

*Kafka for the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. by STANLEY CORNGOLD and RUTH V. GROSS. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture. Rochester, NY: Camden House. 2011. 286 pp. £50. ISBN 978-1-5711-3854-5.

What do we expect from a book called ‘...for the Twenty-First Century’? Presumably, that it will show how the field in question has moved on since the last century, or how it might carry on changing in the new century. Some of this book’s preface (and blurb) is on that track: it promises, for example, to tackle questions like ‘What are the consequences of new critical editions that offer the general reader unprecedented access to Kafka’s works in their original manuscript form?’ and ‘What are the elements in Kafka’s fiction that are likely to find resonance in the altered historical context of a new millennium?’ (p. viii). These are sensible and interesting questions, and they are addressed by various of the contributors. Other elements of the book’s framing are a bit more equivocal, manifesting a desire simultaneously to bring Kafka bang up-to-date with twenty-first-century scholarly trends (‘How does our view of Kafka change in response to changes in the priorities and fashions of literary scholarship?’, p. viii) and to safeguard him as an exemplar of timeless literary genius: ‘Meanwhile, the great question remains: “How can Kafka be so unique as to escape the logic of human attention and the fickleness of academic fashion, as he continues to draw us toward the future and the new?”’ (p. ix). So do Kafka studies and the broader reception of Kafka change with time and fashion, or not? If yes, is he really any different from any other author, and need we invoke ‘[t]he miracle that allows Kafka criticism to thrive and take on new directions’ (p. 14) to account for the fact that lots of academics still want to write about him? If not, what is the point of invoking the new century and millennium as the justifying framework for this book? Maybe this equivocation is a result not just of ambivalence about what the editors want Kafka to be, but also of an only partially made transition from conference to book: the conference was called ‘Kafka at 125’, which implies and encourages a completely different attitude to past and future from the twenty-first-century perspective in the title.

These temporal ambiguities come to a head at the end of the introduction, which is an object lesson in how to let a simple idea (that Kafka teaches us about the past) get out of hand: the editors suggest that we should ‘*think him into the past*’, by which they mean, ‘being true to Kafka’s own adventurous historical spirit and to the discourse on Kafka, imagine a Kafka in other eras’ (p. 19, authors’ italics). In this spirit, they sketch out a Renaissance Kafka ‘decked out in Florentine doublet and hose’, a nineteenth-century Kafka having a chat with Flaubert or ‘strolling along a leaf-strewn path in Baden-Baden’, and even a medieval Kafka hobnobbing with the philosophers of twelfth-century Córdoba. This imaginary dressing-up game is baffling to me, and it is not clarified by the concluding paragraph, a feverish climax of future-perfect portentousness: ‘Kafka as a lamp onto “what will have been” sets us on a track to a different understanding of our intellectual history [...]. Kafka and the twenty-first century

is “what will be.” Kafka in a tunic or a rabbi’s robe is “what will have been” if the Kafka discourse that has proven so rich continues its work. [...] So perhaps this is how Kafka will exist, or will have existed, tomorrow’ (pp. 19–20).

The contributions themselves are more conceptually complex and varied than this preamble might lead us to expect, but their relationship to the titular theme is also variable. There is one (by Roland Reuß) on how we can use the new facsimile edition to read Kafka better, a couple drawing on late-twentieth-century theories of gender (Katja Garloff) or space and telecommunication (Rolf Goebel), three exploring Kafka’s relationship with works from the mid-twentieth to the early twenty-first century by Kazuo Ishiguro (Robert Lemon), Israeli and Palestinian writers (Iris Bruce), and Italian modernist authors (Saskia Elizabeth Ziolkowski), and one addressing, with illuminating results, the topical concept of the total institution (which aims to supervise and dictate the entire behaviour of its inhabitants) through the lens of Kafka’s mythical ability to see into the future (Ritchie Robertson). All of this makes good sense in the context of a forward-looking take on Kafka, but other contributions are less obviously orientated towards anything related to the twenty-first century: discussions of Kafka and metaphor (Mark Harman), Kafka and Nietzsche (Walter H. Sokel), Kafka and realism versus aestheticism (Uta Degner), Kafka and the loss of a ‘transcendent center’ (Jacob Burnett), Kafka and the figure and theme of the proxy (Doreen Densky), Kafka and cinematic vision (Peter Beicken), and Kafka and the traumatic speed of train travel (John Zilcosky) are all continuations of established trends in Kafka studies that should not be shoe-horned into a book about what is new (though maybe ‘what will have been new’ is meant to be the get-out clause here).

Of course, the scope of the chapter topics, broadly conceived, is not everything; it is quite possible to provide excitingly new treatments of well-worn themes. Many of these contributions, however, are disappointingly familiar in some key respects: highly conventional readings are offered, for instance, of ‘Der Fahrgast’ (Beicken) and the perennial favourite ‘Die Bäume’ (Harman); several of the authors conclude, predictably, that everything comes down self-referentially to reading, writing and literature (e.g. Burnett, Degner, Zilcosky), or, as so often happens in Kafka studies, make inadequately supported claims about authorial intention (Burnett, Reuß); and two of them refer to outdated sources (Janouch’s infamously unreliable account of his conversations with Kafka; Beicken) or critical stances (Beißner’s notion, long since qualified, of ‘Einsinnigkeit’; Densky) as if they were still current and unreservedly accepted.

If this book is meant to showcase the present and future of Kafka studies, not only is much of it depressingly familiar, but there are also glaring gaps where the truly new should be. Interesting potential connections with cultural studies through the rich term ‘Kafkaesque’ are instantly closed down by Lemon’s dated and dispiriting assertion that the term is in fact completely useless (p. 207). It

seems wrong too that there is no narrative theory — the basis for James Phelan's excellent recent discussion of 'Das Urteil' in *Franz Kafka. Narration, Rhetoric, and Reading* (Columbus, OH, 2011) — and (though I admit to bias here, given my own research interests) that there are no cognitive approaches. This last absence is especially striking in contributions like Harman's on metaphor, which is crying out for enrichment by cognitive-scientific work on conceptual metaphor.

It is perhaps unsurprising that a volume so ambivalent about the whole project of making Kafka relevant to the twenty-first century should not quite live up to its title. Altogether more surprising are the scattered references to Kafka as a potential source of psychological support: Gross's preface includes the strange observation that 'this extraordinary writer, who so decisively shaped our conception of the twentieth century, might suggest fruitful strategies for coping with the twenty-first', while Burnett talks about *Das Schloß* as 'an endless stairway on which, discovering that we are not lamed by the absence of God, we walk briskly on to meet ourselves in this new century' (p. 105), inspired by a narrative art 'that at once helps and transcends our quotidian cares' (p. 107). Whatever the future of Kafka studies, at least we now know, thanks to this publication, that Kafka as self-help guru will get us safely through to 2100.

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*Das Familiengedächtnis der Wittgensteins. Zu verführerischen Lesarten von (auto-)biographischen Texten.* By NICOLE L. IMMLER. Edition Kulturwissenschaft, 12. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2011. 392 pp. €35,80. ISBN 978-3-8376-1813-6.

A chronicle of the Wittgenstein family offers ample opportunities for the 'seductive readings' suggested by Nicole Immler's subtitle. Biographically oriented studies of the Wittgensteins address the family's status within the cultural and social milieu of early-twentieth-century Vienna; the tensions between the older generation (Karl Wittgenstein's industrial empire and the material wealth and cultural capital that accrued from it) and the younger (with Ludwig Wittgenstein's forfeiting of his inheritance as a paradigmatic manifestation of this tension that is more readily legible than the suicides of his brothers); the often fraught relations between the siblings, culminating in the estrangement of Paul Wittgenstein from his sisters following their decision to remain in Austria after the *Anschluss*; the contested significance of the family's Jewish background for an understanding of Ludwig Wittgenstein's thought; and the wider problem of how to understand, and frame, the relationship between biography and philosophy. Immler's approach can be termed 'metabiographical' (she uses the term *biographietheoretisch*), insofar as the aim of the book is not to offer a new account of Ludwig Wittgenstein's life in the context of his family background, but rather to investigate the various uses scholars and biographers