"Kafka" redirects here. For other uses, see Kafka (disambiguation).

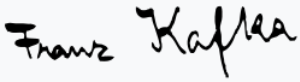
Franz Kafka

Kafka in 1923

Born	3 July 1883 Prague, Austria-Hungary
Died	3 June 1924 (aged 40) Klosterneuburg, Austria
Burial place	New Jewish Cemetery, Prague
Citizenship	Austria (until 1918)[a] Czechoslovakia (from 1918)[1][2]
Alma mater	German Charles-Ferdinand University
Occupations	Novelist short story writer insurance officer

Works	List
Style	Modernism

Signature



Franz Kafka[b] (3 July 1883 – 3 June 1924) was a German-language Jewish Czech writer and novelist born in Prague, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.[4] Widely regarded as a major figure of 20th-century literature, his works fuse elements of realism and the fantastique,[5] and typically feature isolated protagonists facing bizarre or surreal predicaments and incomprehensible socio-bureaucratic powers. The term *Kafkaesque* has entered the lexicon to describe situations like those depicted in his writings.[6] His best-known works include the novella *The Metamorphosis* (1915) and the novels *The Trial* (1924) and *The Castle* (1926). He is also celebrated for his brief fables and aphorisms, which frequently incorporated comedic elements alongside the darker themes of his longer works.[7][c] His work has widely influenced artists, philosophers, composers, filmmakers, literary historians, religious scholars, and cultural theorists, and his writings have been seen as prophetic or premonitory of a totalitarian future.[9][10][11][12][13][14][15]

Kafka was born into a middle-class German- and Yiddish-speaking Czech Jewish family in Prague, the capital of the Kingdom of Bohemia, which belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire (later the capital of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic).[16][17] He trained as a lawyer, and after completing his legal education was employed full-time in various legal and insurance jobs.[18] His professional obligations led to internal conflict as he felt that his true vocation was writing. Only a minority of his works were published during his life; the story collections *Contemplation* (1912) and *A Country Doctor* (1919), and individual stories, such as his novella *The Metamorphosis*, were published in literary magazines, but they received little attention. He wrote hundreds of letters to family and close friends, including his father, with whom he had a strained and formal relationship. He became engaged to several women but never married. He died relatively unknown in 1924 of tuberculosis, aged 40. His literary executor and friend Max Brod ignored Kafka's wishes to destroy his remaining works, publishing them to eventual acclaim.

Life

Early life

Franz Kafka's parents, Hermann and Julie Kafka

Kafka was born near the Old Town Square in Prague, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His family were German-speaking middle-class Ashkenazi Jews. His father, Hermann Kafka, was the fourth child of Jakob Kafka,[19][20] a *shochet* or kosher butcher in Osek, a Czech village with a large Jewish population located near Strakonice in southern Bohemia.[21] Hermann "came to Prague in the 1870s and opened a store selling haberdashery and ladies' accessories".[22] He employed up to 15 people and used the image of a jackdaw (*kavka* in Czech, pronounced and colloquially written as *kafka*) as his business logo.[23] Kafka's mother, Julie, was the daughter of Jakob Löwy, a "cloth-maker in Humpolec in eastern Bohemia".[22]

Kafka's parents, from traditional Jewish society, spoke German replete with influences from their native Yiddish; their children, raised in an acculturated environment, spoke Standard German.[24] The cleanliness and "almost platonic purity"[25] of Kafka's German may derive from the fact that he grew up speaking the language in a country whose primary language was not German.[25] His prose is not marked by slang or fads of contemporary usage that was typical of his generational peers from the heart of the empire in Vienna or, for that matter, from the center of the Second Reich in Berlin.[25]


Kafka at about ten with his sisters Valli (left) and Elli (center)

Hermann and Julie had six children, of whom Franz was the eldest.[26] Franz's two brothers, Georg and Heinrich, died in infancy before Franz was seven; his three sisters were Gabriele ("Elli"), Valerie ("Valli") and Ottilie ("Ottla"). All three were murdered in the Holocaust of World War II. Valli was deported to the Łódź Ghetto in occupied Poland in 1942, but that is the last documentation of her; it is assumed she did not survive the war. Ottilie was Kafka's favourite sister.[27]

Hermann is described by Kafka scholar and translator Stanley Corngold as a "huge, selfish, overbearing businessman"[28] and by Franz Kafka as "a true Kafka in strength, health, appetite, loudness of voice, eloquence, self-satisfaction, worldly dominance, endurance, presence of mind, knowledge of human nature, a certain way of doing things on a grand scale, of course also with all the defects and weaknesses that go with these advantages and into which your temperament and sometimes your hot temper drive you".[29] On business days, both parents were absent from the home, with Julie Kafka working as many as 12 hours each day helping to manage the family business. Consequently, Kafka's childhood was somewhat lonely,[30] and the children were reared largely by a series of governesses and servants. Kafka's troubled relationship with his father is evident in his *Brief an den Vater* (*Letter to His Father*) of more than 100 pages, in which he complains of being profoundly affected by his father's authoritarian and demanding character;[31] his mother, in contrast, was quiet and shy.[32] The dominating figure of Kafka's father had a significant influence on Kafka's writing.[33]

The Kafka family had a servant girl living with them in a cramped apartment.[34] Franz's room was often cold. In November 1913, the family moved into a bigger apartment, although Ellie and Valli had married and moved out of the first apartment. In early August 1914, just after World War I began, the sisters did not know where their husbands were in the military and moved back in with the family in this larger apartment. Both Ellie and Valli also had children. Franz at age 31 moved into Valli's former apartment, quiet by contrast, and lived by himself for the first time.[35]

Education


Kinský Palace where Kafka attended gymnasium and his father owned a shop

From 1889 to 1893, Kafka attended the German boys' elementary school at the *Masný trh/Fleischmarkt* (meat market), now known as Masná Street. His Jewish education ended with his *bar mitzvah* celebration at the age of 13. Kafka never enjoyed attending the synagogue and went with his father only on four high holidays each year.[29][36][37]

After leaving elementary school in 1893, Kafka was admitted to the rigorous classics-oriented state gymnasium, Altstädter Deutsches Gymnasium, an academic secondary school at Old Town Square, located within Kinský Palace. German was the language of instruction, but Kafka also spoke and wrote in Czech.[38][39] He studied the latter at the gymnasium for eight years, achieving good grades.[40] Kafka received compliments for his Czech, but never considered himself fluent in the language. He spoke German with a Czech accent.[1][39] He completed his Matura exams in 1901.[41]

Kafka was admitted to the Deutsche Karl-Ferdinands-Universität of Prague in 1901. He was originally admitted for philosophy, and he had additionally signed up for chemistry.[42] Kafka began studying chemistry but switched to law after two weeks.[43] Although this field did not excite him, it offered a range of career possibilities, which pleased his father. In addition, law required a longer course of study, giving Kafka time to take classes in German studies and art history.[44] He also joined a student club, Lese- und Redehalle der Deutschen Studenten (Reading and Lecture Hall of the German students), which organised literary events, readings and other activities.[45] Among Kafka's friends were the journalist Felix Weltsch, who studied philosophy, the actor Yitzchak Lowy who came from an orthodox Hasidic Warsaw family, and the writers Ludwig Winder, Oskar Baum and Franz Werfel.[46]

At the end of his first year of studies, Kafka met Max Brod, a fellow law student who became a close friend for life.[45] Years later, Brod coined the term *Der enge Prager Kreis* ("The Close Prague Circle") to describe the group of writers, which included Kafka, Felix Weltsch and Brod himself.[47][48] Brod soon noticed that, although Kafka was shy and seldom spoke, what he said was usually profound.[49] Kafka was an avid reader throughout his life;[50] together he and Brod read Plato's *Protagoras* in the original Greek, on Brod's initiative, and Gustave Flaubert's *L'éducation sentimentale* and *La Tentation de St. Antoine* (*The Temptation of Saint Anthony*) in French, at his own suggestion.[51] Kafka considered Fyodor Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Nikolai Gogol, Franz Grillparzer,[52] and Heinrich von Kleist to be his "true blood brothers".[53] Besides these,

he took an interest in Czech literature[38][39] and was also fond of the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,[54][55] though his "admiration for Goethe was, however, somewhat ambivalent: 'By the power of his works Goethe probably holds back the development of the German language.'"[56] Kafka was awarded the degree of Doctor of Law on 18 June 1906[d] and performed an obligatory year of unpaid service as a law clerk for the civil and criminal courts.[6]

Employment


Former home of the Worker's Accident Insurance Institute

On 1 November 1907, Kafka was employed at the Assicurazioni Generali, an insurance company, where he worked for nearly a year. His correspondence during that period indicates that he was unhappy with a work schedule—from 08:00 until 18:00[63][64]—that made it extremely difficult to concentrate on writing, which was assuming increasing importance to him. On 15 July 1908, he resigned. Two weeks later, he found employment more amenable to writing when he joined the Worker's Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia (Úrazová pojišťovna dělnická pro Čechy v Praze). The job involved investigating and assessing compensation for personal injury to industrial workers; accidents such as lost fingers or limbs were commonplace, owing to poor work safety policies at the time. It was especially true of factories fitted with machine lathes, drills, planing machines and rotary saws, which were rarely fitted with safety guards.[65]

His father often referred to his son's job as an insurance officer as a *Brotberuf*, literally "bread job", a job done only to pay the bills; Kafka often claimed to despise it. Kafka was rapidly promoted and his duties included processing and investigating compensation claims, writing reports, and handling appeals from businessmen who thought their firms had been placed in too high a risk category, which cost them more in insurance premiums.[66] He would compile and compose the annual report on the insurance institute for the several years he worked there. The reports were well received by his superiors.[67] Kafka usually got off work at 2 p.m., so that he had time to spend on his literary work, to which he was committed.[68] Kafka's father also expected him to help out at and take over the family fancy goods store.[69] In his later years,

Kafka's illness often prevented him from working at the insurance bureau and at his writing.

In late 1911, Elli's husband Karl Hermann and Kafka became partners in the first asbestos factory in Prague, known as Prager Asbestwerke Hermann & Co., having used dowry money from Hermann Kafka. Kafka showed a positive attitude at first, dedicating much of his free time to the business, but he later resented the encroachment of this work on his writing time.[70] During that period, he also found interest and entertainment in the performances of Yiddish theatre. After seeing a Yiddish theatre troupe perform in October 1911, for the next six months Kafka "immersed himself in Yiddish language and in Yiddish literature".[71] This interest also served as a starting point for his growing exploration of Judaism.[72] It was at about this time that Kafka became a vegetarian.[73] Around 1915, Kafka received his draft notice for military service in World War I, but his employers at the insurance institute arranged for a deferment because his work was considered essential government service. He later attempted to join the military but was prevented from doing so by medical problems associated with tuberculosis,[74] with which he was diagnosed in 1917.[75] In 1918, the Worker's Accident Insurance Institute put Kafka on a pension due to his illness, for which there was no cure at the time, and he spent most of the rest of his life in sanatoriums.[6]

Personal life

Felice Bauer and Franz Kafka

Kafka never married. According to Brod, Kafka was "tortured" by sexual desire,[76] and filled with a fear of "sexual failure".[77] Kafka visited brothels for most of his adult life,[78][79][80] and his collection of erotica and pornographic photographs demonstrates a connoisseur's range of interest in the genre.[81] In addition, he had close relationships with several women during his lifetime. On 13 August 1912, Kafka met Felice Bauer, a relative of Brod's, who worked in Berlin as a representative of a dictaphone company. A week after the meeting at Brod's home, Kafka wrote in his diary:

Miss FB. When I arrived at Brod's on 13 August, she was sitting at the table. I was not at all curious about who she was, but rather took her for granted at once. Bony, empty face that wore its emptiness openly. Bare throat. A blouse thrown on. Looked very domestic in her dress although, as it turned out, she by no means was. (I alienate myself from her a little by inspecting her so closely…) Almost broken nose. Blonde, somewhat straight, unattractive hair, strong chin. As I was taking my seat I looked at her closely for the first time, by the time I was seated I already had an unshakeable opinion.[82][83]

Shortly after this meeting, Kafka wrote the story "Das Urteil" ("The Judgment") in only one night and in a productive period worked on *Der Verschollene* (*The Man Who Disappeared*) and *Die Verwandlung* (*The Metamorphosis*). Kafka and Felice Bauer communicated mostly through letters over the next five years, met occasionally, and were engaged twice.[84] Kafka's extant letters to Bauer were published as *Briefe an Felice* (*Letters to Felice*); her letters did not survive.[82][85][86] After he had written to Bauer's father asking to marry her, Kafka wrote in his diary:

My job is unbearable to me because it conflicts with my only desire and my only calling, which is literature… I am nothing but literature and can and want to be nothing else.... Nervous states of the worst sort control me without pause… A marriage could not change me, just as my job cannot change me.[87]

According to the biographers Stach and James Hawes, Kafka became engaged a third time around 1920, to Julie Wohryzek, a poor and uneducated hotel chambermaid.[84][88] Kafka's father objected to Wohryzek because of her Zionist beliefs. Although Kafka and Wohryzek rented a flat and set a wedding date, the marriage never took place. During this time, Kafka began a draft of *Letter to His Father*. Before the date of the intended marriage, he took up with yet another woman.[89]

Stach and Brod state that during the time that Kafka knew Felice Bauer, he had an affair with a friend of hers, Margarethe "Grete" Bloch,[90] a Jewish woman from Berlin. Brod says that Bloch gave birth to Kafka's son, although Kafka never knew about the child. The boy, whose name is not known, was born in 1914 or 1915 and died in Munich in 1921.[91][92] However, Kafka's biographer Peter-André Alt says that, while Bloch had a son, Kafka was not the father, as the pair were never intimate.[93][94] Stach notes contradictory evidence as to whether Kafka was the father.[95]

Kafka was diagnosed with tuberculosis in August 1917 and moved for a few months to the Bohemian village of Zürau (Siřem in Czech), where his sister Ottla worked on the farm of her brother-in-law Karl Hermann. He felt comfortable there and later described

this time as perhaps the best period of his life, probably because he had no responsibilities. He kept diaries and made notes in exercise books (*Oktavhefte*). From those notes, Kafka extracted 109 numbered pieces of text on single pieces of paper (*Zettel*); these were later published as *Die Zürauer Aphorismen oder Betrachtungen über Sünde, Hoffnung, Leid und den wahren Weg* (The Zürau Aphorisms or Reflections on Sin, Hope, Suffering, and the True Way).[96]

In 1920, Kafka began an intense relationship with Milena Jesenská, a Czech journalist and writer who was non-Jewish and who was married, but whose marriage, when she met Kafka, was a "sham".[97] His letters to her were later published as *Briefe an Milena*.[98] During a vacation in July 1923 to Graal-Müritz on the Baltic Sea, Kafka met Dora Diamant, a 25-year-old kindergarten teacher from an orthodox Jewish family. Kafka, hoping to escape the influence of his family to concentrate on his writing, moved briefly to Berlin (September 1923-March 1924) and lived with Diamant. She became his lover and reignited his interest in the Talmud.[99] He completed four stories, which were published shortly after his death under the title of one of them, *Ein Hungerkünstler* (*A Hunger Artist*).[98]

Siblings


Franz Kafka's sisters as children, from the left Valli, Elli, Ottla

Kafka's parents had six children; Franz was the eldest.[26] His two brothers, Georg and Heinrich, died in infancy; his three sisters, Gabriele ("Elli") (22 September 1889 – fall of 1942), Valerie ("Valli") (1890–1942) and Ottilie ("Ottla") (1892–1943), are believed to have been murdered in the Holocaust of the Second World War. Ottilie was Kafka's favourite sister.[100]

Gabriele was Kafka's eldest sister. She was known as Elli or Ellie; her married name is variously rendered as Hermann or Hermannová. She attended a German girls' school in Prague's Řeznická Street and later a private girls' secondary school.[101] She married Karl Hermann (1883–1939), a salesman, in 1910. The couple had a son, Felix (1911–1940), and two daughters, Gertrude (Gerti) Kaufmann (1912–1972), and Hanna Seidner (1920–1941).[101][102] After her marriage to Hermann, she became closer to her brother, whose letters showed an active interest in the upbringing and education of her children. He accompanied her on a 1915 trip to Hungary to visit Hermann, who was stationed there, and spent a summer with her and her children in Müritz the year before he died.[101][103]

With the outbreak of the Great Depression in 1929, the Hermann family business experienced financial difficulties and eventually went bankrupt.[101] Karl Hermann died 27 February 1939, and Elli was supported financially by her sisters.[101][103] On 21 October 1941, she was deported together with her daughter Hanna to the Łódź Ghetto, where she lived temporarily with her sister Valli and Valli's husband in the spring of 1942. She was probably killed in the Kulmhof extermination camp in the fall of 1942.[101][104][105][103][106] Of Elli's three children, only her daughter Gerti survived the Second World War. A memorial plaque commemorates the three sisters at the family grave in the New Jewish Cemetery in Prague.[103]

Personality


Kafka as a Doctor of Law, around 1906

Kafka had a lifelong suspicion that people found him mentally and physically repulsive. However, those who met him found him to possess a quiet and cool demeanor, obvious intelligence and a dry sense of humour; they also found him boyishly handsome, although of austere appearance.[107][108][109] Kafka was thought to be "very self-analytic".[110] Brod compared Kafka to Heinrich von Kleist, noting that both writers had the ability to describe a situation realistically with precise details.[111] Brod thought Kafka was one of the most entertaining people he had met; Kafka enjoyed sharing his humour with his friends but also helped them in difficult situations with good advice.[112] According to Brod, he was a passionate reciter, able to phrase his speech as though it were music.[113] Brod felt that two of Kafka's most distinguishing traits were "absolute truthfulness" (*absolute Wahrhaftigkeit*) and "precise conscientiousness" (*präzise Gewissenhaftigkeit*).[114][115] He explored inconspicuous details in depth and with such

precision and love that unforeseen things surfaced that seemed strange but absolutely true (*nichts als wahr*).[116]

Kafka's letters and unexpurgated diaries reveal homoerotic themes, including a scenario with novelist Franz Werfel and references to the work of Hans Blüher on male bonding. Saul Friedländer argues that this mental struggle may have informed the themes of alienation and psychological brutality in his writing.[117]

Although Kafka showed little interest in exercise as a child, he later developed a passion for games and physical activity[50] and was an accomplished rider, swimmer, and rower.[114] On weekends, he and his friends embarked on long hikes, often planned by Kafka himself.[118] His other interests included alternative medicine, modern education systems such as Montessori,[114] and technological novelties such as airplanes and film.[119] Writing was vitally important to Kafka; he considered it a "form of prayer".[120] He was highly sensitive to noise and preferred absolute quiet when writing.[121] Kafka was also a vegetarian and did not drink alcohol.[122]

Pérez-Álvarez has claimed that Kafka had symptomatology consistent with schizoid personality disorder.[123] His style, it is claimed, not only in *Die Verwandlung* (*The Metamorphosis*) but in other writings, appears to show low- to medium-level schizoid traits, which Pérez-Álvarez claims to have influenced much of his work.[124] His anguish can be seen in this diary entry from 21 June 1913:[125]

Die ungeheure Welt, die ich im Kopfe habe. Aber wie mich befreien und sie befreien, ohne zu zerreißen. Und tausendmal lieber zerreißen, als in mir sie zurückhalten oder begraben. Dazu bin ich ja hier, das ist mir ganz klar.[126]

The tremendous world I have inside my head, but how to free myself and free it without being torn to pieces. And a thousand times rather be torn to pieces than retain it in me or bury it. That, indeed, is why I am here, that is quite clear to me.[127]

and in Zürau Aphorism number 50:

Der Mensch kann nicht leben ohne ein dauerndes Vertrauen zu etwas Unzerstörbarem in sich, wobei sowohl das Unzerstörbare als auch das Vertrauen ihm dauernd verborgen bleiben können.

Man cannot live without a permanent trust in something indestructible within himself, though both that indestructible something and his own trust in it may remain permanently concealed from him.[128]

The Italian medical researchers Alessia Coralli and Antonio Perciaccante have posited in a 2016 article that Kafka may have had borderline personality disorder with co-occurring psychophysiological insomnia.[129] Joan Lachkar interpreted *Die Verwandlung* as "a vivid depiction of the borderline personality" and described the story as "model for Kafka's own abandonment fears, anxiety, depression, and parasitic dependency needs. Kafka illuminated the borderline's general confusion of normal and healthy desires, wishes, and needs with something ugly and disdainful".[130]

Though Kafka never married, he held marriage and children in high esteem. He had several girlfriends and lovers during his life.[131] He may have suffered from an eating disorder. Doctor Manfred M. Fichter of the Psychiatric Clinic, University of Munich, presented "evidence for the hypothesis that the writer Franz Kafka had suffered from an atypical anorexia nervosa",[132] and that Kafka was not just lonely and depressed but also "occasionally suicidal".[108] In his 1995 book *Franz Kafka, the Jewish Patient*, Sander Gilman investigated contemporaneous views about "why a Jew might have been considered 'hypochondriacal' or 'homosexual' and how Kafka incorporates aspects of these ways of understanding the Jewish male into his own self-image and writing".[133] Kafka considered suicide at least once, in late 1912.[134]

Political views

Before World War I,[135] Kafka attended several meetings of the *Klub mladých*, a Czech anarchist, anti-militarist, and anti-clerical organization.[136] Hugo Bergmann, who attended the same elementary and high schools as Kafka, fell out with Kafka during their last academic year (1900–1901) because "[Kafka's] socialism and my Zionism were much too strident".[137][138] Bergmann said: "Franz became a socialist, I became a Zionist in 1898. The synthesis of Zionism and socialism did not yet exist."[138] Bergmann claims that Kafka wore a red carnation to school to show his support for socialism.[138] In one diary entry, Kafka made reference to the influential anarchist philosopher Peter Kropotkin: "Don't forget Kropotkin!"[139]

During the communist era, the legacy of Kafka's work for Eastern Bloc socialism was hotly debated. Opinions ranged from the notion that he satirised the bureaucratic bungling of a crumbling Austro-Hungarian Empire, to the belief that he embodied the rise of socialism.[140] A further key point was Marx's theory of alienation. While the orthodox position was that Kafka's depictions of alienation were no longer relevant for a society that had supposedly eliminated alienation, a 1963 conference held in Liblice, Czechoslovakia, on the eightieth anniversary of his birth, reassessed the importance of Kafka's portrayal of bureaucracy.[141] Whether Kafka was a political writer is still an issue of debate.[142]

Judaism and Zionism

Further information: Franz Kafka and Judaism


Kafka in 1910 
Kafka's notebook with his studies of Hebrew

Kafka grew up in Prague as a German-speaking Jew.[143] He was deeply fascinated by the Jews of Eastern Europe, who he thought possessed an intensity of spiritual life that was absent from Jews in the West. His diary contains many references to Yiddish writers.[144] Yet he was at times alienated from Judaism and Jewish life. On 8 January 1914, he wrote in his diary:

Was habe ich mit Juden gemeinsam? Ich habe kaum etwas mit mir gemeinsam und sollte mich ganz still, zufrieden damit daß ich atmen kann, in einen Winkel stellen.[145]

What have I in common with Jews? I have hardly anything in common with myself and should stand very quietly in a corner, content that I can breathe.[146][147]

As a teenager, Kafka declared himself an atheist.[148] Issues such as Judaism, the Talmud, the Zohar, and the Kabbalah remain a theme in his diaries.[149] He notes in his diary, shortly before embarking on his composition of *The Castle*, that in the demonic onslaught of visions assaulting him he perceives "the intimations of a secret doctrine, a new Kabbalah" whose development has been barred by Zionism.[150]

In the final issue of *Die Sammlung*,[151] a journal for exiles from the Third Reich in Western Europe, Klaus Mann writes, "[T]he collected works of Kafka, offered by the Schocken Verlag in Berlin, are the noblest and most significant publications that have come out of Germany. [Kafka contributes] the epoch's purest and most singular works of literature… [T]his spiritual event has occurred within a splendid isolation, in a ghetto far from the German cultural ministry".

In 1935, as the Nazi Race Laws were being promulgated and prepared for their introduction at that year's Nuremberg Rally, the word *ghetto* bore the same connotation it carried since the early 17th century: 'a part of the city where Jews were compelled to live'.[152] Mann's mention of the ghetto here is an allusion to Kafka's status as a Jewish writer, and a swipe at Hitler's antisemitic policies. Very likely as a result of this message, the German cultural ministry sent a cease-and-desist letter to Schocken, reminding the

publisher that Kafka's name had been placed on the Third Reich's *index librorum prohibitorum* several weeks earlier.[153]

That same year, a Rabbi of the Bar Kochba Youth Movement in Prague, Martin Buber,[154] wrote to the editor of Kafka's *Werke* that these stories were "a great possession, that could show how one can live marginally with complete integrity and without loss of background".[155] First published in Buber's *Der Jude* in 1917, Kafka's story "Jackals and Arabs" is an illustration of the tendency that Buber describes in this letter: Arabs are called Arabs, elsewhere Chinese may be directly referred to as people from China,[156] but in this case references to Jews are zoomorphic, as elsewhere,[157] and in other places Jewish characters are simply not named as such.[158]

Benjamin remarks that Kafka's world is pre-animistic (as opposed to the dualism of later religions)—implying a universal and primordial ur-phenomenology (prior to the distinction of the spiritual and the substantial in human perception) that emerges as a hallmark of Kafka's style.[159] But in the same essay, Benjamin includes a parable of an obviously Chasidic character to describe Kafka's work, and in his correspondence attached to this essay he refers to Kafka's stories as a *haggadic* (referring to stories in the Talmud) uprising against *halakha* (referring to legal doctrine).[160][153] Arendt echoes and expands on Benjamin's larger sentiment (which at that time was still a novelty in Kafka criticism), repeating the injunction that it is a mistake to refer to Kafka as a particularly Jewish or religious figure. Arendt's article, which appeared in the Partisan Review in 1944, was a sequel to Benjamin's earlier piece in many respects.[161][162] Arendt was a close confidant of Benjamin's and worked as an editor-at-large in Paris for Schocken Books in the late 1930s, when it published the final volumes of Kafka's works.[153] Arendt was also employed by various Zionist associations devoted to facilitating the emigration of Jewish children to Palestine so that they could escape the Third Reich.[163] Arendt and Benjamin both emphasized that Kafka belongs to the whole world.[162]

Hawes suggests that, though Kafka was conscious of his own Jewishness, in his fiction he concealed that of his Jewish characters.[164][165][166] In the opinion of literary critic Harold Bloom, although Kafka was uneasy with his Jewish heritage, he was the quintessential Jewish writer.[167] Lothar Kahn is likewise unequivocal: "The presence of Jewishness in Kafka's *oeuvre* is no longer subject to doubt".[168] Pavel Eisner, one of Kafka's first translators, interprets *Der Prozess* (*The Trial*) as the embodiment of the "triple dimension of Jewish existence in Prague… his protagonist Josef K. is (symbolically) arrested by a German (Rabensteiner), a Czech (Kullich), and a Jew (Kaminer). He stands for the 'guiltless guilt' that imbues the Jew in the modern world, although there is no evidence that he himself is a Jew".[169]

In his essay *Sadness in Palestine?!*, Dan Miron explores Kafka's connection to Zionism: "It seems that those who claim that there was such a connection and that Zionism played a central role in his life and literary work, and those who deny the connection altogether or dismiss its importance, are both wrong. The truth lies in some very elusive place between these two simplistic poles."[144] Kafka considered moving to Palestine with Felice Bauer, and later with Dora Diamant. He studied Hebrew while living in Berlin,

hiring a friend of Brod's from Palestine, Pua Bat-Tovim, to tutor him[144] and attending Rabbi Julius Grünthal[170] and Rabbi Julius Guttmann's classes in the Berlin Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (College for the Study of Judaism),[171] where he also studied the Talmud.[172]

Livia Rothkirchen calls Kafka the "symbolic figure of his era".[169] His contemporaries included numerous Jewish, Czech, and German writers who were sensitive to Jewish, Czech, and German culture. According to Rothkirchen, "This situation lent their writings a broad cosmopolitan outlook and a quality of exaltation bordering on transcendental metaphysical contemplation. An illustrious example is Franz Kafka".[169]

Towards the end of his life Kafka sent a postcard to his friend Hugo Bergmann in Tel Aviv, announcing his intention to emigrate to Palestine. Bergmann refused to host Kafka because he had young children and was afraid that Kafka would infect them with tuberculosis.[173]

Death

Franz Kafka's grave in Prague-Žižkov designed by Leopold Ehrmann

Kafka's laryngeal tuberculosis worsened and in March 1924 he returned from Berlin to Prague,[84] where members of his family, principally his sister Ottla, as well as Dora Diamant, took care of him. He went to Hugo Hoffmann's sanatorium in Kierling just outside Vienna for treatment on 10 April,[98] and died there on 3 June 1924. The cause of death seemed to be starvation: the condition of Kafka's throat made eating too painful for him, and since parenteral nutrition had not yet been developed, there was no way to feed him.[174][175] Kafka was editing "A Hunger Artist" on his deathbed, a story whose composition he had begun before his throat closed to the point that he could not take any nourishment.[176] His body was brought back to Prague where he was buried on 11 June 1924, in the New Jewish Cemetery in Prague-Žižkov.[79] His obituary appeared in the *Prager Presse* and the *Berliner Tageblatt*.[177] Kafka was virtually unknown during his own lifetime, but he did not consider fame important. He rose to fame rapidly after his death,[120] particularly after World War II. The Kafka tombstone was designed by architect Leopold Ehrmann.[178]