



**BODLEIAN LIBRARIES, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD**  
**NEWS RELEASE**

**A new exhibition opening at the Bodleian Libraries explores Kafka's life, work and influence on the centenary of his death**

**Kafka: Making of an Icon**

**30 May - 27 October 2024**

**Weston Library, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford**

The Bodleian Libraries are pleased to announce the opening of the new exhibition *Kafka: Making of an Icon* in May 2024, marking the 100th anniversary of the author's death. The display will celebrate not only Kafka's achievements and creativity, but also the inspiration he continues to be for new literary, theatrical and artistic creations around the world.

*Kafka: Making of an Icon* will feature materials from the archives of the Bodleian Libraries alongside international loans. The Bodleian Libraries hold the majority of Franz Kafka's papers, notably the original manuscripts of the well-known story *The Metamorphosis*, two of his unfinished novels, *Das Schloss* (*The Castle*) and *Der Verschollene* (*America*), as well as personal correspondence.

The exhibition not only sets Kafka in the context of his life and times but also shows how his own experiences nourished his imagination, taking visitors on a journey through Kafka's life and influences – from his relationship with his family and the people closest to him, to the places where he lived and worked, through to his last years of illness and his death on 3 June 1924, at only 40 years of age.

Items including literary notebooks, drawings, diaries, letters, postcards, glossaries, architectural models, videographic materials and photographs outline the people, events and places that shaped the author, but also give an insight into his personality. In a postcard to his brother-in-law, for instance, Kafka jokes about his exceptional skiing skills, despite being severely ill at the time. His Hebrew notebook and his letter (in Hebrew) to his teacher demonstrate his dedication to learning the language that connected him to his

family roots, but we also find snippets of Czech, French and Italian, a reminder of Kafka's keen multilingualism and interest in languages beyond German and Hebrew.

The centre of the exhibition gallery is dedicated to what is perhaps Kafka's best-known work, *The Metamorphosis*. Alongside the original manuscript of the novella, the exhibition includes entomology illustrations that explore the possibilities of what the creature that used to be Gregor Samsa might have looked like, as well as modern reinterpretations of the story. Among them, thanks to a private loan, visitors will exceptionally be able to see the original manuscript of *The Cockroach*, Ian McEwan's satirical novella inspired by *The Metamorphosis*, and the newly commissioned artwork created especially for the exhibition by Tessa Farmer, known for her playful but unnerving artistic language that merges animal art, natural history and fantasy.

To complete the picture of Kafka's peculiar world, the exhibition dives into the author's travels, both real and imaginary. We see in his notebooks and travel journals how his travels in Western Europe and reading of the memoirs of Einar Mikkelsen's Arctic expedition enabled him to practise descriptive writing, while his readings of a book of Chinese poetry and viewing the stereoscopic images he had access to, strengthened his fascination with remote spaces and made him aware of European colonialism.

We also see examples in the exhibition of how, especially after his death, Kafka has continued to reach across the world. His influence and impact on the literary world and beyond is well-represented by the iconic painting by Andy Warhol *Franz Kafka* (1980), which will be part of the exhibition. Alongside this, a section of the display will showcase how the author's work has been translated into numerous languages and has had artistic responses created in a variety of formats, with a particular focus on Asia and the modern day interest in Kafka in Korea and Japan.

Professor Carolin Duttlinger, co-curator of the exhibition, says: *'The centenary of Franz Kafka's death is a unique opportunity to celebrate his global legacy while also introducing his texts to a new generation of readers. We are very excited about the upcoming exhibition, which will tell the story of Kafka's life, times and works, including how his manuscripts ended up at the Bodleian Library in Oxford.'*

Richard Ovenden, Bodley's Librarian, said *'Franz Kafka is one of the most influential writers of the past century. His works have been translated into a vast number of languages, and have sold in the millions of copies. Kafka's fame, and literary success has, however, been a phenomenon since his death in 1924. The Kafka archive is critical to explain the power of his literary genius and the trajectory of his work into its current global status. The show's curators, drawn from the scholarly prowess of the Oxford Kafka Research Centre, have given us key insights into the life and work of this extraordinary writer.'*

This exhibition is curated by Professor Carolin Duttlinger, Co-Director of the Oxford Kafka Research Centre; Professor Katrin M. Kohl, Co-Director of the Oxford Kafka Research Centre; Professor Barry

Murnane, Co-Director of the Oxford Kafka Research Centre; Dr Meindert Peters, Leverhulme Research Fellow at the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages; and Dr Karolina Watroba, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at All Souls College, Oxford. It is supported by Malgorzata Czepiel, Archivist in the Bodleian Libraries.

The free exhibition will sit alongside Oxford University's 'Oxford Reads Kafka' campaign, which aims to encourage engagement across the city and university with Kafka's literary masterpiece *The Metamorphosis*, with 'readings' of the text from a variety of academic perspectives.

After the exhibition's run in the UK, it will be hosted by the Morgan Library in New York from 22 November 2024 - 13 April 2025.

### **The Kafka Archive at the Bodleian**

The Bodleian Library in Oxford holds the largest archive on Franz Kafka. Most of Kafka's papers were looked after by his life-long friend and posthumous editor Max Brod, who decided to ignore the author's request to burn all his manuscripts upon his death, but the ownership was shared among Kafka's four nieces. After being kept in a bank vault in Zurich for five years, they were placed in the safe keeping of the Bodleian Libraries, on permanent revocable loan in 1961. The acquisition was made thanks to Sir Malcolm Pasley, Fellow in German at Magdalen College Oxford, who contacted and liaised with Kafka's surviving heirs, and brought the papers to Oxford in the boot of his Fiat on his return home from a Swiss ski holiday. Since then the author's nieces, Gertrude Kaufmann and Marianna Steiner, bequeathed their share in the archive to the Bodleian and further material was donated by the Schocken Family via Bodley's American Friends.

When in 2011 the descendants of Kafka's favourite sister, Ottla, decided to sell the letters the author wrote to her, the Bodleian Libraries risked losing this precious part of the collection, as the institution could not afford to purchase it. Luckily, just when the manuscripts were about to be put for auction, the Libraries and the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach reached an agreement to co-acquire them. This partnership, one of the first of its kind, has allowed countless researchers and academics to access the archive and pursue their studies.

Other Kafka papers, including the manuscript of *The Trial*, are held in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach, while some of the manuscripts that form part of Max Brod's archive are held by the National Library of Israel. Kafka's letters to his fiancée Felice Bauer were bought by a private collector at auction and haven't been seen since.

**For further information or to speak to Prof. Carolin Duttlinger or Prof. Barry Murnane, please contact Flint Culture via [bodleian.libraries@flint-culture.com](mailto:bodleian.libraries@flint-culture.com)**

## **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

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### **Related publications from Bodleian Library Publishing**

*Kafka: Making of an Icon*, edited by Ritchie Robertson (May 2024)

Please contact Emma O'Bryen for more information at [emma@obryen.co.uk](mailto:emma@obryen.co.uk)

### **About the Bodleian Libraries**

The Bodleian Libraries at the University of Oxford is the largest university library system in the United Kingdom. It includes the principal University library – the Bodleian Library – which has been a legal deposit library for 400 years; as well as 26 libraries across Oxford including major research libraries and faculty, department, and institute libraries. Together, the Libraries hold more than 13 million printed items, over 80,000 e-journals and outstanding special collections including rare books and manuscripts, classical papyri, maps, music, art, and printed ephemera. Members of the public can explore the collections via the Bodleian's online image portal at [digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk](http://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk) or by visiting the exhibition galleries in the Bodleian's Weston Library. For more information, visit [www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk](http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk).

### **About Bodleian Library Publishing**

Bodleian Library Publishing helps to bring some of the riches of Oxford's libraries to readers around the world through a range of beautiful and authoritative books. We publish approximately twenty-five new books a year on a wide range of subjects, including titles related to our exhibitions, illustrated and non-illustrated books, facsimiles, children's books and stationery. We have a current backlist of over 250 titles. All of our profits are returned to the Bodleian and help support the Library's work in curating, conserving and expanding its rich archives, helping to maintain the Bodleian's position as one of the pre-eminent libraries in the world.

### **About the Kafka Research Centre**

The Oxford Kafka Research Centre was founded in 2008 by Manfred Engel and Ritchie Robertson and is currently led by Carolin Duttlinger, Katrin Kohl, Barry Murnane, and Ritchie Robertson. It is a forum for international Kafka research which works closely with the keepers of Kafka's manuscripts at the Bodleian Library. Its mission is to facilitate research and debate about Kafka on all levels, including among young people and the general public, by hosting academic conferences and public events.