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Carolin Duttlinger

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KAFKA IN OXFORD

CAROLIN DUTTLINGER

Wadham College

KEYWORDS: Franz Kafka, Bodleian Library Oxford, Sir Malcolm Pasley, Max Brod, Manuscripts, Der Process (The Trial), Marianna Steiner, Oxford Kafka Research Centre

Franz Kafka's manuscripts are among the greatest treasures of Oxford's Bodleian Library. The vast majority of his *Nachlass* is housed in the Bodleian's special collections, and its presence has resulted in world-leading research and critical editions, in conferences and public exhibitions, outreach work and international collaborations. In this article I trace the journey of Kafka's manuscripts, before reflecting on their legacy — on the opportunities and challenges of this collection and its role in a forward-looking and inclusive vision of Kafka studies in the twenty-first century.

So how did the autographs of an early-twentieth-century Prague writer end up in Oxford? Interestingly, this situation is not (or only to a small extent) the result of targeted institutional collaboration and primarily the product of a mixture of chance and luck and, most importantly, of personal networks and connections.¹ To unravel this story, it is necessary to go back to Kafka's lifetime. One of the best-known facts (or indeed myths) about Kafka is that he did not actually want the world to read his texts. Max Brod, his friend and posthumous editor, recounts a conversation in which Kafka told him to burn all his unpublished manuscripts after his death. Brod apparently replied that he would do no such thing, but after Kafka's death in June 1924, he found two written notes which reiterated the instruction, probably written in late 1921 and November 1922 respectively.²

¹ In summarising these events, I am drawing on the prior, detailed accounts of Jim Reed and Ritchie Robertson. See T.J. Reed, 'Out of the labyrinth: The Kafka manuscripts in the Bodleian Library', *Bodleian Library Record*, 21/2 (Oct. 2008), 247–55; T.J. Reed, 'John Malcolm Sabine Pasley 1926–2004', *Proceedings of the British Academy 150: Biographical Memoirs of Fellows VI* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 149–58; Ritchie Robertson, 'Kafka's Writings: Private Confessions or Public Property?', *The Bodleian Library Record*, 25/2 (2012), 84–93. I am greatly indebted to Mrs Malgorzata Czepiel from the Bodleian Library, who has kindly provided me with information and materials on the history of manuscripts and on the 1983 Oxford Kafka exhibition.

² Max Brod, Franz Kafka, *Eine Freundschaft*, II: *Briefwechsel*, ed. by Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1989), pp. 365; 421–22.

While the earlier of them speaks of Kafka's 'letzte Bitte' to burn his unpublished manuscripts, letters, diaries and drawings, the later one uses the more commanding phrase 'mein letzter Wille'.

There is much that can be said about these two notes both individually and in comparison. The first lists the different locations where this scattered archive might be located — 'im Bücherkasten, Wäscheschrank, Schreibtisch zuhause und im Bureau, oder wohin sonst etwas vertragen sein sollte und dir auffällt' — as well as its different genres and components, namely diaries, manuscripts and letters written both by and to Kafka. Twice in this short text does Kafka distinguish between his writings and his drawings when noting that both categories — 'alles Geschriebene und Gezeichnete' — should be consigned to the flames. This reference to the drawings is missing from the second note, which instead distinguishes between the two categories of published and unpublished texts. Listing his published works³ he concedes that they do indeed 'count' (*gelten*), and though he has no wish for them to be re-printed, he does not want to prevent anyone 'sie zu erhalten, wenn er dazu Lust hat'. His unpublished texts, in contrast, must be burned '*ausnahmslos am liebsten ungelesen*' — though here he adds a lengthy parenthesis to Brod: 'doch wehre ich Dir nicht hineinzuschauen, am liebsten wäre es mir allerdings wenn Du es nicht tust, jedenfalls aber darf niemand anderer hineinschauen'. Even more so than the first, this second note reveals the deeply conflicting impulses which underpin Kafka's last 'wish' or 'will': a desire for elimination which simultaneously tries to take stock of this scattered *Nachlass* and indeed speaks of its afterlife and preservation — either physically, as in the case of the books already printed, or mentally, that is, in the memory of Brod, whom he permits and even expects to take mental stock of his writings before he goes on to destroy them.

Brod, of course, disregarded both of these instructions; in fact, this decision takes up a large part of the 'Nachwort' which he appended to his first posthumous edition of Kafka's works, namely *Der Process*. Brod's justification is multi-layered but centres around one crucial conversation he had with Kafka in 1921, during which Kafka first told him about his wish and backed up this instruction by showing him his second note. As Brod recalls, he emphatically told Kafka 'daß ich deine Bitte nicht erfüllen werde'; though the conversation had a 'scherzhaften Ton', it was, as Brod stresses, underpinned by 'dem heimlichen Ernst, den wir dabei stets bei dem anderen voraussetzten'. As he adds, had Kafka been serious about his wish, he would have appointed another executor who would have respected his instructions.⁴

³ These include 'Urteil, Heizer, Verwandlung, Strafkolonie, Landarzt und die Erzählung: Hungerkünstler. (Die paar Exemplare der "Betrachtung" mögen bleiben, ich will niemandem die Mühe des Einstampfens machen, aber neu gedruckt darf nichts daraus werden)'.
⁴ Brod adds a number of additional reasons to his main justification. They include the fact that Kafka disobeyed his own written instructions when he later allowed parts of *Betrachtung* to be reprinted in a newspaper; in addition, some of the stories contained in his final volume of short stories, *Ein Hungerkünstler* (1924), would have already been written by late 1921 and would thus have been included in the papers to be burnt. Brod also adds a psychological argument, noting that the posthumous publication of Kafka's texts erased the risk that texts written during a difficult period would bring back painful memories for the writer. The fact that Brod makes this lengthy justification the core of his first editorial 'Nachwort' reflects his moral dilemma, though it

Kafka studies have struggled with the moral implications of these instructions ever since Brod chose to disobey them and publish Kafka's entire bequest, including his letters and diaries, which contain deeply personal, in some instances graphically sexual and/or masochistic, passages.⁵ Brod's own recollection that he warned Kafka he would disobey his orders provides one possible route out of this moral dilemma: if Kafka had really been serious about his wish, then surely he would have found someone else to carry it out. A more subtle argument, as I have indicated, can be made based on a close reading of these notes, which in fact betray a deep ambiguity, indeed a palpable sense of melancholy at this prospect, and oscillate between the impulses of destruction and preservation.

Not only did Brod not burn Kafka's manuscripts, but soon after his death he energetically threw himself into the task of publishing his three unfinished novels and more of his short stories. The first posthumous publication, in 1925, was Kafka's second novel, *Der Process* (1914–15),⁶ followed a year later by *Das Schloss* (1922) and then by *Der Verschollene* (1912/1914), to which Brod gave the more catchy title *Amerika* (1927). The three novels were succeeded by a volume of selected short stories in 1931; in the mid-1930s, Brod assembled a six-volume edition of Kafka's *Gesammelte Werke* (1935–37), which contained additional short prose texts, including the so-called Zürau 'aphorisms', and a volume of selected diary entries and letters. A second *Werkausgabe* published by Schocken New York in the 1950s includes a separate volume of Kafka's diaries and another one of his collected letters 1902–24. Neither of these two is complete, but they give a much fuller record than the earlier edition. Interestingly, all available English translations of Kafka's diaries continue to be based on this 1950s edition, which is in fact quite heavily redacted as Brod removed some of the more transgressive passages.

Indeed, while Brod was instrumental in turning Kafka into a world author, he did so in a highly interventionist way, as he 'tidied up' loose ends, reintegrated deleted passages, and changed the order of chapters and sometimes even the gist of the narrative. The most (in)famous example can be found at the end of the chapter 'Der Prügler' in *Der Process*. Having shut the door on the surreal punishment which is meted out to the two guards by the leather-clad flogger, Josef K. returns to the lumber room the following evening. When he opens the door, he finds 'alles [...] unverändert, so wie er es am Abend vorher beim Öffnen der Tür gefunden hatte. Die Drucksorten und Tintenflaschen gleich hinter der Schwelle, der Prügler mit der Rute, die noch vollständig angezogenen Wächter'.⁷ In his edition, Brod changed the verb *angezogen* to *ausgezogen*,⁸ thus turning the nightmarish

allows him to stake out his role as the executor and saviour of Kafka's work. Max Brod, 'Nachworte des Herausgebers', in Franz Kafka, *Der Prozeß*, ed. Max Brod (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1979 [1925]), pp. 223–32 (pp. 224–27).

⁵ See for instance Kafka's diary entries on the collector Anton Max Pachinger and his pornographic photographs, which I explore in *Kafka and Photography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 167–72.

⁶ In this article I am using Kafka's own original spellings of his titles rather than the adjusted spellings used in different editions; see my comments on this matter below, p. 421.

⁷ Franz Kafka, *Der Prozeß*, ed. by Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1990), p. 117.

⁸ Franz Kafka, *Der Prozeß*, ed. Max Brod, '[...] die noch vollständig ausgezogenen Wächter' (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1979 [1925]), p. 79.

cyclicity of this scene into a stop-motion movie, which starts up again as soon as K. the spectator resumes his position.

Brod's guiding agenda was to turn an 'unwieldy and often obscure pile of papers' into a set of readable texts; though his interventionist editorial approach is at odds with current practices, he was instrumental in Kafka's early reception and rise to fame; as Clayton Koelb puts it, 'it was Brod's Kafka that everyone read, and Brod's Kafka that became an international literary phenomenon'.⁹ In some instances he included in the text deleted passages which are relegated to the apparatus in the Fischer critical edition, but which can offer important insights into Kafka's creative thinking.¹⁰ Indeed, where Kafka deletes longer passages it is often because they reveal the underlying rationale of a text; for this same reason Brod deemed them worthy of being included.

Max Brod made Kafka a world author, and he also shaped his early critical reception through the prefaces to his editions, where he advanced his own readings of his texts as religious, specifically Jewish, allegories; this approach was cemented in his 1937 Kafka biography, which portrays the writer 'as a kind of Zionist saint'.¹¹ Yet these achievements came at a cost. While Brod achieved early literary fame, publishing fifteen books before the age of 30, he quickly lost his creative momentum as he poured his energy into networking and self-promotion.¹² During Kafka's lifetime, he acted as his friend's vastly more successful mentor, but he lived to see his own fame eclipsed by Kafka's and his own role reduced to a (however important) chapter in the history of Kafka's work.

Indeed, in the late 1930s, Brod's life became more closely and existentially tied up with the fate of his friend's manuscripts. In early 1939 he writes to Thomas Mann, who was then living in Princeton, with a major request.¹³ His situation in Prague, he notes, was fast becoming untenable as he faced vicious attacks on his work and character in fascist publications such as the *Völkische Beobachter*, the NSDAP's official newspaper. He concludes: 'Ich bin entschlossen, nach Amerika auszuwandern, so lange es noch Zeit ist' and asks Mann for help with a fast-tracked visitor visa. To secure such a visa, Brod makes a bold suggestion. If Mann were able to arrange for him to be given a teaching position at a US university, he

⁹ Clayton Koelb, 'Editions', in *Franz Kafka in Context*, ed. Carolin Duttlinger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 293–301 (p. 298).

¹⁰ One such example is a long paragraph describing a newspaper image of a meeting between the French President and the Russian Czar in the 1915 short story fragment 'Blumfeld, ein älterer Junggeselle', which underlines Kafka's acute awareness of political events in the run-up to the First World War, contradicting the still-dominant cliché of his essentially apolitical outlook. The passage is included in Brod's edition of Kafka's short stories but not in the reading editions based on the Fischer edition. See Carolin Duttlinger, *Kafka and Photography*, pp. 207–19.

¹¹ Ruth V. Gross, 'Early Critical Reception', in *Kafka in Context*, pp. 259–66 (p. 262).

¹² See Reiner Stach's forensic account of Brod's life and personality in *Kafka: Die frühen Jahre* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2014), pp. 242–50.

¹³ This episode is reconstructed in Peter F. Neumeyer, 'Thomas Mann, Max Brod, and the New York Public Library', *MLN*, 90 (1975), 418–23. The letters cited by Neumeyer also feature in: *Letters of Thomas Mann, 1889–1955*, selected and transl. by Richard and Clara Winston (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975).

could lecture on Czech politics and music (particularly Janáček) and on Jewish religious politics and philosophy. In addition, Brod offers to bring with him a valuable asset: 'Ich würde den gesamten, noch unveröffentlichten Nachlass von Franz Kafka mitbringen, dort edieren und ein Kafka Archiv einrichten'.¹⁴ Mann had variously expressed his admiration for Kafka's works, describing his novels and short stories as 'beängstigend, traumkomisch, treumeisterlich und krankhaft, die sonderbar eindringlichste Unterhaltung, die man sich denken kann'.¹⁵ Mann passed on Brod's suggestion to H. M. Lydenberg, Director of the New York Public Library, who responds courteously and with interest but was unable to make Brod an immediate offer due to a recent 'curtailment of staff'. In the end, Brod did not emigrate to the US but escaped Prague on 14 March 1939, on the last train to leave the city before its invasion by the German army. Carrying Kafka's papers with him in a suitcase, he travelled through Poland and Romania to Constanza on the Black Sea, where he got on a boat to Athens and thence to Tel Aviv.

Here, he deposited the papers in a bank safe, but during the Suez Crisis of 1956, fearing for their safety, he moved them to a bank vault in Zurich, where they stayed for five years. The next protagonist in the story of Kafka's manuscripts is Sir Malcolm Pasley, Fellow in German at Magdalen College Oxford, who in 1960 got to know Michael Steiner, Kafka's great-nephew, who was studying law at Lincoln College. Through Steiner, Pasley discovered that Kafka's manuscripts were not in fact owned by Brod, as was widely assumed, but by his surviving heirs, his nieces Marianna Steiner, Gertrude Kaufmann, Helena Rumpoltová and Věra Saudková. Through Michael's mother Marianna, Pasley made contact with the other heirs, who in 1961 placed the manuscripts in the Bodleian Library on permanent revocable loan. When this deal was agreed, Pasley happened to be on skiing holiday in Austria; he drove over to Zurich, checked the authenticity of the papers, insured them for the sum of £100,000 pounds, and drove them back to Oxford in his Fiat.

The one substantial part of Kafka's literary work which is not in Oxford is the manuscript of *Der Process*, which Brod considered his personal property, and which after his death was auctioned by Sotheby's in 1988 and bought (for over £1,000,000) by the Deutsches Literaturarchiv (DLA) Marbach. His letters to Felice Bauer, the most important part of his correspondence, were auctioned off in 1987 and bought by a private collector; they have not been seen since. Hans-Gerd Koch, editor of the ongoing critical edition of Kafka's letters, based his edition on photocopies.¹⁶ When Kafka's letters to his youngest sister Ottla came up for auction in 2011, it was feared they would meet the same fate. However, they were saved for academic research by a historic partnership between the DLA and the Bodleian Library, which jointly purchased the letters with the help of private donors, a crucial and resonant moment of international collaboration in the conflict-laden history of Kafka's estate.

A less harmonious chapter of this history unfolded after the death of Ilse Ester Hoffe, Max Brod's secretary and partner of many years. In her Tel Aviv apartment

¹⁴ Cited in Neumeyer, 'Mann', pp. 420–21. Brod's letter is undated, but given Mann's letter to Lydenberg, the terminus ante quem is 17 February 1939.

¹⁵ Thomas Mann, 'Verjüngende Bücher', *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 17 April 1927.

¹⁶ See Ritchie Robertson, 'Kafka's Writings', p. 85.

she kept Brod's *Nachlass*, which also included some of Kafka's texts - though the exact nature and number of these texts was unclear. Hoffe died in 2007, at the age of 101. She left these papers to her two daughters, Eva Hoffe and Ruth Wiesler, who intended to sell the papers to the German Literary Archive in Marbach, which had agreed to set up a dedicated Max Brod archive, but the State of Israel intervened, challenging the legality of Hoffe's will by arguing that Brod's papers had not in fact been gifted to her, and that Brod had stipulated in his will they should be passed on to the National Library of Israel. At the trial, the Deutsches Literaturarchiv appeared as a co-plaintiff alongside Ester Hoffe's daughters; following several appeals, in 2016 the Israeli Supreme Court ruled in favour of the National Library of Israel, which took possession of the large trove of manuscripts left by Brod and which has since started to catalogue and digitise the estate.¹⁷ On the Kafka side, it includes items such as the earliest version ('Version A') of his prose fragment 'Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande' (1907), a Hebrew notebook, some letters, as well as around 150 drawings.¹⁸

But let us return to the Oxford part of the story. Having been instrumental in bringing the manuscripts to Oxford, Malcom Pasley became one of the editors of the Fischer Kritische Ausgabe, together with Jürgen Born, Gerhart Neumann and Jost Schillemeit. The first volume, of *Das Schloss*, edited by Pasley himself, appeared in 1982; the edition is still ongoing but nearly complete. The only outstanding part is the fifth volume of the letters, edited by Hans-Gerd Koch, which will contain Kafka's letters written between 1921 and 1924. The Fischer edition reverses Brod's many changes and seeks to restore the German text to its original (in many cases incomplete) state. It also retains Kafka's idiosyncratic punctuation, which does not follow official rules but works more like a musical score, indicating speed and pauses in the reading process. The edition does, however, adjust Kafka's spelling to make it more compatible with the then valid German spelling conventions; therefore, *Der Proceß* is spelled with a 'c' (as in Kafka's manuscript) but replaces his 'ss' with a 'ß'. Ironically, under the new *Rechtschreibung*, this 'ß' has since become obsolete, and Kafka's original spelling in fact complies with the norm. This Fischer edition has become the main reference point for Kafka scholarship and also forms the basis of newer English translations (with the important exception of the diaries and letters, which continue to be based on Brod's editions).

The Fischer edition is complemented by the facsimile, or historical-critical, edition overseen by Roland Reuß and Peter Staengle of the Institut für Textkritik in Heidelberg and published by Stroemfeld Verlag. This ongoing project (ten volumes have appeared thus far), is much more capacious than the Fischer

¹⁷ On the Israeli trial, see Benjamin Balint, *Kafka's Last Trial: The Strange Case of a Literary Legacy* (London: Picador, 2018).

¹⁸ These drawings include a sheet with a pencil-drawn portrait of Kafka's mother Julie above a self-portrait (1911) as well as a 1906 portrait called 'Lesende Martha'. See <https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/literature-and-poetry/authors/franz-kafka> [accessed 15 October 2021]. All of Kafka's drawings, including the new material, are assembled in *Franz Kafka: Die Zeichnungen*, ed. by Andreas Kilcher (Munich: Beck, 2021). Version A of 'Hochzeitsvorbereitungen', on the other hand, is already included in the Fischer edition. Franz Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente I*, ed. Malcolm Pasley, *Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1993), pp. 12–42.

edition. The notebook containing *Die Verwandlung*, for example, takes up a separate volume, as does the early fragment ‘Beschreibung eines Kampfes’ and the Zürau aphorisms, which are here called the ‘Zürauer Zettel’. As this title indicates, the facsimile edition emphasises the provisional nature of Kafka’s work. Most famously, the first volume, of *Der Process*, is not presented as one book; rather, each chapter is contained in a separate slim volume, all of which are contained in a box file, or *Schuber*, to reflect the materiality of the manuscript, which is made up of loose sheets that have been extracted from a total of ten notebooks.

The facsimile edition was initially surrounded by a very public row about whether the editors should be allowed to scan the Oxford manuscripts.¹⁹ Relations were not improved by the fact that Reuß justified this editorial project by attacking the Fischer edition for being too interventionist, for lacking respect for the manuscripts and being driven by commercial interests.²⁰ The row was eventually resolved, and Reuß and Staengle are regular visitors at the Bodleian Oxford for their ongoing editing work. For Kafka research, both editions are clearly important and complement each other; while the Fischer edition was instrumental in providing readers with a reliable and readable version of Kafka’s texts, together with a detailed scholarly apparatus, the facsimile edition is part of the ongoing effort to preserve Kafka’s increasingly fragile manuscripts. With its painstaking transcription of Kafka’s autographs, it is of ‘inestimable value to scholarship’ in that it offers a more immediate insight into Kafka’s writings,²¹ though this method also requires a lot of effort and attention on the parts of both editors and readers.

As this brief history of the manuscripts and editions shows, Kafka’s bequest is fragile and contested, punctuated by conflict in his lifetime and beyond. The fate of his writings is inextricably linked to the trauma of twentieth-century history and its lasting legacy, which means that in academic debates rational arguments cannot always be separated from a more emotional response. Thus the trial in Israel was about far more than legal matters; it was about collective identity, about where Kafka belongs in national, ethnic and cultural terms, and about the fact that his writings cannot easily be attributed to one specific national context. At the same time, though, this history is also one of lucky turns, of great generosity and successful collaboration.

And just as the story of Kafka’s manuscripts is interlinked with the fraught history of the past century, so has the history of Kafka scholarship been an acute barometer of developments within literary studies. Kafka has been read through many different lenses, and while it is easy to be dismissive of this plurality as symptomatic of passing fads, his ongoing popularity in literary studies should be seen as a reflection of the discipline’s ability to evolve and to question itself. While it is impossible to confine Kafka to any one reading, in conjunction these interpretations

¹⁹ See David Harrison, ‘Scholars squabble in Kafkaesque Drama’, *The Observer*, 17 May 1998, 23.

²⁰ Roland Reuß, “‘genug Achtung vor der Schrift’? Franz Kafka: Schriften Tagebücher Briefe”, *Text: Kritische Beiträge*, 1 (1996), 107–26.

²¹ Koelb, ‘Editions’, p. 300.

reflect a fundamental truth about literary research and the humanities: to read literature is to think about the world — both the world of the text and that of the reader, in a continuous process of critical dialectical interrogation. That Kafka continues to excite such fascination, such zeal and such heated debate, is a sign of the richness of his texts, which speak to people from different backgrounds, periods, and cultures, including young readers.

Kafka's presence at Oxford and Malcolm Pasley's service to Kafka studies continue to inspire current Germanists at Oxford. The Oxford Kafka Research Centre, which was founded in 2008,²² is a forum for international Kafka research and works closely with the keepers of Kafka's manuscripts at the Bodleian Library. Its mission is to facilitate research and debate about Kafka on all levels, including among young people and the general public, by hosting academic conferences and public events. In 2018, for instance, the Centre put on a series of workshops for sixth-form students, undergraduates and postgraduates on Kafka's *Das Schloss*, concluding with a podium discussion with Roland Reuß, who discussed the recently published facsimile edition of *Das Schloss*, and playwright Ed Harris, who spoke about his radio adaptation of the novel for Radio Four.²³

Indeed, Kafka has played a central role in the cultural life of Oxford for several decades. One important milestone was the centenary of Kafka's birth in 1983, which the Bodleian Library marked with an exhibition dedicated to him. The richly illustrated catalogue describes an exhibition of two parts and with a dual focus.²⁴ One part, 'From Pen to Print', was on display in the exhibition room in the Bodleian's old school quadrangle from 10 May until 25 August 1983; the second half, 'Paths out of Prague', was hosted by the Taylor Institution, home of the University's Modern Languages collection, and on display from 10 May until 17 June. The exhibition flyer also lists an opening event on 9 May, namely 'a selection of films seen by Kafka' screened at the Taylorian and presented by the German director Hanns Zischler, who later went on to publish his findings in his 1996 monograph *Kafka geht ins Kino*.

The exhibition was organised by Malcolm Pasley. In their joint preface to the accompanying catalogue, Giles Barber, Librarian of the Taylor Institution, and John Jolliffe, Bodley's Librarian, start off by play devil's advocate; though Kafka is an author of international standing, they nonetheless raise the question 'why the centenary of the birth of this particular German-language author should be marked by a double exhibition in Oxford'. In answering this question, they refer to a second, more poignant anniversary: 9 May 1983, the eve of the exhibition's opening, is also the fiftieth anniversary of 'the inauguration in Nazi Germany of the public burning of officially disapproved literature', which would have included the works of Kafka (5). In referencing this much darker anniversary, the authors

²² The OKRC was by Manfred Engel and Ritchie Robertson and it now directed by Carolin Duttlinger, Katrin Kohl, Barry Murnane and Ritchie Robertson. See <http://www.kafka-research.ox.ac.uk/> [accessed 15 October 2021].

²³ Ed Harris, *Franz Kafka – The Castle*. The two-part adaptation was first broadcast on 10 and 16 May 2015. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05tbw1m> [accessed 15 October 2021].

²⁴ [Malcolm Pasley], *Catalogue of the Kafka Centenary Exhibition 1983* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1983), p. 3. Page references will henceforth be given parenthetically in the text.

draw a poignant dual analogy both with Kafka's own disregarded instruction to burn his unpublished writings and with the 'world conflagration' which was caused by Nazi rule. The preface thus highlights Kafka's place within the longer history of the twentieth century, a history which is marked by crisis but also by fortuitous turns. The organisers pay homage to Malcolm Pasley, 'to whose knowledge and enthusiasm we are indebted both for arranging this exhibition and for compiling this catalogue' (5). In putting the manuscripts centre-stage and giving the visitor a cross-section of Kafka's writing styles and media as they evolved over time, the exhibition does indeed bear Pasley's imprint.²⁵ As Barber and Jolliffe conclude,

Careful editorial work based on access to manuscripts and printed texts allows an author's work to be seen in a clear light. We therefore feel honoured to have been entrusted with this archive, to be associated with the edition of the works of one of the most significant authors of our time, and to be allowed to share this with others by means of this exhibition. [...] Each age brings its own interpretations of a great writer: it is the duty of libraries to assemble and preserve the evidence on which to base them. (5–6)

The ensuing Introduction, presumably written by Pasley, underlines the collaborative nature of the project, offering thanks to individuals such as Marianna Steiner and Klaus Wagenbach, who provided most of the 'visual material' in the exhibition, and to institutions such as the Jewish National and University Library Jerusalem. It also thanks various 'private owners' for contributing some of the items on display (8).

True to the title 'From Page to Print', the Bodleian part of the exhibition offered visitors a chance to view Kafka's manuscripts alongside first editions of his short stories and short story collections as they were published during his lifetime. Also on display were contextual items such as a photograph of Flora Klug, a member of the Yiddish theatre troupe whose performances Kafka attended in 1912, in her role as a 'Herrenimitatorin' (14), and the final listed exhibit, the certificate attesting Kafka's presence at the Dr Hoffmann's Sanatorium in Kierling, where he died on 3 June 1924 (33). The literary autographs range from his earliest surviving text, a two-line poem written into the album of his school friend Hugo Bergmann, probably in 1897, to the manuscript of his final short story, 'Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse' (1924).²⁶ Between them, the 80 displayed items give a broad overview of Kafka's life and work. They include some of his most famous works, such as the ending of his breakthrough story 'Das Urteil' (1912), the first and the (unfinished) last chapters of his first novel *Der Verschollene* (1912/1914), and the opening page of his third and final novel, *Das Schloss* (1922). Kafka started writing *Das Schloss* as a first-person narrative but later shifted into

²⁵ See for instance Malcolm Pasley, 'Kafka's *Der Process*: What the Manuscript can tell us', *Oxford German Studies*, 18–19 (1989–90), 109–18; see also the Marbach exhibition catalogue *Franz Kafka, 'Der Process': Die Handschrift redet*, ed. Malcolm Pasley and Ulrich Ott (Marburg/Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1990).

²⁶ Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente I*, p. 7. Hugo Bergmann later emigrated to Palestine and became the first director of the Jewish National Library.

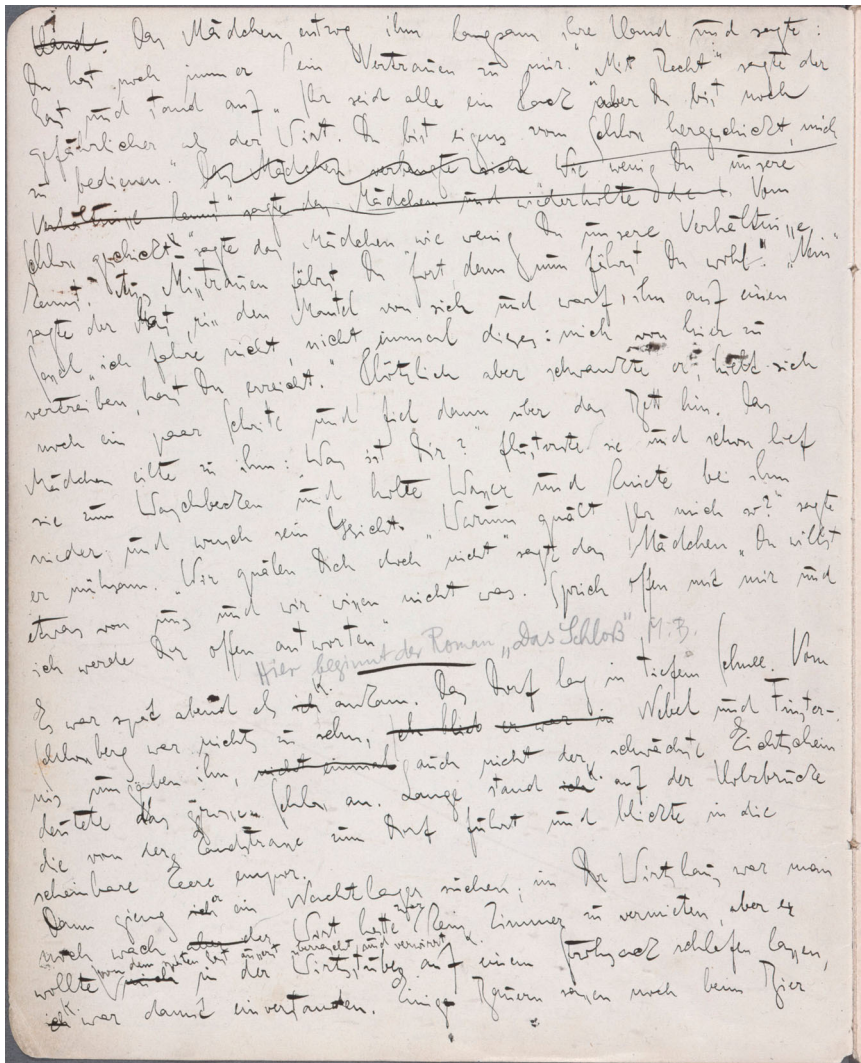


FIG. 1. MS Kafka 34, fol 2 verso. Reproduced by courtesy of The Bodleian Libraries, Oxford OX1 3BG. 'Das Schloss' begins in the bottom third of the page. Note the change from the original 'ich' to 'K'.

the impersonal third-person mode. After he made this transition, he simply went over the preceding chapters, changing all first-person pronouns and verbs into the third person (see [Figure 1](#)).

The exhibition puts these famous works alongside more obscure pieces such as Kafka's early prose fragment 'Beschreibung eines Kampfes' (1904–1911) and the typescript of his drama fragment 'Der Gruftwächter' (1916–17). This part of the exhibition also places his writings in their original context and emphasises their materiality, by displaying the handwritten texts alongside their published versions, as in the case of the short prose text 'Entschlüsse', which Kafka first records in his

diary quarto notebook on 5 February 1912 and which is subsequently included in his first book, *Betrachtung* (1912; 17–18).

The second part, hosted at the Taylor Institution and called ‘Paths out of Prague’, is subtitled ‘The Diffusion of Kafka’s Work’ and focussed on his reception in his lifetime and beyond. Its first two sections are dedicated to the resonance of his work between 1912–1924, both in Prague and ‘beyond Bohemia’; a third section, entitled ‘1925–1945: wider contexts’, traces his growing international resonance, as his texts started to appear in Spanish, French, and English translation. Revealingly, a 1942 English translation, ‘Jackals and Arabs’, by Mimi Bartel, in the US periodical *New Directions*, is accompanied by the editorial remark that ‘the name of Franz Kafka is too familiar to require any comment’ (48). The final section is entitled ‘Since 1945: world renown — with penalties’ (50). It contains more international editions as well as catalogues of Kafka exhibitions which took place in East Berlin in 1966, in Jerusalem in 1966, and in London in 1971. A particular focus, which explains the intriguingly ambivalent title, is on his evolving status in Eastern Europe. Kafka was classed and condemned by the Soviet authorities as a ‘modernist’ alongside writers such as Proust, Beckett, and Joyce, but in the face of his fast-growing popularity in the Eastern Block, as attested by the displayed translations of his works into Czech, Polish, Russian and Hungarian, the regime gradually began to thaw in its attitude towards him.²⁷ As Pasley comments in the catalogue, the 1963 Kafka conference in Liblice (Czechoslovakia) was the clearest indication of ‘a decisive shift in the official attitude towards Kafka’s work in the Soviet world’ (54).

Though an exhibition on the theme of ‘Kafka in England’ had already taken place in London in 1971, the 1983 Oxford exhibition was probably the first opportunity for a wider public to come face to face with Kafka’s manuscripts. In Oxford and the UK, the 1983 exhibition has also set a precedent for another centenary exhibition, namely one marking the centenary of Kafka’s death, which will take place in the Oxford Weston Library in the spring and summer of 2024.

The partnership between the Oxford Kafka Research Centre and the Bodleian will be crucial for this upcoming centenary. The 2024 exhibition will be hosted in the purpose-built exhibition space in the Weston Library and will immerse visitors in Kafka’s life and times by focussing on key themes such as institutions and bureaucracy, animals, colonialism, and visual media and mass culture. Kafka’s manuscripts and editions will once again play a central role. Indeed, the exhibition will tell the story of his Nachlass, including its perilous journey from Prague to Oxford; it will also highlight his legacy as a global author, who continues to inspire academic and writers, translators and artists working across a wide range of media. This exhibition will be an opportunity to re-situate Kafka’s texts within their time and context, to show that in his writings Kafka actively and critically engaged with the culture and politics of his time. It will also seek to counteract some of the more persistent clichés around Kafka and the ‘Kafkaesque’, for instance by highlighting his humorous side and his interest in modern culture and technology. But most importantly, it will, like the 1983 exhibition, put his texts

²⁷ For an overview of this shift, see Emily Tall, ‘Who’s Afraid of Franz Kafka? Kafka Criticism in the Soviet Union’, *Slavic Review*, 35 (1976), 484–503.

centre stage, by displaying his autographs and drawing attention to his lesser-known works.

The exhibition theme, 'Franz Kafka Global', will echo the international outlook of the 1983 exhibition and will build on it by being conceived as part of an international collaboration. It will be staged in partnership with the DLA Marbach and the National Library of Israel, which will both be putting on their own exhibitions. While they will be conceptually independent, all three exhibitions will be linked by a joint website, the mutual loans of manuscripts, and shared events and publications. As these plans resonantly show, the times of wrangling over who 'owns' Kafka, in both a literal and metaphorical, cultural and intellectual, sense are hopefully behind us. Given that this centenary marks Kafka's death, the associated programme of academic events in Oxford will focus on the triad of his 'Life, Death, and Afterlife'; it will also focus on Kafka's illness and treatment from a medical humanities perspective, while exploring the traces of this experience in his late writings.

Kafka scholarship should be less about individuals advancing their own readings; it is part of a more general project, that of a custodian responsibility towards Kafka's texts. This is a responsibility which is shared by libraries and archives and by Kafka researchers. In practice, this responsibility involves returning to the texts time and again, looking at them in close, forensic detail (not just through the lens of his 'big' themes), for instance with regard to punctuation and syntax and the materiality of the manuscript and the writing process. Kafka's notebooks, which are full of aborted stories, continue to be underexplored, even though they are vital as a creative laboratory which offers important insight into the workings of his literary imagination.

So whatever approach we take to Kafka (as to any author), it is vital that these studies remain grounded in the text. In this regard, British Kafka scholarship, and Oxford research in particular, has been inspired by the spirit of custodianship, by the obligation of staying close to his manuscripts. An approach to his work which puts the texts at the centre, being mindful of their inner complexity while situating them within their wider cultural-historical context, has been characteristic of Kafka studies in Oxford and in the United Kingdom more generally, and this approach ties in with Oxford as a home to Kafka's *Nachlass*. His manuscripts' presence in Oxford, then, is an ongoing inspiration as well as an obligation. Oxford academics and librarians have played a vital role in preserving Kafka's legacy and making his works accessible to readers around the world. After decades of uncertainty and conflict, the centenary in 2024 will be an opportunity for international collaboration, an opportunity to show our shared commitment to Kafka. It is this spirit of openness that the Oxford Kafka Research Centre and the Bodleian Library hope to convey with the activities planned for 2024.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

Carolyn Duttlinger is Professor of German Literature and Culture at the University of Oxford, a Fellow of Wadham College Oxford, and Co-Director of the Oxford Kafka Research Centre.