



FRANZ KAFKA

was born in Prague in 1883,
and died in 1924 in Kierling, Austria.
He worked for insurance firms,
wrote in German, and would rather have seen
the majority of his work destroyed.

Today, his works are considered
classics of world literature.

NICOLAS MAHLER

was born in Vienna in 1969 and leads a double life
as a cartoonist and literary editor.
His cartoons appear in numerous newspapers
and magazines, and the majority of his illustrated adaptations
of classic literature (including Thomas Bernhard,
Robert Musil, Marcel Proust, James Joyce and
Elfriede Jelinek) have been published by Verlag Suhrkamp, Berlin.

Mit einem solchen Körper
lässt sich nichts erreichen.



Ich werde mich an
sein fortwährendes
Scheitern gewöhnen
müssen.

With such a body
nothing can be achieved

I will have to get
used to its
perpetual failure.

FEAR

From a young age, Franz Kafka suffers from countless anxieties, including a terrible fear of mirrors. He explains why in his diary:

Because, from my perspective, they revealed unescapable ugliness, which, moreover, could not be a totally accurate reflection of reality, as if I had I really looked like that, I would have caused more of a stir.

Diary, 2 January 1912

Es gibt Möglichkeiten für mich,
gewiss, aber unter welchem
Stein Liegen sie?



There are possibilities for me,
certainly, but under what
stone do they lie?

ERDENSCHWERE

*Senselessness of youth. Fear of youth, fear of senselessness,
of the senseless rise of inhuman life, this is how Kafka grows up.*

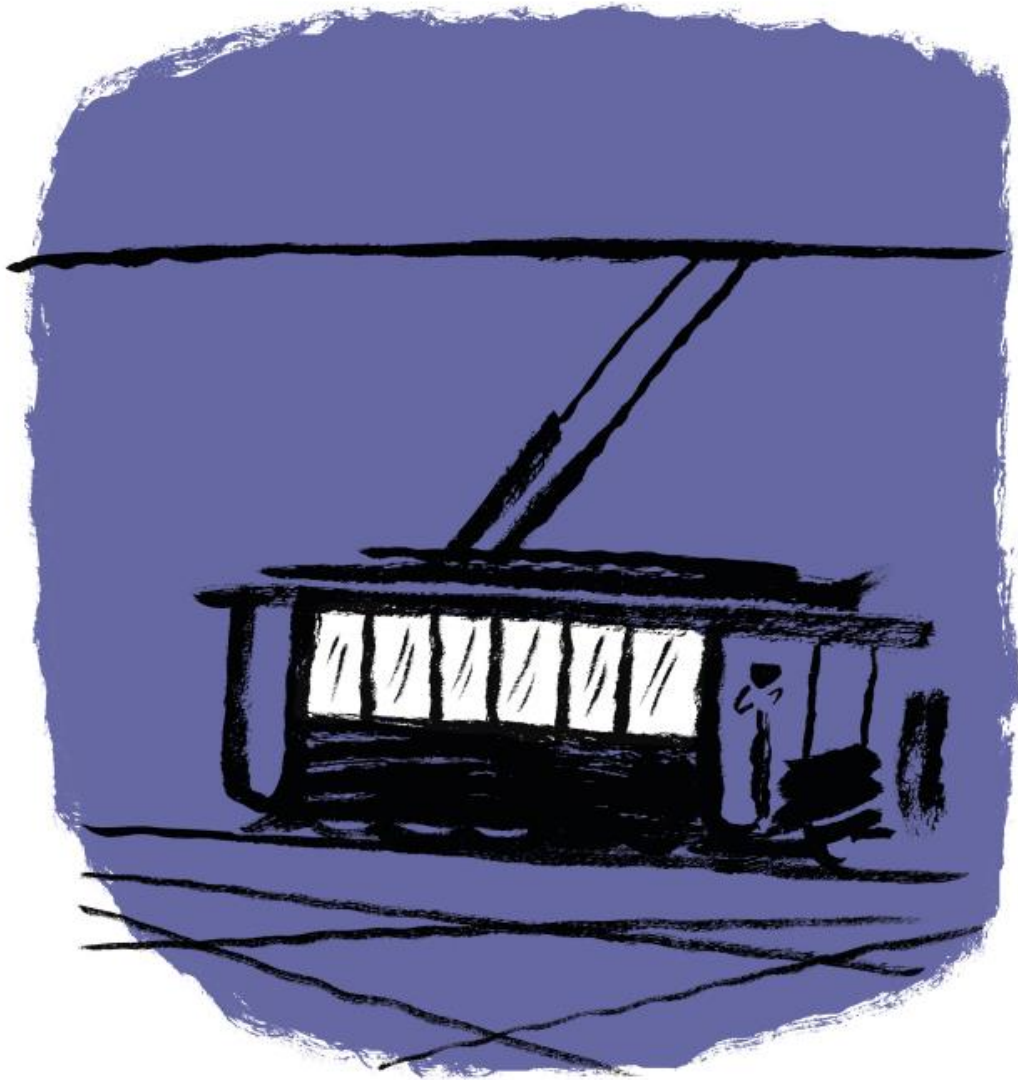
He suffers from *Erdenschwere* - from the heaviness of earthly existence. But every so often there is a flash of hope



A QUESTION OF CLOTHING

Of course I was conscious of being particularly poorly dressed, a condition I could hardly ignore, and I had an eye for when others were dressed well, but for years, I simply could not bring myself to understand the cause of my miserable appearance in my clothes.

Diary, 31 December 1911

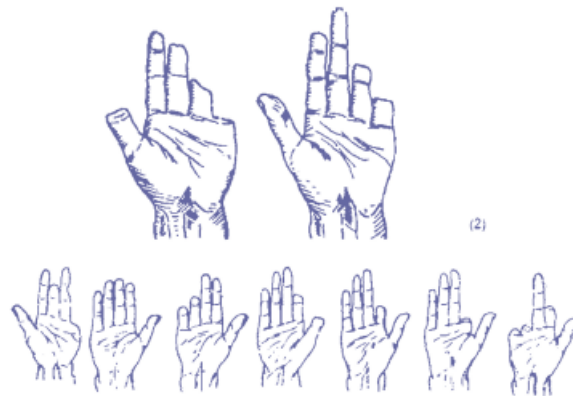


EVERYTHING MAKES ME THINK

Kafka is never untroubled. No matter where he finds himself, there is reason to ruminate everywhere.

I stand on the end platform of the tram and am completely unsure of my footing in this world, in this town, in my family.

The Passenger, 1913

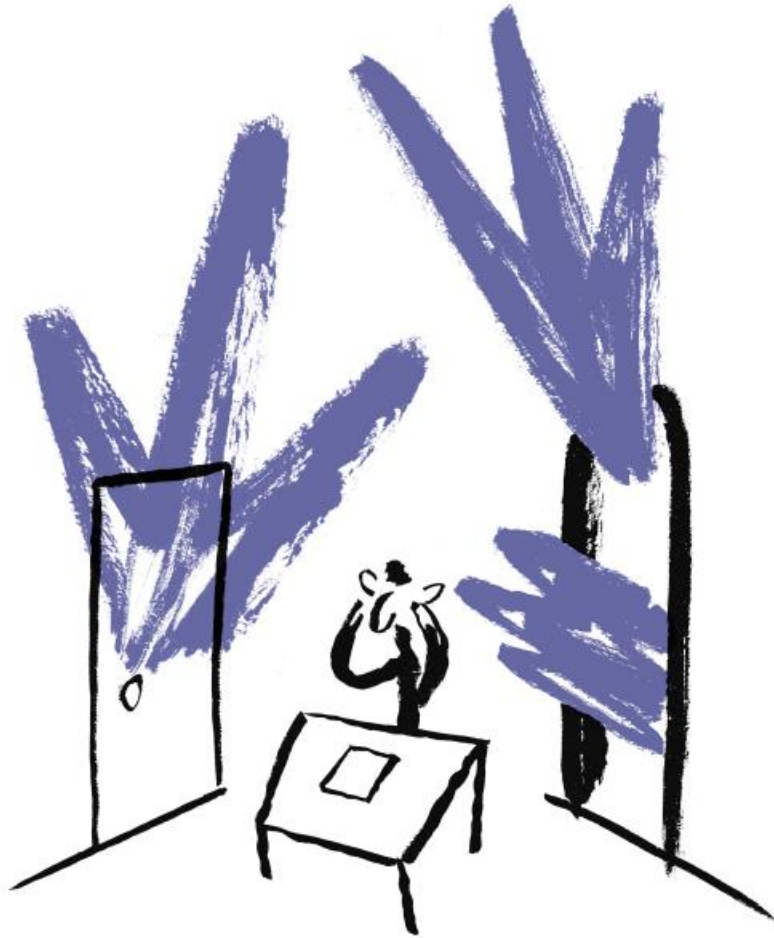


IN THE DREGS OF MISERY

From his mid-twenties, Kafka - now a qualified lawyer - works for insurance firms. Here he spends his time on *accident prevention regulations for wood planing machines*, among other things.

*I have a passing knowledge only of what lies above the surface;
underneath I suspect only terrible things.*

Letter to Felice Bauer, 3 December 1912



IN THE HEADQUARTER OF NOISE

After finishing work at the office, he switches desks, and at home in his room he throws himself into his own work. But trapped between his parents' bedroom and the parlour, he gets no peace.

*I want to write, and there's a constant trembling in my forehead.
I sit in my room, in the headquarter of noise of the entire apartment.*

Diary, 5 November 1911



Out,
out,
out

Somewhere, there is a
worm, which makes even the
complete story
hollow.

SOMEWHERE, THERE IS A WORM

I hate everything which does not relate to literature, holding conversations (even relating to literature) bores me, visiting people bores me, the joys and sorrows of my relatives bore me to my core.

Diary, 21 July 1913

But Kafka is unsatisfied with his work too.
Much remains unpublished within his lifetime.



DAS URTEIL

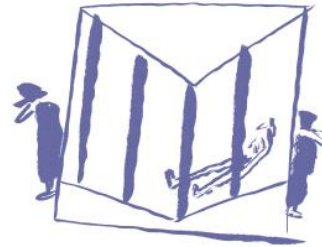


DER HEIZER



IN DER STRAFKOLONIE

Versuche, jemandem die Hungerkunst zu erklären. Wer es nicht fühlt, dem kann man es nicht begreiflich machen.



EIN HUNGERKÜNSTLER

I now sentence
you to
death by
drowning

THE JUDGEMENT

Honour your
Superior

IN THE PENAL COLONY

Karl,
oh my Karl!

THE STOKER

Try explaining
hunger art to someone.
He who does not feel it
cannot be made to comprehend it.

A HUNGER ARTIST

OF ALL I HAVE WRITTEN

Of all I have written, the only books that can stand are: Judgement, Stoker, Metamorphosis, Penal Colony, A Country Doctor and the short story: Hunger Artist.

Testamentary Decree, 29 November 1922

Everything else is published posthumously, against his will and on the initiative of his friend, the writer Max Brod.



Not that,
please not
that!

THE METAMORPHOSIS

When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from disquieted dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous vermin.

Kafka, who is himself fond of drawing, has serious concerns about the cover design for the published edition of his novella *The Metamorphosis*. He rightly fears that the illustrator might want to draw the beetle.

The insect itself cannot be drawn. It cannot even be shown from a distance, Kafka writes to his publisher, Kurt Wolff.

Wie kann ich denn
verhaftet sein?

Solche Fragen
beantworten wir
nicht.



How can I be
under arrest?

We don't answer
questions like
that.

THE TRIAL

Kafka's novels all remain fragments,
including perhaps his most famous book, *The Trial*.

Someone must have slandered Josef K., because one morning, although he had done nothing wrong, he was arrested.

The Trial

K will also never find out *what* he has been accused of. The novels *The Castle* and *The Lost Man (America)* also remain incomplete.

Ich kann auch lachen, Felice,
zweifle nicht daran.



Ich bin sogar als
großer Lacher
bekannt.

I can laugh too, Felice,
do not doubt it.

In fact, I am known
as a great laughier.

THE GREAT LAUGHER

Like much of Kafka's writing, works such as *The Trial* or *The Metamorphosis* are considered difficult and dark.

Kafka himself, however, found his work so humorous that, when he tried to read the first chapter of *The Trial* for Max Brod, he laughed so much "that for a little while he could not read on", as Brod describes.



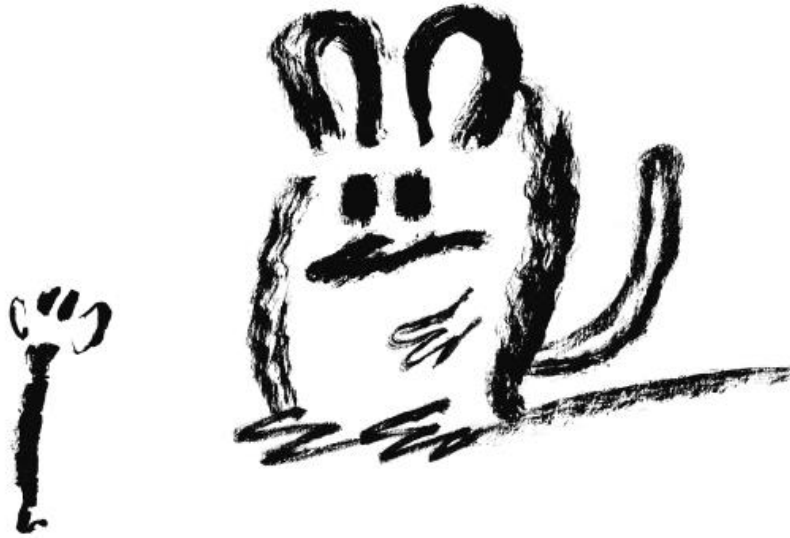
NO MEETING

*It would be nice to meet, but we shouldn't ... You are a girl, after all,
and you want a man, not a weak worm on the ground.*

Letter to Felice Bauer, 5 December 1915 resp. 2-3 March 1913

His engagement to Felice lasts five years, until it is finally
dissolved by Kafka's tuberculosis.

Mit wenig verschluckt man
sich vielleicht leichter.



Perhaps one chokes
more easily with less.

SUCH A SMALL SIZE

At 40 years old, Kafka dies of tuberculosis.

*It takes so long for one to be compressed down to such a small size,
and to be stuffed through this last, narrow hole.*

By the end, he can no longer eat or speak.

He communicates only via handwritten notes, which he passes to the person he is speaking to. In one of his last notes, he writes the title of his final story:

The story has a new title: Josephine, the Singer, or the Mouse Folk.