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*The Cambridge Introduction to
Franz Kafka*

Franz Kafka (1883–1924) is one of the most influential of modern authors, whose darkly fascinating novels and stories – where themes such as power, punishment and alienation loom large – have become emblematic of modern life. This *Introduction* offers a clear and accessible account of Kafka's life, work and literary influence and overturns many myths surrounding them. His texts are in fact far more engaging, diverse, light-hearted and ironic than is commonly suggested by clichés of 'the Kafkaesque'. And, once explored in detail, they are less difficult and impenetrable than is often assumed. Through close analysis of their style, imagery and narrative perspective, Carolin Duttlinger aims to give readers the confidence to (re-)discover Kafka's works without constant recourse to the mantras of critical orthodoxy. In addition, she situates Kafka's texts within their wider cultural, historical and political contexts, illustrating how they respond to the concerns of their age, and of our own.

CAROLIN DUTTLINGER is University Lecturer in German at the University of Oxford, Ockenden Fellow in German at Wadham College, Oxford, and Co-Director of the Oxford Kafka Research Centre. She is the author of *Kafka and Photography* (2007) and the editor, with Ben Morgan and Anthony Phelan, of *Walter Benjamins anthropologisches Denken* (2012).

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For Joe, Max and Clara

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Preface

Kafka is one of the most iconic of modern writers and probably the most widely read German-language author of all times. A century on, his works have lost none of their strangeness and appeal; while the ‘Kafka industry’ continues to produce books and articles at a dizzying rate, Kafka’s influence is by no means limited to the ivory towers of academia. Indeed, he is one of the few authors whose fame straddles the boundary between high and popular culture. Yet Kafka’s enduring and almost universal popularity is something of a mixed blessing, since for many this might make him appear offputtingly trendy in a shallow, vaguely postmodern way. Surely an author whose works have appealed to so many cannot have real substance? Even if we are not deterred by Kafka’s fame, we cannot avoid the questions it poses. (Is Kafka perhaps too famous for his own good, too famous to be read seriously?) Arguably, we know both too much and too little about Kafka. The myth of Kafka the isolated, otherworldly genius seems to resist all evidence to the contrary, and his problematic relationship with his father – admittedly documented by Kafka himself – is often applied to his texts as a one-size-fits-all interpretative template. But Kafka has also often been cited as the Existentialist, nihilist, Zionist or Freudian writer par excellence, or as a kind of prophet who predicted the Holocaust. The dilemma surrounding Kafka’s fame is encapsulated by the term ‘Kafkaesque’. In contrast to similar coinages, such as ‘Shakespearean’, ‘Proustian’ or ‘Wildean’, ‘Kafkaesque’ is used not only as an adjective but also as a noun. ‘The Kafkaesque’ is a term not limited to literary contexts but which has become a shorthand for a wide range of artistic techniques, situations and experiences. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as ‘Of or relating to the writings of Franz Kafka; resembling the state of affairs or a state of mind described by Kafka’. This appropriately vague, tautological definition leaves it open to which aspect of Kafka’s writings the term refers, and indeed ‘Kafkaesque’ can be used in different, even incompatible, ways. It can refer to Kafka’s strange and darkly comical storylines (a man’s never-explained transformation into an insect, another man’s equally mysterious arrest by a faceless institution), to the more general absurd and oppressive mood pervading his

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texts, or to particular narrative techniques which defy the reader's expectations and resist conclusive interpretation.

So the notion of the Kafkaesque is sufficiently vague to make it ubiquitous, but this ubiquity leads to another problem. It implies that there is something recognizable and distinctive, even unique, about Kafka's texts, but at the same time suggests that this quality is not limited to Kafka's texts but can be transferred, emulated or indeed parodied. What is more, as my examples of Kafka's darkly comical plotlines above suggest, the term in its core meaning is probably derived from just two texts: *The Metamorphosis* and *The Trial*. Although these two works – undoubtedly Kafka's most famous – seem to form a neat diptych of Kafka's universe, involving brutal fathers, transgressive desires and labyrinthine, faceless institutions, *The Metamorphosis* and *The Trial* are also problematic showcases. As we will see in more detail later, Kafka did not like the ending of the former, and went about writing the latter in an atypical, experimental way. Ultimately, he was unhappy with both texts. So if *The Trial* and *The Metamorphosis* have become emblematic of his writings more generally, this is at the expense of his lesser-known works, at the expense of a more diverse and comprehensive picture.

The purpose of this book is to provide such a picture, by returning to Kafka's texts with careful close readings that bring out their inner tensions and complexities. For this purpose, I will put particular emphasis on Kafka's rhetoric and style – on the meandering, often contradictory or paradoxical ways in which his plots unfold, and on the grammatical intricacies of his texts. To read Kafka well, to appreciate why he is – rightly – one of the most famous of modern writers, is to read him slowly and in close detail, rather than to just look out for the big 'headline' issues of guilt and power, punishment and alienation. This is one main challenge of reading Kafka; another concerns our understanding of what Kafka's work *is*. For readers wanting to gain a first insight into his writings, editions of his three novels and of the short stories are the natural starting point, but even here we run into problems. For the vast majority of Kafka's writings, including the novels and many short stories, remained unfinished, work in progress. To read these texts as self-contained, coherent works is to distort and misunderstand the fluid nature of Kafka's texts, many of which emerged out of an amorphous (and often intermittent) writing stream, which was channelled into self-contained pieces only retrospectively, by either Kafka himself or his editors.

One of my aims in this Introduction is to draw attention to the fluid and provisional nature of Kafka's texts by focusing on what could be described as the 'margins' of these writings: deletions, corrections, alternative formulations, fragments and discarded drafts, the vast majority of which have not been

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translated into English. In addition, I will juxtapose famous and less famous texts. The result should be a more interesting Kafka, an author who is worth reading time and again, in detail and beyond the narrow scope of his most famous works. I hope this will provide readers with the tools and the incentive to explore those texts which, for reasons of space, I have been unable to discuss. These include, among Kafka's longer pieces, 'The Huntsman Gracchus', 'Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor' and 'The Village Schoolmaster', as well as the Zürau aphorisms and many other texts and fragments.

Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

The abbreviations used in this book are listed below. Where a published translation is available, all quotations are referenced first to the English version and then to the German original, in each case followed by a page number. On occasion, translations have been tacitly modified from the published versions; for those works which have not been translated I have given my own translations.

Fictional writings

- C* *The Castle*, trans. Anthea Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- CSS* *The Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1976)
- DL* *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, ed. Wolf Kittler, Hans-Gerd Koch and Gerhard Neumann. Franz Kafka: Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1996)
- DLA* *Drucke zu Lebzeiten: Apparatband*, ed. Wolf Kittler, Hans-Gerd Koch and Gerhard Neumann. Franz Kafka: Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1996)
- HA* *A Hunger Artist and Other Stories*, trans. Joyce Crick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)
- M* *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, trans. Joyce Crick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- MD* *The Man who Disappeared (America)*, trans. Ritchie Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)
- NS I* *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente I*, ed. Malcolm Pasley. Franz Kafka: Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1993)
- NS II* *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente II*, ed. Malcolm Pasley. Franz Kafka: Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1992)

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- xvi *List of abbreviations*
- ON *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 1991)
- P *Der Proceß*, ed. Malcolm Pasley. Franz Kafka: Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1990)
- PA *Der Proceß: Apparatband*, ed. Malcolm Pasley. Franz Kafka: Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1990)
- S *Das Schloß*, ed. Malcolm Pasley. Franz Kafka: Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1982)
- SA *Das Schloß: Apparatband*, ed. Malcolm Pasley. Franz Kafka: Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1982)
- T *The Trial*, trans. Mike Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- V *Der Verschollene*, ed. Jost Schillemeit. Franz Kafka: Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1983)

Non-fictional writings

- A *Amtliche Schrifte*, ed. Klaus Hermsdorf and Benno Wagner. Franz Kafka: Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 2004)
- B *Briefe 1902–1924*, ed. Max Brod (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1975)
- B1 *Briefe 1900–1912*, ed. Hans-Gerd Koch. Franz Kafka: Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1999)
- B2 *Briefe 1913 – März 1914*, ed. Hans-Gerd Koch. Franz Kafka: Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 2001)
- B3 *Briefe April 1914 – 1917*, ed. Hans-Gerd Koch. Franz Kafka: Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 2005)
- BE *Briefe an die Eltern aus den Jahren 1922–1924*, ed. Josef Čermák and Martin Svatoš (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1993)
- BF *Briefe an Felice und andere Korrespondenz aus der Verlobungszeit*, ed. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1998)
- BM *Briefe an Milena*, ed. Jürgen Born and Michael Müller, extended and revised edn (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1999)
- D *The Diaries of Franz Kafka, 1910–23*, ed. Max Brod (London: Minerva, 1992)
- LF *Letters to Felice*, ed. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born, trans. James Stern and Elisabeth Duckworth (London: Minerva, 1992)

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- LF* *Letters to Friends, Family and Editors*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (Richmond: Oneworld Classics Ltd, 2011)
- LM* *Letters to Milena*, ed. Willy Haas, trans. Tania and James Stern (London: Minerva, 1992)
- O* *The Office Writings*, ed. Stanley Corngold, Jack Greenberg and Benno Wagner, trans. Eric Patton with Ruth Hein (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008)
- TB* *Tagebücher*, ed. Hans-Gerd Koch, Michael Müller and Malcolm Pasley. *Franz Kafka: Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1990)