

Spring 2016
GEW6901 (Kafka Seminar): Reading Kafka/ Kafka's Readers

Dr. Eric Kligerman
Tuesday, Periods 9-11 in Walker Hall 201
ekligerm@ufl.edu
Walker Hall 206

Office hrs: T/Th 8th period

In his parable “He,” Franz Kafka writes, “Man has found Archimedes’ fulcrum, but he has turned it to account against himself. Clearly he was permitted to find it only on this condition.” This seminar sets out to explore how Kafka himself functions as such a fulcrum throughout 20th century debates pertaining to modernity, temporality, history, the human condition, law and justice, technology, theology, mimesis and the limits of linguistic expression. We will examine Kafka’s short fiction, personal diaries, correspondences and novels, and the effect that his legacy has had on critical theory, philosophy and literary studies. Through our examination of the intersection between Kafka and his readers, we will trace the impact Kafka’s writings have had on such thinkers as Benjamin, Adorno, Arendt, Lukács, Derrida, Blanchot and Butler. Kafka functions as the Archimedean point for each of these thinkers in their investigations of the intersection between history and literature, and the crisis of modernity. The objective of this seminar is to trace the constellation of critical interpretations arising out from Kafka’s literature and to situate the encounter between Kafka and his readers alongside the debates regarding European modernity within the context of Jewish languages, culture and identity.

After our in-depth analysis of Kafka and critical theory, we will explore Kafka’s influence on one of the most important postwar German authors, W.G. Sebald. How is Sebald’s probing of post-modernity and catastrophic history framed through a Kafkan lens? How does “Kafka”—the myriad creatures that occupy his literary universe and the author himself—function within the space of contemporary German literature? Our goal is to examine how the hermeneutic pitfalls in Kafka’s literature influence the writing of literary criticism, philosophy and literature itself. *The seminar will work with both the original German and English translations.*

Required Texts:

For students reading the texts in German, you can order your books on amazon.com or amazon.de. The Fischer Verlag and Reclam have editions of Kafka’s novels and short stories, but you can use the editions that you might already have purchased elsewhere.

If you are reading Kafka in English, look for the following translations:
Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum Glatzer. ISBN 9780805210552
Or Michael Hoffmann’s translation, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*: (Penguin Classic)

Franz Kafka, *The Man who Disappeared*, Trans. Michael Hoffmann or *Amerika. The Missing Person*. Trans. Mark Harmon.

Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, Trans. Breon Mitchell

Franz Kafka, *The Castle*, Trans. Anthea Bell

Sebald, *Austerlitz*

Sebald, *Rings of Saturn*

You can also find some of Kafka's literature on line at the following links.

<http://www.kafka.org/>

<http://www.kafka-online.info/>

<http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/suche?q=kafka&page=2> (collected works in German)

<http://homepage.univie.ac.at/werner.haas/> (*Briefe*/letters)

<http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/169/1> (*Brief an den Vater*)

I will provide handouts or links for the secondary readings.

Class Requirements:

Class Participation: you are expected to come to class prepared with readings for that particular week. It is essential that students partake each week in seminar discussions. 15%

Class Presentation: each student will be expected to give a 20-minute presentation and help lead class discussion on one text (seminar topic) during the semester. 15%

Final Paper: 15-20 page research paper on topic of your choice. 70%

******Syllabus is subject to change******

Kafka's Language

Weeks 1 and 2

1/5:

Vor dem Gesetz, Eine kaiserliche Botschaft, Von den Gleichnissen, Die Sorge des Hausvaters

"Before the Law"; "An Imperial Message"; "On Parables"; "Concerns of a Family Man"

Secondary readings

Batuman, Kafka's "Last Trial":

http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/26/magazine/26kafka-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

Butler, "Who Owns Kafka": <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n05/judith-butler/who-owns-kafka>

Borges, "Kafka and his Precursors":

<https://sites.google.com/site/anotherhexagon/borges-essays>

1/12:

June 1921 letter to Brod (on *Mauscheln*); "For a Minor Literature" (Diary entry 12/25/1911); *Letter to Father* (selections)

Secondary Readings:

Deleuze and Guattari, selections from *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature* (chapters 1&3)

<http://projectlamar.com/media/dgkafka.pdf>

Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* ("Kafka and the Work's Demand")

http://monoskop.org/images/9/94/Blanchot_Maurice_The_Space_of_Literature.pdf

The Body Incribed:

Weeks 3, 4 and 5

1/19

Das Urteil, Ein Landarzt

"*The Judgment*", Diary entry Sep. 23, 1912, *Country Doctor*

Secondary Readings

Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: On the 10th Anniversary of his Death";

<http://traumawien.at/stuff/texts/Benjamin,-Walter---Illuminations.pdf>

Selected correspondences between Benjamin and Scholem

1/26 and 2/2

In der Strafkolonie, Ein Hungerkünstler

"*In the Penal Colony*"; "*A Hunger Artist*"

Secondary Readings

Adorno, "Notes on Kafka" from *Prisms*, (MIT Press)

Sander Gilman, *The Jewish Patient* (selections)

Humans, Animals and Hybrids

Weeks 6 and 7

2/9 and 2/16

Die Verwandlung, Eine Kreuzung, Ein Bericht für eine Akademie, Josefina, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse

"*The Metamorphosis*"; "*A Crossbreed*"; "*A Report to an Academy*"; "*Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk*"

Secondary Readings

Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, (selections- "The Gap Between Past and Future")

Santner, *On Creaturely Life* (selections)

The modern novel

Weeks 8 and 9

2/23 and 3/1

Der Verschollene

Amerika (The Disappeared)

Secondary Readings

Lukacs, "Franz Kafka or Thomas Mann?"

<http://faculty.washington.edu/lhc3/494b/Lukacs%20on%20Kafka%20v%20Mann.pdf>

Arendt, "The Jew as Pariah" and "Franz Kafka, Appreciated Anew"

Selections from Adorno on "The Nature Theatre of Oklahoma"

Week 10 Spring break

Weeks 11 and 12

3/15 and 3/22

Der Proceß

The Trial

Secondary Readings

Derrida, "Before the Law" in Acts of Literature

http://www.oderuebersetzen.eu/kafka/Derrida_Before_The_Law.pdf

Blanchot, *The Work of Fire* (selections)

Weeks 13 and 14

3/29 and 4/5

Das Schloß, Der Jäger Gracchus, Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer

The Castle, "The Hunter Gracchus", "Building of the Great Wall of China"

Secondary Readings

Sebald essays on Kafka, "The Law of Ignominy: Authority, Messianism and Exile in The Castle"; "The Undiscovered Country: The Death Motif in Kafka's Castle" ("Thanatos: Zur Motivstruktur in Kafkas Schloss")

Weeks 15 and 16

4/12, 4/19

Die Ringe des Saturn; Austerlitz

Rings of Saturn; Austerlitz

