

# **THE METAMORPHOSIS (ILLUSTRATED)**



**Franz Kafka**

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**Translated by David Wyllie**

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Franz Kafka in 1906

## About Author

**Franz Kafka** (3 July 1883 – 3 June 1924) was a German-language writer of novels and short stories, regarded by critics as one of the most influential authors of the 20th century. Kafka strongly influenced genres such as existentialism. Most of his works, such as "Die Verwandlung" ("The Metamorphosis"), *Der Process* (*The Trial*), and *Das Schloss* (*The Castle*), are filled with the themes and archetypes of alienation, physical and psychological brutality, parent–child conflict, characters on a terrifying quest, labyrinths of bureaucracy, and mystical transformations.

Kafka was born into a middle-class, German-speaking Jewish family in Prague, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In his lifetime, most of the population of Prague spoke Czech, and the division between Czech- and German-speaking people was a tangible reality, as both groups were strengthening their national identity. The Jewish community often found itself in between the two sentiments, naturally raising questions about a place to which one belongs. Kafka himself was fluent in both languages, considering German his mother tongue.

Kafka trained as a lawyer and, after completing his legal education, obtained employment with an insurance company. He began to write short stories in his spare time. For the rest of his life, he complained about the little time he had to devote to what he came to regard as his calling. He regretted having to devote so much attention to his *Broterberuf* ("day job", literally "bread job"). Kafka preferred to communicate by letter; he wrote hundreds of letters to family and close female friends, including his father, his fiancée Felice Bauer, and his youngest sister Ottla. He had a complicated and troubled relationship with his father

that had a major effect on his writing. He also suffered conflict over being Jewish, feeling that it had little to do with him, although critics argue that it influenced his writing.

Only a few of Kafka's works were published during his lifetime: the story collections *Betrachtung* (*Contemplation*) and *Ein Landarzt* (*A Country Doctor*), and individual stories (such as "Die Verwandlung") in literary magazines. He prepared the story collection *Ein Hungerkünstler* (*A Hunger Artist*) for print, but it was not published until after his death. Kafka's unfinished works, including his novels *Der Process*, *Das Schloss* and *Amerika* (also known as *Der Verschollene*, *The Man Who Disappeared*), were published posthumously, mostly by his friend Max Brod, who ignored Kafka's wish to have the manuscripts destroyed. Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre are among the writers influenced by Kafka's work; the term *Kafkaesque* has entered the English language to describe surreal situations like those in his writing.

### Life & Family:



Birthplace in Prague

Kafka was born near the Old Town Square in Prague, then located in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His family were middle-class Ashkenazi Jews. His father, Hermann Kafka (1852–1931), was the fourth child of Jakob Kafka, a *shochet* or ritual slaughterer in Osek, a Czech village with a large Jewish population located near Strakonice in southern Bohemia. Hermann brought the Kafka family to Prague. After working as a travelling sales representative, he eventually became a fancy goods and clothing retailer who employed up to 15 people and used the image of a jackdaw (*kavka* in Czech) as his business logo. Kafka's mother, Julie (1856–1934), was the daughter of Jakob Löwy, a prosperous retail merchant in Poděbrady, and was better educated than her husband. Kafka's parents probably spoke a variety of German influenced by Yiddish that was sometimes pejoratively called *Mauscheldeutsch*, but, as the German language was considered the vehicle of social mobility, they probably encouraged their children to speak High German. Hermann and Julie had six children, of whom Franz was the eldest. Franz's two brothers, Georg and Heinrich, died in infancy before Franz was seven; his three sisters were Gabriele ("Ellie") (1889–1944), Valerie ("Valli") (1890–1942) and Otilie ("Ottla") (1892–1943). They all died during the Holocaust of World War II. Valli was deported to the Łódź Ghetto in Poland in 1942, but that is the last documentation of her.

Hermann is described by the biographer Stanley Corngold as a "huge, selfish, overbearing businessman" and by Franz Kafka as "a true Kafka in strength, health, appetite, loudness of voice, eloquence, self-satisfaction, worldly dominance, endurance, presence of mind, [and] knowledge of human nature". 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, 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; his mother, in contrast, was quiet and shy. The dominating figure of Kafka's father had a significant influence on Kafka's writing.

The Kafka family had a servant girl living with them in a cramped apartment. Franz's room was often cold. In November 1913 the family moved into a bigger apartment, although Ellie and Vallie 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.

### Education:

From 1889 to 1893, Kafka attended the *Deutsche Knabenschule* 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 a year.



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

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, within the Kinsky Palace. German was the language of instruction, but Kafka also spoke and wrote in Czech; he

studied the latter at the gymnasium for eight years, achieving good grades. Although Kafka received compliments for his Czech, he never considered himself fluent in Czech and spoke German with a Czech accent. He completed his Matura exams in 1901.

Admitted to the German Charles-Ferdinand University of Prague (de) in 1901, Kafka began studying chemistry, but switched to law after two weeks. 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. He also joined a student club, *Lese-und Redehalle der Deutschen Studenten* (Reading and Lecture Hall of the German students), which organized literary events, readings and other activities. 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 Oskar Baum and Franz Werfel.

At the end of his first year of studies, Kafka met Max Brod, a fellow law student who became a close friend for life. Brod soon noticed that, although Kafka was shy and seldom spoke, what he said was usually profound. Kafka was an avid reader throughout his life; together he and Brod read Plato's *Protagoras* in the original Greek, on Brod's initiative, and Flaubert's *L'éducation sentimentale* (*Sentimental Education*) and *La Tentation de St. Antoine* (*The Temptation of Saint Anthony*) in French, at his own suggestion. Kafka considered Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Flaubert, Franz Grillparzer, and Heinrich von Kleist to be his "true blood brothers". Besides these, he took an interest in Czech literature and was also very fond of the works of Goethe. Kafka obtained the degree of Doctor of Law on 18 July 1906 and performed an obligatory year of unpaid service as law clerk for the civil and criminal courts.

### Employment:



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