafka’s works into Korean. Her multilingual novella *Milena, Milena, Ecstatic* (first published in 2016) mixes a Korean text with quotations from Kafka’s letters to his translator Milena Jesenská, which themselves mix German and Czech. Here we show the English translation.

Bae Suah (b. 1965)
Milena, Milena, Ecstatic
Translated by Deborah Smith (b. 1987)
Norwich: Strangers Press, 2019
Private collection

Japanese art inspired Kafka, and now Kafka inspires modern Japanese artists. His father's business logo—featuring the family name in the form of a jackdaw (in Czech: *kavka*)—can be seen here in a letter to Kafka from his mother, Julie. The logo reappeared nearly a century later on the cover of Haruki Murakami's best-selling novel *Kafka on the Shore*.

ON WALL:

Julie Kafka (1856–1934)
Letter to Franz Kafka, Prague, March 29, 1918
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 51, fol. 1r

IN CASE:

Haruki Murakami (b. 1949)
海辺のカフカ (*Umibe no kafuka*; *Kafka on the Shore*)
Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2002
Bodleian Libraries; Jap.e.2582, v. 1–2

"It's a remarkable piece of apparatus," said the officer to the explorer and surveyed with a certain air of admiration the apparatus which was after all quite familiar to him.

"In the Penal Colony"

One of Kafka's most violent stories, "In the Penal Colony" (written in 1914 and published in 1919), is set on an unspecified tropical island. The manuscript has not survived, but in these notes the protagonist, a traveler from Europe, features prominently. In the published story, the opening sentence describes him as a *Forschungsreisender*—a traveler on an expedition or research trip. He examines a strange *Apparat* (apparatus). This is later revealed to be an elaborate torture machine that kills prisoners by slowly carving their sentence onto their skin.

Notes for "In der Strafkolonie" ("In the Penal Colony")
Autograph manuscript, September 1915–August 1917

***In der Strafkolonie* (*In the Penal Colony*)**
Leipzig: Kurt Wolff, 1919
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 11, folS. 33v–34r and ARCH.8o.G.1919

The bridge connecting New York with Boston hung delicately over the Hudson and trembled if one narrowed one's eyes.

Amerika: The Missing Person

Not everything is as it should be in Kafka's America—for instance, the Brooklyn Bridge links New York and Boston. Kafka saw an accurate photograph of the bridge in this account by the Hungarian socialist Arthur Holitscher, but in his own manuscript the bridge makes an impossible connection. It might have been a simple error—or perhaps Kafka wanted to emphasize that this was his own imaginary "Amerika."

Arthur Holitscher (1869–1941)
Amerika Heute und Morgen **(*America Today and Tomorrow*)**
Berlin: S. Fischer, 1912

Amerika: The Missing Person was Kafka's first attempt at a novel, and he worked on it intermittently between 1911 and 1914. In its final chapter, the protagonist, a young immigrant, joins the "great Theater of Oklahama," whose recruiting posters promise "All are welcome! [. . .] We are a theater that can make use of everyone, each in his place!" Kafka wrote this chapter and "In the Penal Colony," as well as a significant portion of his novel *The Trial*, during an intense and productive period in the fall of 1914.

Franz Kafka (1883–1924)
***Der Verschollene* (*Amerika: The Missing Person*)**
Autograph manuscript, 1912
Bodleian Libraries; REP.G.2671 (1912) and MS. Kafka 16, fols. 2v–3r

When I saw the picture in my book, I was at first alarmed. For in the first place it refuted me, since I had after all presented the most up-to-date New York.

Letter to Kurt Wolff, May 25, 1913

In 1913 Kafka published the first chapter of his novel about America as a stand-alone short story, "The Stoker." It begins with the arrival of teenage Karl Rossmann in New York Harbor. Kafka was unhappy about the old-fashioned drawing of the harbor used for the frontispiece of the first edition. His America is ultramodern—a place of novel machinery, mass media, and workers' strikes. This new world makes Rossmann intensely anxious. The silent threat is visible on the first page, with the Statue of Liberty holding a sword rather than a torch.

Kafka might have preferred the illustrations in this Mexican edition from the 1980s.

***Der Heizer* (*The Stoker*)**
Frontispiece by G. K. Richardson, after W. H. Bartlett,
***The Ferry at Brooklyn, New York*, 1838**
Leipzig: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1913
Bodleian Libraries; ARCH.8o.G.1913(2)

Der Heizer (_The Stoker_)
Illustrated by Elisabeth Siefer
Mexico City, 1985
Private collection

So here are the notes: Column I line 2 arm *[German for "poor"] here also has the secondary meaning: pitiable, but without any special emphasis of feeling, a sympathy without understanding that Karl has with his parents as well, perhaps* ubozí

Letter to Milena Jesenská, Meran, May 1920

In 1920 "The Stoker" became Kafka's first story translated into another language—Czech. In this letter to the translator Milena Jesenská, he comments on her translation of the German adjective "arm" to describe Karl Rossmann's "poor" parents. Were they "impoverished" or "pitiable," or both?

Jesenská, a journalist, persuaded the editor of the Prague literary weekly *Kmen* to devote a whole issue to "The Stoker." She would translate many other stories by Kafka, including all of the pieces in his first book, *Meditation*. Her professional correspondence with Kafka eventually blossomed into a short but significant love affair. She went on to write for the underground press during the Nazi occupation and, like Kafka's sisters, died in a concentration camp during the war.

Letter to Milena Jesenská, Meran (Merano), May 1920
Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; HS011458350

Kafka has had an immense influence on Jewish American writers, perhaps most prominently on Philip Roth, whose interest in Kafka shaped both his own fiction and his editorship of the Writers from the Other Europe series of publications in the 1970s and ’80s. In this essay, originally delivered as a lecture to undergraduates at the University of Pennsylvania in 1972, Roth imagines an alternate history in which Kafka recovered from tuberculosis, immigrated to the United States, moved to Newark, and taught Hebrew to one Philip Roth, a precocious nine-year-old.

Philip Roth (1933–2018)
“‘I Always Wanted You to Admire My Fasting’; or, Looking at Kafka”
Galleys of *Reading Myself and Others*
New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, [ca. 1975]
The Morgan Library & Museum, Carter Burden Collection of American Literature; PML 182179

Exhibition Design

In seeking to create apt covers for Franz Kafka's works, designers have often come up with graphic concepts that are as innovative and unusual as the books' contents. The American designer Peter Mendelsund created a suite of new covers for the Kafka titles published by Schocken Books in 2011 that broke definitively from the color palette and imagery used in many earlier editions. Mendelsund's covers inspired the Morgan's exhibition design, which was developed in collaboration with him.

The poster for *Kafka's Doll*, a Polish puppet theater adaptation of the same story, offers another witty twist on Kafka's iconic silhouette. The medium is particularly apt—in Polish, a "puppet theater" is called a "doll theater."

Natalia Tilszner
Poster for *Lalka Kafki* (*Kafka's Doll*),
Wrocławski Teatr Lalek, 2021
Reproduction
Photo: Courtesy Wrocławski Puppet Theater

This photograph of Kafka was taken circa 1906, around the time he obtained his doctor of law degree from Charles University in Prague. In a 1912 letter to Felice Bauer, Kafka included a similar photo of himself taken a few years later and explained, “I haven’t in fact got a twisted face; it’s the flash that gives me that visionary look, and I have long ago abandoned high collars.”

Unknown photographer
Franz Kafka, ca. 1906
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 55, fol. 4r

In November 1912 Kafka sent several childhood photographs, including the two here, to Felice Bauer, whom he had first met that August. About the circa 1884 photograph, he wrote: "I don't know how old I was in this one. At that time I think I still belonged completely to myself, and it seems to have suited me very well. As the eldest, I was constantly being photographed and there exists a long series of transformations. From now on it gets worse in every picture, but you'll see. In the very next one I appear as my parents' ape."

Unknown photographers
Franz Kafka as a child, ca. 1884 and ca. 1886
Bodleian Libraries; MS. Kafka 55, fols. 2r and 3r

How does our impression of Kafka change when we see him petting a dog alongside Juliane Szokoll, a Prague barmaid? Perhaps he doesn't seem quite "as lonely as Franz Kafka"—the title of an influential French study that was published with an altered version of this photograph on its cover, where Kafka is isolated for better effect. The image of Kafka as an "unhappy single man" persists to this day.

ON WALL:

Unknown photographer
Franz Kafka with Juliane Szokoll, ca. 1908
Reproduction
Photo: © Archiv Klaus Wagenbach

IN CASE:

Klaus Wagenbach (1930–2021)
Franz Kafka: Pictures of a Life
New York: Pantheon Books, 1984

Marthe Robert (1914–1996)
***Seul, comme Franz Kafka* (*As Lonely as Franz Kafka*)**
Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1979

Franz Kafka (1883–1924)
The Unhappiness of Being a Single Man: Essential Stories
Edited and translated by Alexander Starritt (b. 1985)
London: Pushkin Press, 2018
Bodleian Libraries

According to Dora Diamant, in the last year of Kafka's life, he met a little girl who had lost her doll in a park. To explain the doll's absence, he told the girl that the doll was traveling and would write home; then he sent her letters in the doll's voice.

The letters that Kafka wrote to the girl are lost, but the story has inspired several children's books. Rebecca Green's drawings capture a kindly, playful side to Kafka that is often ignored. It acts as a counterweight to the brooding, lone man who gazes at us from innumerable other portraits.

Rebecca Green (b. 1986)
Original artwork from *Kafka and the Doll*, 2019
Watercolor and pen and ink
Courtesy the artist

Larissa Theule
Kafka and the Doll
Illustrated by Rebecca Green (b. 1986)
New York: Viking, 2021
Bodleian Librarie

Andy Warhol created this most iconic depiction of Franz Kafka as part of his series *Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century*, which also included Sarah Bernhardt, Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, and the Marx Brothers. The series was met with widely diverging responses: many critics deemed it exploitative, and, in the *New York Times*, Hilton Kramer wrote "it reeks of commercialism, and its contribution to art is nil." However, the Jewish dealers, curators, and cultural groups with whom Warhol conceived and showed the portraits saw it as honoring Jewish achievement.

It is based on a 1917 photograph, the only surviving image of Kafka with his fiancée Felice Bauer, which they sat for during their second engagement. Warhol cropped Bauer out of the image and focused in on Kafka's face.

Andy Warhol (1928–1987)
***Franz Kafka*, 1980**
Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on canvas
Private collection

Unknown photographer
Kafka with Felice Bauer, 1917
Reproduction
Photo: © Archiv Klaus Wagenbach