

NYU Prague

COLIT-UA9136P01, SASEM-UG9401P01

Kafka and His Contexts

Fall 2018

Instructor Information

- **Richard Müller, Ph.D.**
- Email: rm168@nyu.edu
- Office hours: Immediately before or after class, and by arrangement via email

Course Information

- COLIT-UA9136P01 and SASEM-UG9401P01
- Kafka and His Contexts
- No prerequisites or co-requisites
- **Tuesday / Thursday 10:30 am – 11:50 am**
 - Seifert classroom, RD

Course Overview and Goals

The course is focused on exploring Franz Kafka's work – stories, novels, diaries and letters – in the context of fin de siècle Prague and the birth of modernism. We will take a closer look at the cultural and social context of Central Europe in the first two decades of the 20th century (literature and the arts, but also the functionalist architecture of Adolf Loos, Simmel's sociology of the metropolitan life, Freud's analysis of the unconscious, Brentano's psychology, the resonance of Nietzsche's philosophy, or the emergence of new media like the phonograph and the silent film). In addition, we will discuss the adaptations of Kafka's work and its impact on later art, fiction and film (Borges, Welles, Kundera, Hrabal, Švankmajer, Yamamura). The topics discussed through Kafka's writings and other related works include: man and metropolis, family, estrangement, authorship, time, writing and media, travelling, territories and identities, languages, animals, art and pain. We will be especially interested in how these phenomena transform when represented in and through the medium of literary fiction.

Class discussions based on prepared readings, lectures and two field trips (a commented walk around the Old Town sites related to Franz Kafka, including a visit to Kafka's Library, and the Archive of National Letters, which stores some of Kafka's original manuscripts).

Upon Completion of this Course, students will be able to:

- Understand Kafka's unique literary language and his place in the age of Modernism.
- Comprehend and use the basic concepts of literary analysis and interpretation.
- Understand the conceptual relations between the self and the other, writing and image or collective and individuality as developed and represented in the selected works of literature and art, philosophy and media.

Course Requirements

Class Participation

Active class participation is necessary for this type of course; it constitutes 20% of your grade. You will be expected to have read the assigned texts and come prepared to discuss your reading.

Response Papers

There will be three home-written response papers (700 words, 5 points each); 15% of the grade.

Mid-Term Written Test

Written in-class interpretations; your understanding of the theoretical concepts discussed so far will be tested; reading materials can be used; 20%.

Presentation and critical response

One 15-minutes presentation and one 5-minute critical response, given at different classes and based on required and some additional readings (usually between 20 to 30 pages); 20%.

Final Exam

Home-written paper on a topic of your choice or a suggested topic (1,400 words); in-class oral exam based on your paper and additional questions exploring your conceptual understanding of the material; 25%.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class.

Grading of Assignments

The grade for this course will be determined according to the following formula:

Assignments/Activities	% of Final Grade
Class participation	20
Response papers	15
Presentations	20
Mid-term written test	20
Final exam	25

Letter Grades

Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

Letter Grade	Percent
A	96% and higher
A-	90 - 95.99%
B+	86% - 89.99%
B	83% - 85.99%
B-	80% - 82.99%

Letter Grade	Percent
C+	76% - 79.99%
C	73% - 75.99%
C-	70% - 72.99%
D+	67% - 69.99%
D	63% - 66.99%
D-	60% - 62.99%
F	59.99% and lower

Assessment Expectations

Grade A: Excellent work demonstrating a critical and creative approach to the subject, clear understanding of the explored critical concepts and an ability to express thoughts cogently and persuasively both in class and in written form.

Grade B: Very good work that demonstrates most, but not all of the criteria mentioned above.

Grade C: Good work that demonstrates only some of the criteria mentioned above.

Grade D: Passable work.

Grade F: Failure to achieve a passable standard.

Course Schedule

Topics and Assignments

Week/Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment Due
Session 1 Tuesday, September 4	Course overview.		
Session 2 Thursday, September 6	Kafka's Early Texts	Franz Kafka, <i>Contemplation</i> (1912) [selection, Reader, 10pp] <i>Narratee</i> [NYU Classes, 2pp]	
Session 3 Tuesday, September 11	Modern Metropolis	Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903) [Reader, pp. 17–25, 9pp] Franz Kafka, <i>Contemplation</i> (1912) [selection 2, NYU Classes, 2pp]	
Session 4 Thursday, September 13	Authors and Readers	Umberto Eco: "The Author and His Interpreters" (1991) [NYU Classes, 20pp]	<u><i>Presentation 1: Author, Reader, Text according to Eco Response Paper 1 due Monday</i></u>
Session 5 Tuesday, September 18	Kafka's Trial (1)	Franz Kafka, <i>The Trial</i> (1925), chapters 1–3 [pp. 1–73 = 74pp] <i>Free Indirect Discourse</i> [NYU Classes, 3pp]	
Session 6	Kafka's Trial (2)	Franz Kafka, <i>The Trial</i> (1925), chapters 4–6 [pp. 74–106 = 33pp]	

Week/Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment Due
Thursday, September 20		<i>Narrated Time, Time of Narration</i> [NYU Classes, 3pp]	
Session 7 Tuesday, September 25	Kafka's Trial (3)	Franz Kafka, <i>The Trial</i> (1925), chapters 7–10 [pp. 107–211 = 105pp] Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka", extract (1933–34) [NYU Classes, 8pp]	
Session 8 Thursday, September 27	After God	Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Gay Science", aphorisms 109, 125, 343 (1882) [NYU Classes, 4pp] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On The Genealogy of Morality", Preface, First and Second Essay (1887) [NYU Classes, 65pp]	
Session 9 Tuesday, October 2	Writing and Fragment	Franz Kafka, <i>Diaries</i> (1910–1923) [selection, ca 5pp] Max Brod, Postscript to the first edition of <i>The Trial</i> (1925) [NYU Classes, 7pp]	
Session 10 Thursday, October 4	Against Ornament	Adolf Loos, "Ornament and Crime" (1908) [Reader, pp. 11–15 = 5pp] Klaus Wagenbach, "Prague at the turn of the century" (1958) [Reader, pp. 296–310 = 15pp]	<u>Presentation 2: Anti-Ornament</u> [materials provided by professor, ca 19pp]
Session 11 Tuesday, October 9	Kafka and Family (1)	Franz Kafka, "The Judgement" (1912) [Reader, pp. 175–189 = 25pp]	<u>Response Paper 2 due Thursday</u>
Session 12 Thursday, October 11	Kafka and Family (2)	Franz Kafka, "The Cares of a Family Man" (1914–1917) [Reader, pp. 191–192 = 2pp] Franz Kafka, "A Crossbreed" (1917) [NYU Classes, 2pp]	
Fall Break October 13-21	Fall Break		
Session 13 Tuesday, October 23	Letters	Franz Kafka, "Letter to the Father" (1919) [Reader, pp. 193–235 = 43pp] Gilles Deleuze – Félix Guattari, "An Exaggerated Oedipus" (1975) [NYU Classes, 7pp]	<u>Presentation 3: Against psychoanalysis</u> (Deleuze and Guattari) [materials provided by professor, ca 20pp]
Session 14 Thursday, October 25	"New Media"	Franz Kafka, <i>Letters to Felice</i> , selection (1912–1917) [Reader, pp. 337–357 = 21pp]	<u>Presentation 4: Gramophone, Film, Typewriter</u> (1986) by Friedrich Kittler [materials provided by professor, ca 30pp]
Session 15 Tuesday, October 30	<u>MID-TERM WRITTEN EXAM</u>		

Week/Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment Due
Session 16 Thursday, November 1	Kafka's Prague	A commented walk around the places in the Old Town related to Kafka, and a visit to Kafka's Library. Meet in the classroom.	
Session 17 Tuesday, November 6	Home	Franz Kafka, "The Metamorphosis" (1915) [Reader, pp. 400–425 = 26pp] Gilles Deleuze – Félix Guattari, "An Exaggerated Oedipus" (1975) [NYU Classes, 7pp]	
Session 18 Thursday, November 8	Silence, Noise	Franz Kafka, "The Silence of the Sirens" (1917) Homer, Book XII of <i>Odyssey</i> (ca 800 BC) [NYU Classes, 7pp]	<u>Presentation 5:</u> <i>Communication in the Presence of Noise</i> [materials provided by professor, ca 25pp]
Make-up Day Friday, November 9 (9am-5pm)	Make-up day for missed classes		
Session 19 Tuesday, November 13	Animals	Franz Kafka, "A Report to an Academy" (1920) [NYU Classes, 9pp]	<u>Presentation 6:</u> <i>Posthumanism, Non-/Human Animal</i> [materials provided by the professor, 20pp]
Session 20 Thursday, November 15	Archive	Fieldtrip to National Archives	
Session 21 Tuesday, November 20	Pain	Franz Kafka, "In the Penal Colony" (1919) [Reader, pp. 428–451 = 24pp]	<u>Presentation 7:</u> <i>Sadomasochism</i> [materials suggested by professor, ca 17pp]
Session 22 Thursday, November 22	Adaptating Kafka (1)	Franz Kafka, "A Country Doctor" (1916–1917) [NYU Classes, 7pp]	
Session 23 Tuesday, November 27	Adapting Kafka (2)	"Kafka's Country Doctor", short film, dir. by Koji Yamamura, Japan, 2007, 21 minutes	<u>Presentation 8:</u> <i>Intermediality</i> [materials provided by professor, ca 15pp] <u>Response Paper 3 due Thursday</u>
Session 24 Thursday, November 29	Writers' Kafka	Milan Kundera, "The Castrating Shadow of Saint Garta" (1991) [NYU Classes, 11pp] Milan Kundera, "The Hitch-Hiking Game" (1963) [NYU Classes, 18pp]	
Session 25	Kafka's Contemporary	Jaroslav Hašek, <i>The Good Soldier Švejk</i> , chapters 1–5	<u>Presentation 9:</u> <i>Grotesque, Black Humour</i>

Week/Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment Due
Tuesday, December 4		(1921–1923) [Reader, pp. 464–502 = 39pp] Karel Kosík, “Hašek and Kafka” (1963) [NYU Classes, 6pp]	
Session 26 Thursday, December 6	After Kafka: Borges	Jorge Luis Borges, “The Garden of Forking Paths” (1941), “Borges and I” (1960) [NYU Classes, 16pp]	<u>Presentation 10:</u> <i>Borges [materials suggested by professor, ca 18pp]</i>
Session 27 Tuesday, December 11	After Kafka: Švankmajer	Screening: Jan Švankmajer’s short films, selection	<u>Presentation 11:</u> <i>Švankmajer’s Animation Film [materials provided by professor, ca 10pp]</i>
Session 28 Thursday, December 13 (last day of classes)	FINAL_EXAM		Final essay (1,400 words) due December 12
Session 29 Tuesday, December 18	Finals: consultations, commentaries		
Session 30 Thursday, December 20	Finals: consultations, commentaries		

Course Materials

Required Textbooks & Materials

- *Reader: Kafka and His Contexts*. Assembled by Richard Müller. New York University 2012.
Note that some texts are available only through NYU Classes and are not part of the reader.
- Franz Kafka: *The Trial*. Transl. by Willa Muir, Edwin Muir. London : Vintage Books 2005.
ISBN 978-0-099-42864-0

Supplemental Text (not required to purchase, copies available in NYU P Library)

- Anderson, Mark (ed.): *Reading Kafka. Prague, Politics, and the Fin de Siècle*. New York: Schocken Books 1989.
- Anderson, Mark: *Kafka’s Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg fin de siècle*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1992.
- Benjamin, Walter: “Franz Kafka”. In idem: *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books 2007.
- Brod, Max: *Franz Kafka: A Biography*. New York: Schocken Books 1947.
- Corngold, Stanley – Gross, Ruth V. (eds.): *Kafka for the Twenty-First Century*. Rochester, NY: Camden House 2011.
- Deleuze, Gilles – Guattari, Félix: *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1986.
- Robertson, Ritchie: *Kafka: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004.

- Rolleston, James (ed.): *A Companion to the Works of Franz Kafka*. Rochester: Camden House 2002.
- Sayer, Derek: "The Language of Nationality and the Nationality of Language: Prague 1870–1920". *Past and Present* 153 (1996), 164–210.
- Spector, Scott: *Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka's Fin de Siècle*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 2000.
- Stach, Reiner: *Kafka: The Decisive Years*. Orlando: Harcourt 2005.
- Steiner, Peter: *The Deserts of Bohemia. Czech Fiction and its Social Context*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2000.
- Wagenbach, Klaus: *Franz Kafka*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2003
- Zilcosky, John: *Kafka's Travels. Exoticism, Colonialism and the Traffic of Writing*. New York: Palgrave/Macmillan 2003.

Resources

- **Access your course materials:** [NYU Classes](https://nyu.edu/its/classes) (nyu.edu/its/classes)
- **Databases, journal articles, and more:** [Bobst Library](https://library.nyu.edu) (library.nyu.edu)
- **Assistance with strengthening your writing:** [NYU Writing Center](https://nyu.mywconline.com) (nyu.mywconline.com)
- **Obtain 24/7 technology assistance:** [IT Help Desk](https://nyu.edu/it/servicedesk) (nyu.edu/it/servicedesk)
- **NYU Prague library:** [Tritius Catalog](https://nyu.tritius.cz/?lang=EN) (https://nyu.tritius.cz/?lang=EN)

Course Policies

Attendance and Tardiness

Absences only for medical reasons and for religious observance will be excused. To obtain an excused absence, you are obliged to supply either a doctor's note or corroboration of your illness by a member of the housing staff (either an RA or a Building Manager). To be excused for religious observance, you must contact the instructor and the Academic Director via e-mail one week in advance of the holiday. Your absence is excused for the holiday only and does not include days of travel associated with the holiday. Unexcused absences will be penalized with a 2% percent deduction from your final course grade for every week of classes missed.

Please note that Friday, November 9 (9am – 5pm) is reserved as a make-up day for missed classes. Do not schedule any trips for this day.

Late Submission of Work

- Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.
- Response papers must be submitted by the submission date; late submissions without an agreed extension will not be accepted.

Academic Honesty/Plagiarism

According to the Liberal Studies Program Student Handbook, plagiarism is defined as follows:

Plagiarism is presenting someone else's work as though it were one's own. More specifically plagiarism is to present as one's own a sequence of words quoted without quotation marks from another writer, a paraphrased passage from another writer's work; facts or ideas gathered, organized and reported by someone else, orally and/or in writing. Since plagiarism is a matter of fact, not of the student's intention, it is crucial that acknowledgment of the sources be accurate and complete. Even where there is no conscious intention to deceive, the failure to make appropriate acknowledgment constitutes plagiarism.

The College of Arts and Science's Academic Handbook defines plagiarism similarly and also specifies the following:

“presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written), writing a paragraph which, despite being in different words, expresses someone else’s idea without a reference to the source of the idea, or submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both teachers have given their permission in advance).

Receiving help on a take-home examination or quiz is also cheating – and so is giving that help – unless expressly permitted by the teacher (as in collaborative projects). While all this looks like a lot to remember, all you need to do is give credit where it is due, take credit only for original ideas, and ask your teacher or advisor when in doubt.”

“Penalties for plagiarism range from failure for a paper, failure for the course or dismissal from the university.” **(Liberal Studies Program Student Handbook)**

Classroom Etiquette

Toilet breaks should be taken before or after class or during class breaks.

Eating is not permitted.

Mobile phones should be set on silent and should not be used in class except for emergencies.

Disability Disclosure Statement

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.