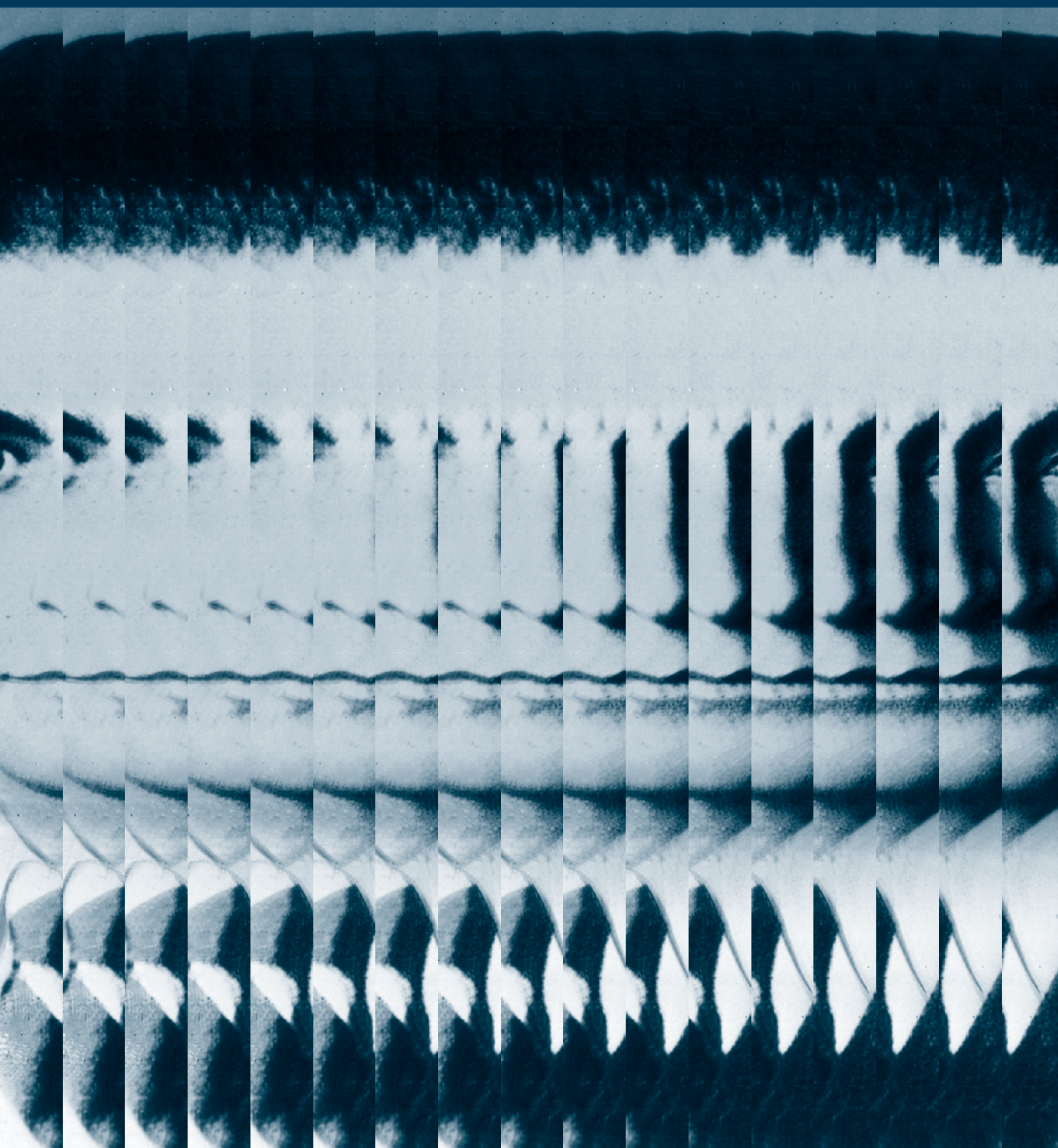


MAREK
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**FRANZ KAFKA
AND HIS
PRAGUE CONTEXTS**

KAROLINUM



Franz Kafka and his Prague Contexts:
Studies in Language and Literature

Marek Nekula

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FOREWORD

It is now taken for granted that Franz Kafka has become one of the most published German-language writers, that he is a world literary figure, that his fragmentary texts with their polyphony and rich ambiguity exemplify the procedures of literary modernism, and that his writings address the key questions of the modern age. There are several editions of his complete works in German alone, while the critical edition strives to reconstruct faithfully the genesis of his texts and their variants, elucidating the contexts from which they emerged in exhaustive commentaries. Besides Kafka's literary works, diaries and letters, the critical edition also includes the letters he received. Even the correspondence and official reports he wrote or may have written at work, whether alone or as co-author, have been published and annotated. And alongside the constant flow of new studies analysing his literary works from various angles, there has been (and continues to be) a plethora of specialized studies and monographs concerning the books Kafka possessed or read, the films he saw, the family he was born into, the women he knew, the sanatoria he was treated in, the pubs he frequented, and the factories he had dealings with in his work.

Yet paradoxically, given this flood of secondary literature relating to Kafka's life and work, authors seeking a new perspective increasingly do not take for granted that he can be written about. The question: What should a new study of Kafka be about? thus becomes: Can it in fact say anything new about him? Does it serve any purpose? Moreover, by devoting so much attention to Kafka do we not displace other writers to the periphery and distort our perception of the literary field of the time? These questions are of particular relevance for this collection of Kafka studies initiated by the Karolinum Press, which I have called *Franz Kafka and His Prague Contexts*.

After all, 'Kafka and Prague' is hardly an original subject. Indeed, the conjunction is so obvious that it has prompted many efforts to 'ground' the writer in his home city and interpret him 'from the Prague perspective'. After the years of Czechoslovak socialist realism in the 1950s, when the supposedly 'decadent' Kafka had been considered taboo, Germanists in Czechoslovakia began to appropriate him on the evidence of his family background and topographical links with Prague.

What is new in my book, I believe, is its critical view of the apparent self-evidence of such appropriation. That is why it opens with the essay ‘Suppression and distortion: Franz Kafka “from the Prague perspective”’, which challenges the self-evidence of the biography- and sociology-based view of Kafka associated with the Liblice conference which, with its over-simplified data, research interests and interpretations of Kafka’s texts, persists in some studies of Kafka to this day. As the 2008 conference *Kafka and Power 1963 – 1968 – 2008* and studies by Vladimir V. Kusin and Michal Reiman have reminded us, the Liblice conference was more significant from the point of view of cultural policy than of literary studies. The part played by Liblice in shaping ‘readings’ of Kafka in the wider context of his reception has been examined by Veronika Tuckerová. In this regard, my study focuses on the role of Kafka’s family language in interpretations of his work ‘from the Prague perspective’ and on the resulting distortion of authentic readings of Kafka’s Czech texts that helped sustain the ‘Prague interpretation’. This view relied less on his texts and more on external sources, including the testimony, not always genuine, of contemporaries who knew him or met him. At the time of the Liblice conference Kafka still was a part of communicative memory and thus fell victim to the self-interest of story-tellers such as Gustav Janouch and Michal Mareš.

The opening study in the present volume, first published in 2014 in *Franz Kafka – Wirkung, Wirkungsverhinderung* (Franz Kafka – Reception and Reception Blocks), has two aims. The first is to demonstrate how an ideology-driven approach to Kafka led to the distorting of the authentic shape of Kafka’s language in his texts and thus to the reinforcing of a particular interpretation of his literary works. The second is to exemplify the approach I have adopted in the other studies in this collection and which gives the book its unity – although these are concerned with linguistic as well as literary issues. The other studies, too, address questions that may be considered self-evident or already settled, challenging, for instance, the widely accepted myth of ‘Prague German’ and its supposed influence on Kafka’s literary style, or revisiting the seemingly obvious question of Kafka’s natural (‘organic’) language – to which the answer is in fact far from obvious. Studies of the form of language used in Kafka’s texts go back wherever possible to the authentic versions of his texts with their unretouched idiosyncrasies, mutations and multiple corrections and variants. The present studies contextualize these idiosyncrasies, whereby their author is the first to admit that their sources and interpretations, given Kafka’s social milieu and the linguistic situation in his day, may be multifarious. The studies of the literary texts, in turn, go back to a ‘close reading’ of the actual text – not in an attempt to imprison it in one of its possible readings, as was proposed by Marxist scholars with their ‘Prague perspective’, but to uncover in a ‘wide reading’ the polysemy of

Kafka's texts and the plurality of their readings, out of and into which lead 'textual threads' that connect them with the literary and public discourse of the period. While the opening chapter offers an external outline of Kafka's identity in German Studies, the essays that follow look at the discursive negotiation of that identity (or identities) from within his literary and non-literary texts. These are read, in the modus of New Historicism, in contrast not only with each other but, in the context of contemporary discourses, with other, non-literary texts. Overall, my intention in these studies is to extricate Kafka from the one-sidedness of partisan interpretations, which tended from the outset to marginalize other perspectives and approaches to Kafka within German Studies and ignore the relevance of other literary and public discourses that he – if we are to believe Julie Kristeva's dictum that writing is a re-reading of other texts – assimilated both as reader and author. Such narrowness distorted not only the polyphony of Kafka's texts but the way we view the literary field in which he was active.

Thematically, this collection of my studies is devoted to the actual language of Kafka's texts as well as the fictive languages we encounter within his literary works – such as those spoken by the builders of the Tower of Babel, or by the nomads who chatter like jackdaws – taking into account the prevalent language situation, the function of language(s) in the public space, and contemporary discourse on the language question. I have adapted these studies so that they form chapters of a book that I hope is coherent in both form and content. Partly, I take up themes discussed in my 2003 monograph *Franz Kafkas Sprachen: '...in einem Stockwerk des innern babylonischen Turmes...'* (Franz Kafka's Languages: '...on a Floor of the Inner Tower of Babel...'), which was published in both German and Czech. There I examined Kafka's written language in both his Czech and German texts, taking into account his language biography as well as the status of the two languages in public institutions and, in general, the role of language in the formation of collective identity and the way it is negotiated in Kafka's texts. The form of both languages found in his texts was reconstructed and viewed in the context of the linguistic usage of his day. Similarly, Kafka's acquisition of each language and its use in his family was contextualized with regard to the prevailing language situation. Notwithstanding certain idiosyncratic features that Kafka's German undoubtedly displays, I confined myself in that work to a critical interpretation of empirical material, taking issue with Eisner's 'triple ghetto' thesis and its more recent variants, and with the attribution of Kafka's literary language and style to the 'poverty' (*Armut*) of 'Prague German', a consequence of its supposed isolation.

In *Franz Kafkas Sprachen* I drew on textual and archival material as well as biographical works by Klaus Wagenbach, Anthony D. Northey, and Alena Wagnerová, but also on specialized studies by Pavel Trost, Kurt Krolop, Josef

Čermák, Jürgen Born and Hartmut Binder. For my analysis of the historical status of languages and ethnicities and the language situation in Prague, I was indebted to the work of the historians Hannelore Burger, Gary B. Cohen, Jaroslav Kučera, Robert Luft and Jiří Pešek; and with special reference to the Jewish context to Andreas Kilcher and Hillel J. Kieval. I was also able, thanks to my collaboration in the course of preparing the Czech complete edition of Kafka's works and the German critical edition with Hans-Gerd Koch, Benno Wagner, Kafka archivists and his surviving relatives, to present a more precise picture of the language of Kafka's Czech texts, as well as providing new or newly contextualized material and, by drawing attention to the specific character of Kafka's Czech and German and the function of each language in his family and in the wider social context of the time, identifying a new area of research for Kafka scholarship. By focussing on how Kafka acquired his knowledge of the Czech language and Czech literature at school as well as on the content and context of his Czech reading (bearing in mind the quantitative and qualitative differences between his Czech, German and Jewish reading), my book provided a counterbalance to the simplistic restriction of Kafka to the German linguistic, literary and cultural context and an alternative view of Kafka's reading of Jewish texts and the Jewish reading of Kafka. The latter is also significant in the light of his 'Character sketch of small literatures' and thus of his aesthetic conception and understanding of the function of literature and writing.

I have referred at length to my earlier monograph partly because much of this English edition of my Kafka studies is derived from it, in particular the chapters 'Franz Kafka at school: Kafka's education in Czech language and literature' and 'Kafka's Czech reading in context', which are updated English translations of the corresponding chapters in that book. The chapter 'The "being" of Odradek: Franz Kafka in his Jewish context' is a revised and abridged conflation of two chapters from my earlier work that investigates the languages used by Kafka's parents in the wider context of language assimilation among Bohemian Jews and shows how Kafka's attitudes to Yiddish and Hebrew evolved over time.

The chapter 'Franz Kafka's languages' is new, although that too draws on material collected and treated in the earlier volume. In addition to a discussion of Kafka's Czech and German and interference from Yiddish in his idiolect, it also considers his other languages, including Hebrew, referring to the work of Alfred Bodenheimer and others. The sections devoted to Czech, German and Yiddish also contain new material, with a more thorough discussion of those languages in the context of research on language contact and bi- or multilingualism. In these sections Kafka's multilingualism is discussed in the context of his parents' bilingualism and multilingualism in the Kafka household. Here I draw not only on my own research, but also on studies

and monographs produced by a group of PhD students as part of my project *Language and Identity: Franz Kafka in a Central European Linguistic and Cultural Context*, which ran from 2004-07 and was financed by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation. To their and my own publications, which were also jointly published as conference proceedings, I refer the reader in notes in the chapter 'Franz Kafka's languages' as well as in the final bibliography.

While working on that project I also began to consider, besides the actual language(s) of Kafka's texts, the fictive languages contained in some of them, namely that of the builders of the Tower of Babel or the nomads who chatter like jackdaws, relating them to contemporary discourse on the language issue. Here I was able to build on the work of the literary scholars Andreas Kilcher, Axel Gellhaus and Benno Wagner, and of the historian Kateřina Čapková. Kafka's treatment of the language question within his literary texts is a subject I dealt with in my interpretation of the figure of Odradek in the short story 'The householder's concern', also in my 2003 monograph. The text 'Kafka's "organic" language: Language as a weapon', an abridged version of a paper delivered at the 2010 Oxford conference *Kafka, Prague, and the First World War*, considers primarily the stories 'Report to an Academy', 'In the penal colony' and 'A page from an old manuscript'. These I read through the prism of New Historicism in the wider context of discourses on language, specifically manifested in texts of the contemporary philosophy of language as well as in antisemitic discourse. The image of an 'organic' language, which we find in Kafka's letter to Brod about the 'mauscheln' of German-speaking Jews, takes up the theme of the preceding chapter 'Franz Kafka's languages' while shifting its focus from the way Kafka used language to the way he thought about it, placing it within the debate on collective identity. In their choice of particular language categories, however, Kafka's literary texts interact with his non-literary texts, thus widening their scope, as noted above, to engage in the language discourse of the day.

'Divided city: Franz Kafka's readings of Prague', the last of the chapters devoted to literature, also addresses the theme of language discourse in its interpretations of the texts 'The city coat of arms', 'The Great Wall of China', 'Silence of the Sirens' and 'The hunter Gracchus'. By analysing the conceptualization and literarization of Prague public space, it shows how public discourse on language, permeating through its 'textual threads' the literary discourse, invaded the public space of the city, and how discursive reality intersected with non-discursive reality. This text dates from 2006, when I spent a sabbatical at the Davis Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University, and has been abridged and revised for the present volume.

This brings me to the institutions and individuals who have made the publication of these texts and this book possible. My thanks are due to the Fritz Thyssen Foundation for their support of the aforementioned project, and to

the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies for the undisturbed sabbatical I spent there in an inspiring environment. I also wish to thank my publishers Karolinum Press for generously facilitating the translation of my Czech and German texts into English, the translators Robert Russell and Carly McLaughlin for their patience with my reformulations of their work, Robert Russell and Peter Zusi for their careful reading of and comments on the final manuscript, and Veronika Tuckerová and Kateřina Čapková for comments on various parts of the text. I am also deeply indebted to Hans-Gerd Koch for his constant support and generous permission to reprint illustrative material from the archive of the German critical edition of Kafka's works. Thanks, too, to the various institutions who allowed me to reprint other reproductions and who are credited separately under each one, as well as to the publishers of the journals and anthologies in which my texts first appeared for their kind permission to reuse and translate them.

I should also like to express my gratitude to Franz Kafka's nieces, not only for the information they imparted to me but also for the meetings we had in the course of my research, which for me were unforgettable experiences. When, a few days after I had submitted the English manuscript, I received notice that Věra Saudková, the last member of Franz Kafka's family who still personally remembered him, had died on the very day I had submitted, I could not help reflecting that something had come to an irrevocable end, not only on the personal level. Henceforward Kafka will exist only in our cultural memory. This should remind literary scholars of the necessity of concentrating on Kafka's texts, with the aim not simply of preserving them but of ensuring that their ambiguous and multilayered meaning will never be reduced to a single canonical interpretation or lost in the myth of the 'Prague perspective'. That is my public wish. On a personal note, I should like to dedicate this book to the memory of Věra Saudková and Marianne Steiner, to whom Fate was kinder than to other members of their family, allowing them to pass on their memories of Franz Kafka, his family and his world to our shared cultural memory.

SUPPRESSION AND DISTORTION: FRANZ KAFKA 'FROM THE PRAGUE PERSPECTIVE'

RETURN OF A COUNTRYMAN

A very good overview of Franz Kafka's reception in Czechoslovakia has been provided by Josef Čermák.¹ His first publications on this topic date back to the 1960s.² My study picks up precisely where his study of 2000 left off, namely in 1963, although admittedly I do not get far beyond 1963. It is in this year that Kafka's Czech-language texts were first published. I am going to focus on the inclusion of these published texts in academic and journalistic discussions, which goes hand in hand with the interpretation of Kafka 'from the Prague perspective'. The – albeit only fragmentary – publication of Kafka's unknown Czech texts was, in the context of Kafka's reception, an entirely new phenomenon;³ in the Czechoslovak context, however, this was also true to an extent of Kafka himself and his work as a whole. The Czech translations of his works were, after all, banned from 1948 until 1957. From the perspective of socialist realism Kafka's writings were regarded as formalist and decadent; stigmatised as a representative of the bourgeoisie, Kafka became a taboo author.⁴ Even in 1957 the slowly burgeoning reception of Kafka faced strong ideolog-

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- 1 See Josef Čermák, *Die Kafka-Rezeption in Böhmen (1913–1949)* (Kafka's reception in Bohemia 1913–1949). In: Kurt Krolop – Hans Dieter Zimmermann (eds), *Kafka und Prag* (Kafka and Prague). Berlin, New York: de Gruyter 1994, pp. 217–237; Josef Čermák, *Die Kafka-Rezeption in Böhmen (1913–1949)* (Kafka's reception in Bohemia 1913–1949). *Germanoslavica* 1 (1994), pp. 1–2, pp. 127–144; and Josef Čermák, *Recepce Franze Kafky v Čechách (1913–1963)* (Franz Kafka's reception in Bohemia (1913–1963)). In: *Kafkova zpráva o světě* (Kafka's Report on the World). Prague: Nakladatelství Franze Kafky 2000, pp. 14–36.
 - 2 See Josef Čermák, *Česká kultura a Franz Kafka: Recepce Kafkova díla v letech 1920–1948* (Czech culture and Franz Kafka: Reception of Kafka's work 1920–1948). *Česká literatura* 16 (1968), pp. 463–473.
 - 3 See Franz Kafka, *Neznámé dopisy Franze Kafky* (Unknown letters by Franz Kafka). Translation by Aloys Skoumal. Introduced by Jiří Hájek. *Plamen* 5 (1963), No. 6, pp. 84–94; Jaromír Loužil, *Dopisy Franze Kafky Dělnické úrazové pojišťovně pro Čechy v Praze* (Franz Kafka's letters to the Worker's Accident Insurance Company). *Sborník Národního muzea v Praze*, Row C, *Literary history* 8 (1963), No. 2, pp. 57–83. The Czech passages in Kafka's *Briefe an Milena* are mainly quotations from Milena's letters. See Franz Kafka, *Briefe an Milena* (The Letters to Milena). Frankfurt am Main: Fischer 1952.
 - 4 These categories persisted, resulting in the view of Kafka as representative of the 'Prague German-Jewish bourgeoisie'. See Pavel Reiman, 'Proces' Franze Kafky (Franz Kafka's *The Trial*). In: Franz Kafka, *Proces* (The Trial). Prague: Československý spisovatel 1958, pp. 207–225, p. 211.

ical opposition from those who went on to shape the cultural politics of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, which was officially declared in 1960. The social and territorial 'grounding' or proletarianisation of Kafka, the process of making Kafka 'one of us' and his representation 'from the Prague perspective'⁵ surmounted the ideological barriers of 1963 but not without excluding or overlooking other aspects of the author, such as the Jewish dimension of his work.

Why 1963 is of greater importance than any other year should be obvious. It marks – along with the Liblice conference initiated by Eduard Goldstücker⁶ – an important turning point in Kafka's reception, the implications of which were relevant also outside of Czechoslovakia. Although this phase of his reception also saw him being appropriated by various contemporary discourses, this time it did not result in a ban of his work. Rather, it transformed Kafka – at least in Czechoslovakia – into a cult author of the 1960s. This turning point in Kafka's reception has, however, less to do with the 'internal' (implicit) or 'external' (biographical) author and much more with the 'image of the author'.⁷ The 2008 conference *Kafka and Power 1963–1968–2008* focused precisely on the myth surrounding the Liblice conference and the effect it had well into the 1960s, not least on the Prague Spring. Kusin has

5 See Eduard Goldstücker – František Kautman – Pavel Reiman (eds), *Franz Kafka: liblická konference 1963* (Franz Kafka: Liblice Conference 1963). Prague: ČSAV 1963; Eduard Goldstücker – František Kautman – Paul Reiman (eds), *Franz Kafka aus Prager Sicht 1963* (Franz Kafka from the Prague Perspective 1963). Prague: ČSAV 1965.

6 The question of the 'initiation' of this conference is contentious; nevertheless, the conference's organisation highlights the central role of Eduard Goldstücker and Pavel/Paul Reiman/Reimann. The conference was organised by the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, Charles University and the Czechoslovak Writers' Guild in Liblice Castle on 27 and 28 May 1963. Over twenty speakers, from Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, France (Roger Garaudy) and Austria (Ernst Fischer) participated in the conference. The following authors appear in the conference proceedings: O. F. Babler, Josef Čermák, Zdeněk Eis, Dagmar Eisnerová, Ernst Fischer, Pavel Trost, Ivo Fleischmann, Norbert Frýd, Roger Garaudy, Jiří Hájek, Klaus Hermsdorf, František Kautman, Jenö Krammer, Alexej Kusák, Dušan Ludvík, Josef B. Michl, Werner Mittenzwei, Pavel Petr, Jiřina Popelová, Petr Rákos, Pavel Reiman, Helmut Richter, Ernst Schumacher, Ivan Sviták, Pavel Trost and Antonín Václavík.

For more see Michal Reiman, *Die Kafka-Konferenz von 1963* (The Kafka conference of 1963). In: Michaela Marek – Dušan Kováč – Jiří Pešek – Roman Prahl (eds), *Kultur als Vehikel und als Opponent politischer Absichten. Kulturkontakte zwischen Deutschen, Tschechen und Slowaken von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis in die 1980er Jahre* (Culture as Medium and Opponent of Political Programs: Cultural Contact between Germans, Czechs and Slovaks from the middle of 19th Century to the 1980s). Essen: Klartext 2010, pp. 107–113, or Ines Koeltzsch, Liblice. In: Dan Diner (ed.), *Enzyklopädie jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur* (Encyclopaedia of Jewish History and Culture). Vol. 3 (He – Lu). Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler 2012, pp. 511–515.

7 For more on the terminology used here see Petr A. Bílek, *Obraz Boženy Němcové – pár poznámek k jeho emblematické funkci* (The image of Božena Němcová – some remarks on its emblematic function). In: Karel Piorecký (ed.), *Božena Němcová a její Babička* (Božena Němcová and her *Babička*). Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu 2006, pp. 11–23.

also looked at the role of the Liblice conference for the reform movement.⁸ For the same reason, scholars such as Goldstücker or Kusák, among others, have also looked back on this from their perspective as key participants.⁹ To read the contemporary clash over 'Spring, swallows, and Franz Kafka' – in which Kurella uses swallows as well as other black bird species with less positive connotations to build up his polemical arguments¹⁰ – is to encounter the imagery and rhetoric of both the Prague Spring and of 'Normalisation', making the teleological perspective of the *Kafka and Power 1963–1968* [...] conference easily understandable. The election of Eduard Goldstücker as Chairman of the Czechoslovak Writers' Guild seems to complete an arc which began with the Liblice conference and ended with the Prague Spring. In the 1970s the proximity of these two events as well as the accusation of his 'bourgeois decadence' from the 1950s proved to be disastrous for Kafka's reception:

[...] it made the civil servant J. furious that the Kafka motto 'I write differently from how or what I speak, I speak differently from what I think, I think differently from the way I ought to think, and so it all proceeds into deepest darkness'¹¹ had been retained in the translation. And not only because the motto was deceitful, but also because it had been penned by Kafka, the writer who had been condemned and whose name 'was not to appear anywhere'. [...] The point of this story is, however, in true Švejk style utterly stupid: three months later I saw 18 copies of the Kafka book by Brod [...] lying on the desk of the antiquarian bookshop in Ječná Street... the unsold remains of the print run which had [now] been released for sale.¹²

In order to understand the ethos of the Kafka reception of 1963, we need to go back a few years. Following the advent to power of the communists in 1948 there was a glaring hiatus in the official reception of Kafka which would last

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- 8 See Vladimír V. Kusín, *The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring. The Development of Reformist Ideas in Czechoslovakia 1956–1967*. Cambridge (MA): Cambridge University Press 2002.
- 9 See Eduard Goldstücker, *Prozesse. Erfahrungen eines Mitteleuropäers* (Trials: Experiences of a Central European). Munich: Knaus 1989; Eduard Goldstücker, *Vzpomínky* (Memoirs) Vol. 2: 1945–1968. Prague: G plus G 2005; Alexej Kusák, *Tance kolem Kafky: Liblická konference 1963 – vzpomínky a dokumenty po 40 letech* (The Dance around Kafka: the Liblice Conference of 1963 – Memories and Papers 40 Years on). Prague: Akropolis 2003.
- 10 See e.g. Alfred Kurella, Jaro, vlaštovky a Franz Kafka (Spring, the swallows and Franz Kafka). *Literární noviny* 12 (1963), No. 40, p. 8, and Ernst Fischer, Jaro, vlaštovky a Franz Kafka (Spring, the swallows and Franz Kafka). *Literární noviny* 12 (1963), No. 41, p. 9. See further Čermák, *Recepce Franze Kafky*, p. 28, which contains the revealing reference to Howard Fast's Czech edition. See Howard Fast, *Literatura a skutečnost* (Literature and Reality). Translation by Zd. Kirschner and Jaroslav Bílý. Prague: Svoboda 1951. Fast also sees Kafka not as a swallow but a repugnant bird ('Kafka' literally means jackdaw) which sits atop 'the cultural dungheap of reaction'.
- 11 *Franz Kafka to Ottla*, 10 July 1914. – See Franz Kafka, *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*. New York: Schocken Books 1977, p. 109.
- 12 Jan Zábřana, *Celý život: Výbor z deníků 5. listopadu. 1976 – července 1984* (A Whole Life: Selected Passages from the Diaries, 5 November 1976 – July 1984). Vol. 2. Prague: Torst 1992, p. 567.

until 1957, a much longer hiatus, then, than that between 1939 and 1945. The absence of an official normative reception should, however, not be mistaken for an interruption of the reception in itself, as Jan Zábřana's diary entry describing the decentralised, individual reception of Kafka makes clear. Nevertheless, it is clear that this reception, too, had an ideological frame and was formulated in reaction to the official ideological discourse on Kafka and the exclusion of his writings from the official literary sphere:

For the young, non-conforming Prague intellectuals of the 1950s who skulked around the literary scene or who themselves wrote, it was common for each of them to have a couple of Franz Kafka's short stories at home which they had translated themselves and which they lent to friends and acquaintances or read them out at get-togethers. [...] It was somehow the done thing. I heard and saw several Kafka stories in perhaps twenty handwritten translations doing the rounds. Where did all these cobbled-together translations disappear to? They were an expression, a reflection of the longing for the knowledge of the forbidden, outlawed world of true writing which Kafka at the time embodied for them. That it was only ever a couple of stories, one, two, three – never a whole book –, was simply evidence of the authentic love of *amateurs* rather than of superficiality. They were not professionals; they were not capable of more, had not the staying power; they were mostly timid lovers of an illusion which Franz Kafka embodied for them at the time. My memories of those evenings when somebody somewhere would read out Kafka's stories are filled with great melancholy. All of these stories were later published in book form, making sure that it could never be the same again.¹³

However, the criticism of the cult of personality in 1956 made it possible for Kafka's writings to be published again. The breakthrough came in 1957 with the publication of *Doupě*, the Czech translation of Kafka's story 'The burrow'. It was published in the magazine *Světová literatura* (World Literature) alongside an essay on Kafka by its translator Pavel Eisner in which he picked up once again and elaborated on his concept of the triple (linguistic, social and religious) ghetto.¹⁴ As Čermák remembers, the publication must have 'resonated powerfully' with his readers.¹⁵ Reactions in the press to Pavel Eisner's ventures as well as to the publication of the Czech translation of Kafka's novel *The Trial* in the following year, also translated by Pavel Eisner, were however – in comparison with the response to Kafka that was to follow in

¹³ Zábřana, *Celý život*, p. 886.

¹⁴ Franz Kafka, *Doupě* (The burrow). *Světová literatura* 3 (1957), pp. 132–153; Pavel Eisner, Franz Kafka. *Světová literatura* 3 (1957), pp. 109–129; Pavel Eisner, Německá literatura na půdě ČSR. Od r. 1848 do našich dnů (German literature on Czechoslovak territory. From 1848 to the present day). In: *Československá vlastivěda* (Encyclopaedic Information on Czechoslovakia). Vol. VII: *Písemnictví* (Letters). Prague: Sfinx 1933, pp. 325–277.

¹⁵ Čermák, *Recepte Franze Kafky*, p. 28.

1963 – scarce.¹⁶ Čermák discusses each of the responses that did appear, positively evaluating the studies by Ivan Dubský and Mojmir Hrbek and Oleg Sus, and criticising Pavel Reiman and Jiří Hájek.¹⁷ According to the international bibliography of Kafka's oeuvre and reception, there were also other publications on Kafka during this time.¹⁸ I found yet other peripheral publications on Kafka, e.g. in the *Christian Review*,¹⁹ but it would be another four years before the next translations of Kafka work were published.²⁰ Only rarely did someone venture forth, for example Goldstücker or Grebeníčková,²¹ who reviewed Victor Erlich's study of Gogol's 'The Nose' and Kafka's 'The Metamorphosis' in the journal *Plamen* (Flame).

The reception of Kafka between 1956 and 1962²² and its entanglement with contemporary political discourses can be summed up in a single visual image. In 1956 the military uniform on the body of the communist president Klement Gottwald, on display at the Czechoslovak Mausoleum of Revolution on Mount Vítkov, modelled on the Lenin and Stalin Mausoleum in Moscow, was replaced by civilian clothing. But it was not until 1962 that Gottwald's corpse was cremated and the monumental Stalin statue on Letná hill blown up.²³

That year also saw the publication of the Czech translation of the unfinished novel *The Man who Disappeared*, although Pavel Reiman was still obliged to translate the novel in the shadow of an ideologically acceptable interpreta-

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- 16 Franz Kafka, *Proces* (The Trial). Translation and afterword by Pavel Eisner. Prague: Československý spisovatel 1958; with commentary by Ján Rozner, *Případ Kafka? Nad českým vydáním Procesu* (The case of Kafka? On the Czech edition of *The Trial*). *Slovenské pohľady* 75 (1959), No. 2, pp. 125–140.
- 17 Ivan Dubský – Mojmir Hrbek, *Kafkův Proces* (Kafka's *The Trial*). *Květen* 3 (1958), pp. 620–623; Oleg Sus, *Kafka – zmatení jazyků* (Kafka – the confusion of tongues). *Host do domu* 6 (1959), pp. 139–140; Pavel Reiman, *Společenská problematika v Kafkových románech* (On the social issues in Kafka's novels). *Nová mysl* 1 (1958), pp. 52–63; Jiří Hájek, *Spor o Franze Kafku* (The dispute over Franz Kafka). *Tvorba* 24, 8. 1. 1959, No. 2, pp. 31–32.
- 18 Čestmír Jeřábek, *Jubileum pražského básníka* (Anniversary of the Prague writer). *Host do domu* 5 (1958), pp. 334–335; Čestmír Jeřábek, *Kafkův Proces česky* (Kafka's *The Trial* in Czech). *Host do domu* 5 (1958), pp. 373–374. See Maria Luise Caputo-Mayr – Julius Michael Herz, *Franz Kafka: Internationale Bibliographie*. Vol. 1–2. Munich: De Gruyter/Saur 1997 & 2000, here vol. 2, p. 255.
- 19 Oskar Kosta, *Hledání a bloudění Franze Kafky* (The searching and wandering of Franz Kafka). *Nový život* 10 (1958), pp. 784–786; Josef Svoboda, *Bez víry?* (Without faith?). *Křesťanská revue* 25 (1958), pp. 283–285.
- 20 The illustrated volume by Frynta published in the interim was only intended for a non-Czech readership. See Emanuel Frynta, *Franz Kafka lebte in Prag* (Franz Kafka Lived in Prague). With photographs by Jan Lukas. Translation into German by Lotte Elsner. Prague: Artia 1960.
- 21 Eduard Goldstücker, *Předtucha zániku: K profilu pražské německé poezie před půlstoletím* (Premonition of doom: On the profile of German poetry in Prague 50 years ago). *Plamen* 2 (1960), pp. 92–96; Růžena Grebeníčková, *Gogolovy 'metamorphosis' na Západě* (Gogol's 'metamorphosis' in the West). *Plamen* 2 (1960), pp. 126–128.
- 22 Starting with Ivan Dubský – Mojmir Hrbek, *O Franzi Kafkovi* (On Franz Kafka). *Nový život* 8 (1956), pp. 415–435.
- 23 See Hana Pichová, *The Lineup for Meat: The Stalin Statue in Prague*. *PMLA* (*Journal of Modern Language Association of America*) 123 (2008), 3, pp. 614–630.

tion.²⁴ For instance, he places the Stoker at the centre of the novel as a representative of the working class who finds sympathy in Karl Rossmann, who, as a member of the 'bourgeoisie', has realised that capitalism is on the verge of collapse. As a result of these sympathies he initially acts as the mouthpiece of the Stoker. Reiman also argues that Rossmann's downfall is due to the fact that he loses sight of the Stoker and, thus, of the working class. Among those who greeted this publication with reviews were Ivan Dubský in *Kultura* (Culture) and *Host do domu* (Guest at Home), Ivo Fleischmann in *Literární noviny* (Literary Newspaper), Pavel Grym in *Lidová demokracie* in (People's Democracy) and Eduard Goldstücker in *Tvorba* (Creation).²⁵ These covered the entire spectrum of periodicals concerned with the reception of cultural events. Nevertheless, according to the *Bibliografický katalog ČSSR – články v českých časopisech* (Bibliographical Catalogue of Czechoslovakia – Articles in Czech journals) apart from these and three brief articles by Zdeněk Kožmín, Agneša Kalinová and 'zf',²⁶ nothing else appeared in this year – except the translation of Franz Kafka's letter to his father in the journal *Světová literatura* (World Literature).²⁷

It was in Moscow, rather than in Prague, that the wall around Kafka in the Eastern Block was finally toppled – by Jean-Paul Sartre. In 1962, at the World Peace Congress in Moscow, the French thinker held a metaphor-laden speech with the title *La démilitarisation de la culture*,²⁸ in which he labelled Kafka as a 'weapon' used by the West and called for 'cultural demilitarisation' in the relationship between the East and the West.²⁹ At the same time he insisted on

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- 24 Franz Kafka, *Amerika* (The Man who Disappeared). Czech translation by Dagmar Eisnerová. Prague: SNKLU 1962; Pavel Reiman, Úvod (Foreword). In: Franz Kafka, *Amerika*. Prague: SNKLU 1962, pp. 7–23.
- 25 Ivan Dubský, *Kafkova Amerika* (Kafka's *Amerika*). *Kultura* 6 (1962), 12, p. 4; Ivan Dubský, *Amerika aneb Neznámý* (Kafka's *Amerika* or *The Man who Disappeared*). *Host do domu* 9 (1962), 4, p. 181f.; Ivo Fleischmann, *Kafkova Amerika* (Kafka's *Amerika*). *Literární noviny* 11 (1962), No. 16, pp. 368–369; Eduard Goldstücker, *Kafkův Topič* (Kafka's 'The Stoker'). *Tvorba* 27 (1962), No. 16, pp. 368–369; Gm [= Pavel Grym], *Kafkův hrdina v labyrintu světa* (Kafka's hero in the labyrinth of the world). *Lidová demokracie*, 16.2.1962, p. 3.
- 26 Zdeněk Kožmín, *Marxistická monografie o Kafkovi* (Marxist monograph on Kafka). *Host do domu* 7 (1962), pp. 223–225; Agneša Kalinová, *Kafka v Bergamu* (Kafka in Bergamo). *Literární noviny* 11 (1962), No. 40, p. 8; Zf, *O Kafkovi trochu jinak* (Harry Järve's bibliography of Kafka scholarship). *Lidová demokracie*, 8.4.1962, p. 5.
- 27 Franz Kafka, *Dopis otci* (Letter to his Father). *Světová literatura* 7 (1962), No. 6, pp. 84–112. Translation by Dagmar Eisnerová and Pavel Eisner, introduced by Klaus Hermsdorf.
- 28 See Jean-Paul Sartre, *La démilitarisation de la culture: Extrait du discours à Moscou devant le Congrès mondial pour le désarmement générale et la paix*. *France-Observateur*, 17.7.1962, pp. 12–14; Stephan Hermlin, *Die Abrüstung der Kultur. Rede auf dem Weltfriedenkongress in Moskau*. (The demilitarization of culture: Speech for the world peace conference in Moskau). *Sinn und Form* 14 (1962), pp. 805–815.
- 29 Veronika Tuckerová deals with the reception of Franz Kafka between the East and the West during the Cold War. I was unable to get hold of her dissertation. Veronika Tuckerová, *Reading Kafka in Prague: The Reception of Franz Kafka between the East and the West during the Cold War*. New York: Columbia University 2012.

the need for people in the East to finally be allowed to 'read' Kafka. His speech instigated an – in quantitative terms – influential, but at the same time politically chequered, reception of Kafka in the Eastern Block. In the following year there was a veritable flood of Kafka publications largely inspired by the Liblice conference – enabled, if not inspired, by Sartre's speech. In 1963, in addition to the Czech translation of Kafka's 'The Metamorphosis',³⁰ roughly seventy translations of Kafka's short works or journalistic texts made reference to,³¹ amongst other things, Jean-Paul Sartre's reflections on Kafka, the Liblice conference, Kafka's birthday and publications. These, along with radio broadcasts and the Czech edition of the Liblice conference volume, rained down on the parched public sphere like a long awaited rainstorm.

If at the beginning many referred to the breakthrough instigated by Jean-Paul Sartre in order to support their own response to Kafka, their reception of Kafka did not align with Sartre's calls for a concentration on texts. Incidentally, over the course of the year explicit references to Sartre disappeared completely. Fischer, for example, devised the metaphor of spring and the swallow in 1963.³² Goldstücker even went so far as to present Kafka, in view of the hiatus in his reception particularly between 1948 and 1957, as a 'victim of the cult of personality',³³ in doing so he may well have been projecting his own personal agenda on to Kafka. In 1951 Goldstücker had been sentenced to lifelong imprisonment in an antisemitic show trial, only to be rehabilitated and released in 1955.³⁴

30 Franz Kafka, *Proměna* (The Metamorphosis). Translation by Zbyněk Sekal and afterword by Josef Čermák. Prague: SNKLU 1963.

31 See Marek Nekula, *Einblendung und Ausblendung: Tschechoslowakische Kafka-Rezeption und Erstveröffentlichungen von Kafkas tschechischen Texten* (From the shadow into light: The Czechoslovak reception of Franz Kafka and the first publication of his Czech texts). In: Steffen Höhne – Ludger Udolph (eds), *Franz Kafka – Wirkung, Wirkungsverhinderung* (Franz Kafka: Reception and Reception Blocks). Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau 2014, pp. 61–91. This paper contains a list of sources which is based on my own research conducted with the help of the *Bibliografický katalog ČSSR – články v českých časopisech*, and related research by Jiskra Jindrová from the bibliographical department of the Czech National Library in Prague, and also draws slightly on Caputo-Mayr – Herz, *Franz Kafka: Internationale Bibliographie*. In my endeavour to document this 'flood' of sources, the bibliography has become very long; only some of these texts are quoted in this chapter.

32 Fischer, Jaro, *vlaštovky a Franz Kafka*.

33 Eduard Goldstücker, *Jak je to s Franzem Kafkou?* (How do things stand with Franz Kafka?) *Literární noviny* 12 (1963), No. 7, p. 4; Eduard Goldstücker, *Na téma Franz Kafka. Články a studie* (On the Subject of Franz Kafka: Essays and Papers). Prague: Československý spisovatel 1964, p. 62. See also Eduard Goldstücker, *Vydědění a temný obraz světa* (Outcasts and their dark image of the world). *Plamen* 3 (1961), No. 10, pp. 66–69.

34 On the show trial see for example Goldstücker, *Prozesse*, or Koeltzsch, *Liblice*. In 1956 Goldstücker became a lecturer at Charles University. He was completely rehabilitated and appointed professor in 1963.

The political language in which Kafka's reception was couched may well have had little to do with Kafka and his works, but it nevertheless became an important aspect of the author's image, and, consequently, of the contemporary interpretation of his works. In this time, Kafka became a reference point not only for the at this time more open-minded Marxist critics and historian of literature like Pavel Reiman, Eduard Goldstücker, Jiří Hájek and others, but also for the official newspaper of the communist party.³⁵ Furthermore, in the Czech, that is the Czechoslovak, context the appropriation of Kafka as 'one of us' was of central importance. Miroslav Kaňák used the title 'Ztracený a znovunalezený' (Lost and found) for his article published in the weekly Hussite newspaper *Český zápas* (The Czech Struggle),³⁶ in which he reflected on Franz Kafka's reception, superimposing the protagonist of *The Man who Disappeared* onto Kafka and in doing so characterising him as the prodigal son. Eduard Goldstücker's imagery also went along the same lines and marked an equally clear departure from Sartre and contextualised Kafka's texts to selective biography including his posthumous fortunes. In his speech on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition of Kafka's personal documents and book publications in the literary archive of the *Památník národního písemnictví* (Museum of Czech Literature), at the beginning of July 1963, Eduard Goldstücker welcomed the 'countryman born in Prague' on his return from 'a long and undeserved emigration'.³⁷ Of particular note here are the family semantics of the prodigal son ('lost and rediscovered') and of the homeland ('compatriot', 'undeserved emigration') which are in keeping with Goldstücker's call for the 'grounding' of Kafka and thus also with the interpretation of his work 'from the Prague perspective', to which I will return later.

The prodigal son and compatriot was also welcomed on the occasion of his eightieth birthday on 3 July 1963, around five weeks after the Liblice conference, right across the Czech media landscape, including the most official newspapers like *Rudé právo* (Red Justice), *Mladá fronta* (Young Front), *Práce* (Labour), *Svobodné slovo* (Free Speech), *Lidová demokracie* (People's Democracy) etc.³⁸ The women's magazine *Vlasta*, the youth magazine *Mladý svět*,

35 See e.g. Jiří Hájek, Kafka a marxistické literární myšlení (Kafka and Marxist literary thought). *Plamen* 5 (1963), No. 7, pp. 131–132, as well as A. Petřina, Jako v Kafkově 'Procesu' (As in Kafka's *The Trial*). *Rudé právo* 43, 10.8.1963, No. 219, p. 3.

36 Dr. M. K. [= Miroslav Kaňák], Ztracený a znovu nalezený (Lost and found). *Český zápas* 46 (1963), No. 34–35, p. 8.

37 Article on the exhibition in *Literární noviny* 12 (1963), No. 23, p. 13. The reflection of Kafka in terms of 'return' is present also in Ivan Dubský, Návrat Franze Kafky (The return of Franz Kafka). *Kulturní tvorba* 1 (1963), No. 26, p. 8; and Zdeněk Pešat, Kafkův návrat domů a literární věda (Kafka's homecoming and literary studies). *Literární noviny* 12 (1963), No. 17, p. 5.

38 See Eduard Goldstücker, Lidské poselství hledajícího člověka (Human legacy in search of people). *Rudé právo*, 3.7.1963, p. 5; Svatoslav Svoboda, Franz Kafka. *Mladá fronta*, 3.7.1963, p. 5; Josef