

Kafka in Prague

Erik S. Roraback

Docent/Habilitation, Charles University

Doctor of Philosophy, University of Oxford

Bachelor of Arts, Pomona College www.erikroraback.com

Contact: eroraback@aeprague.org

Course Description:

This seminar will engage some major prose compositions by the modernist Prague-born writer, Frank Kafka (1883–1924). We shall also engage some key works of criticism on Kafka by authors who are themselves thinker-writers of stature and interest; these will include Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Stanley Corngold, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Michael Löwy, J. Hillis Miller, Paul North, David Foster Wallace, Benno Wagner, and Slavoj Žižek. Furthermore, we shall also watch a 1962– film based on Kafka’s novel work, *The Trial*, by the American-born director Orson Welles (1915–85). We shall also visit the Franz Kafka Museum in Prague.

Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes:

The seminar aims to achieve a greater awareness of the possible roles of literature and of Kafka for the individual and social imaginary. It also aims to cultivate the capacity of the student to read complex literary works and works of criticism in their cultural and historical context.

Course Requirements:

- **Reading:** there is not an overabundance of matter to be read for the class; therefore, that which is assigned deserves your careful attention.
- **Two essays a midterm of 2500 words and a final essay of 3000 words;** topics will be given two weeks in advance, but you can also make your own creative choice of topic area that must have the professor’s approval in advance; regrettably, late papers will not be accepted.

- **Attendance** at the weekly sessions to discuss the guided readings (one absence allowed, beyond that your grade will be lowered a full letter grade for each additional excused or unexcused absence). Your mental participation and over-all effect on the quality of the class inform this grade as much as how much you contribute to seminar discussions; arriving more than ten minutes late for class or leaving for more than ten minutes for any part of the class session will result in an absence for that day. There will be two ten-minute breaks during each week's session.
- **Oral presentations** by the students in the class, which may be seen as work in progress toward one of the two writing assignments.

Grading Policy:

- Participation/attendance in the class sessions: 30%
- Midterm essay: 25%
- Final essay: 35%
- In-class presentation: 10%

Mandatory Completion Policy

Note that all mandatory assignments and exams must be completed to the best of your ability in order for your final grade to be issued. Failure to complete a mandatory assignment or exam may result in a failing grade.

Letter Grade	Percentage	Description
A+	97-100	Excellent Work
A	93-97	Outstanding Work
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	Good work
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	Acceptable Work
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D+	67-69	Work that is significantly below average
D	63-66	
D-	60-62	
F	0-59	Work that does not meet the minimum standards for passing the course

AEP Academic Integrity Policy

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are not tolerated. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the development of knowledge and learning is encouraged at many stages of the learning process. While we value technology for educational purposes, we also value originality and the retainment of knowledge, and thus using AI for assignments and examinations, even if rephrased, is strictly prohibited and considered an academic integrity violation, unless the instructor explicitly allows for it in the context of evaluated work

AEP Non-Discrimination/Harassment Policy

The AEP program in Prague promotes a diverse learning environment where the dignity, worth, and differences of each individual are valued and respected. Discrimination and harassment, whether based on a person's race, gender, sexual orientation, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, or other legally protected characteristics, are repugnant and completely inconsistent with our objectives. Retaliation against individuals for raising good faith claims of harassment and/or discrimination is prohibited.

AEP Diversity Policy

AEP is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming community that values diversity in all its forms. We believe that one of the most meaningful lessons of studying abroad is learning to navigate and appreciate differences with curiosity and an open mind. While engaging across differences can sometimes be challenging or uncomfortable, these moments are essential for growth and learning. We recognize that every member of our community, even with the best intentions, may occasionally make missteps. Our commitment is to provide a supportive environment where respectful and honest dialogue helps us learn from these experiences, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive and broaden their perspective.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

CEE Introductory Lecture Series

AEP Introductory Lecture Series

Week 2

Introductions I

- David Foster Wallace, “Laughing with Kafka” from Harper’s Magazine pp. 23–27

Week 3

Introductions II

- “Before the Law” from The Complete Stories, “Letters, Diaries, and Conversations” pp. 193–213 from Kafka’s Selected Stories: A Norton Critical Edition

The World of Judgment I

- Read the first half of The Trial

Week 4

The World of Judgment II

- Read the second half of The Trial
- Gilles Deleuze, “To Have Done with Judgement”, Essays Critical and Clinical, pp. 126–35

Week 5

Kafka on Film

- Watch 1962 film of The Trial (dir. Orson Welles, 123 minutes)
- Jeffrey Adams, “Orson Welles’s The Trial: Film Noir and the Kafkaesque” pp. 140–57
- Deleuze and Guattari, pp. ix–xxi, xxii–xxix, 3–42 + notes 91–96 from Toward a Minor Literature

Week 6

Post-film discussion on The Trial

Kafka & After; or, Leading-Edge Kafka Criticism

- Deleuze and Guattari, pp. 43–88 + notes and index 96–104 from *Toward a Minor Literature*

Week 7

Mid-Term Essay Due

A visit to the Franz Kafka Museum

Week 8

The Kafka Short Story I

- Read “In the Penal Colony”, “A Hunger Artist” from *The Complete Stories*
- Stanley Corngold, Chapter Four “Allotria and Excretia in ‘In the Penal Colony’” pp. 67–93, 223–26 from *Lambent Traces: Franz Kafka*

Week 9

The Kafka Short Story II

- Read “The Metamorphosis”, “The Judgment” from *The Complete Stories*
- Optional reading only Maurice Blanchot, pp. 240–88, 305–09 “Kafka and Brod”, “The Last Word”, “The Very Last Word” from *Friendship*
- Stanley Corngold and Benno Wagner, Chapter 7 “Kafka and Sex” pp. 133–49, 246–47 from *Franz Kafka: The Ghosts in the Machine*

*Also you may consult Stanley Corngold, trans. and ed. “The Metamorphosis” by Franz Kafka (New York: Modern Library, 2013) two copies to be found for consultation with one on reserve in the CERGE–EI library

Week 10

The Kafka Short Story III

- Read “Josephine the Singer”, “The Burrow” from *The Complete Stories*
- Georges Bataille, pp. 151–69 “Kafka” from *Literature and Evil*

Week 11

Kafka's Magnum Opus I

- Read The Castle first half
- Theodor W. Adorno, pp. 245–71 “Notes on Kafka” from Prisms
- Stanley Corngold and Benno Wagner, Chapter 6 “The Ministry of Writing (The Castle)” pp. 109–30, 242–46 from Franz Kafka: The Ghosts in the Machine

Week 12

Kafka's Magnum Opus II

- Read The Castle second half
- optional reading Walter Benjamin, pp. 108–35 “Franz Kafka on the Tenth Anniversary of His Death” + pp. 136–43 “Max Brod's Book on Kafka And Some Of My Own Reflections” from Illuminations
- Erik S. Roraback, work in progress to be discussed by the author, Conclusions

Week 13

Finals Week

Final Essay Due, which takes the place of the Final Exam

Readings:

Texts either in a hard copy or in the online version of the course reader or: available in the CERGE EI library to borrow or will be discussed by the professor:

Jeffrey Adams, “Orson Welles's The Trial: Film Noir and the Kafkaesque” from College Literature, Vol. 29, No. 3, Literature and the Visual Arts (Summer, 2002), pp. 140–57. Required

Theodor W. Adorno, “Notes on Kafka” from Prisms, trans. by Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967) pp. 243–71. Required

Mark M. Anderson, Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin de Siècle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). Recommended

Georges Bataille, “Kafka” from Literature and Evil, trans. Alastair Hamilton (London: Marion Boyars, 1997) pp. 149–69. Required

Walter Benjamin, “Franz Kafka on the Tenth Anniversary of His Death” + “Max Brod's Book on Kafka And Some Of My Own Reflections” from Illuminations with an intro. by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999) pp. 108–35 + pp. 136–43. Optional

Maurice Blanchot, "Kafka and Brod", "The Last Word", "The Very Last Word" from Friendship, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997) pp. 240–51, 252–64, 265–88, 305–09. Optional

Elizabeth Boa, Kafka: Gender, Class, and Race in the Letters and Fictions (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996). Selections to be discussed by instructor

Stanley Corngold, Lambent Traces: Franz Kafka (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004) Chapter Four "Allotria and Excretia in 'In the Penal Colony'" pp. 67–93, 223–26. Required

Stanley Corngold, trans. and ed. "The Metamorphosis" by Franz Kafka (New York: Modern Library, 2013). Recommended

Stanley Corngold and Benno Wagner, Franz Kafka: The Ghosts in the Machine (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2011) Chapter 6 "The Ministry of Writing (The Castle)" pp. 109–30 and Chapter 7 "Kafka and Sex" pp. 133–49, 242–47. Required

Gilles Deleuze, "To Have Done with Judgement", Essays Critical and Clinical, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997) pp. 126–35. Required

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, trans. Dana Polan, foreword Réda Bensmaïa (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986). Required

Franz Kafka "In the Penal Colony" pp. 35–59, & "Letters, Diaries, and Conversations" pp. 193–213 (German) from Kafka's Selected Stories: A Norton Critical Edition, trans. and ed. Stanley Corngold

(New York: Norton, 2006). Required

_____ . The Complete Stories. Target stories on syllabus required

_____ . The Castle. Required

_____ . The Trial. Required

Clayton Koelb, Kafka's Rhetoric: The Passion of Reading (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989). Selections to be discussed by instructor

Michael Löwy, Franz Kafka: Subversive Dreamer, trans. Inez Hedges (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2016). Selections to be discussed by instructor

J. Hillis Miller, The Conflagration of Community: Fiction before and after Auschwitz (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2011) pp. 39–145, nn 277–90. To be discussed by instructor

Paul North, The Yield: Kafka's Atheological Reformation (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2015). Selections to be discussed by instructor

Erik S. Roraback, work in progress to be discussed in class by the author and teacher-scholar

Anke Snoek, Agamben's Joyful Kafka: Finding Freedom Beyond Subordination (London: Bloomsbury, 2012). Selections to be discussed by instructor

David Foster Wallace, "Laughing with Kafka" from Harper's Magazine, July 1998, pp. 23–27. Required

Orson Welles, dir. 1962. *The Trial*. DVD video. B &W 120 minutes. Alpha Video 2003. From the novel by Franz Kafka. Perf. Anthony Perkins, Orson Welles, Jeanne Moreau, Romy Schneider, Elsa Martinelli, Akim Tamiroff; screenplay Orson Welles, music Jean Ledruit, pinscreen prologue scenes Alexandre Alexeiff and Claire Parker. Required

John Zilcosky, *Kafka's Travels: Exoticism, Colonialism, and the Traffic of Writing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). For future reference

Slavoj Žižek, Selected passages from across his corpus of texts that briefly yet intelligently broach the work of Franz Kafka. E.g. *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006). To be discussed in class by the teacher-scholar