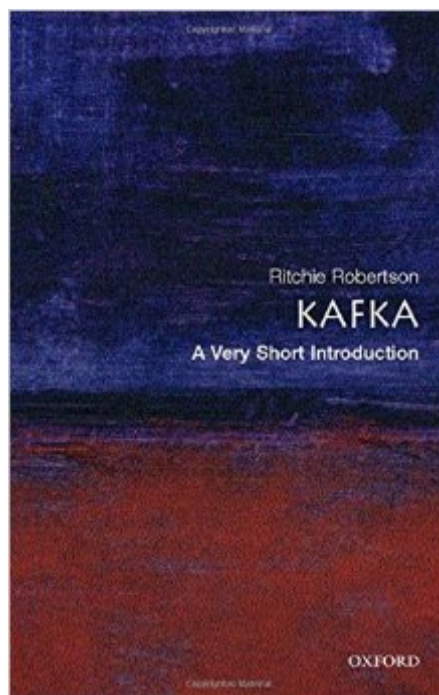


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Kafka: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)



Synopsis

Franz Kafka is among the most intriguing and influential writers of the last century. During his lifetime he worked as a civil servant and published only a handful of short stories, the best known being *The Transformation*. His other three novels, published after his death, helped to found his reputation as a uniquely perceptive interpreter of the twentieth century. Discussing both Kafka's crisis-ridden life and the subtleties of his art, Ritchie Robertson provides an intriguing and accessible look at the life of this fascinating author. Using *Metamorphosis* as a recurring example, Robertson shows how Kafka's work explores such characteristically modern themes as the place of the body in culture, the power of institutions over people, and the possibility of religion after Nietzsche had proclaimed "the death of God."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Who on earth can adequately introduce a writer of Kafka's stature in the few short (and very tiny) pages the "Very Short Introduction" series allows? Only someone like Ritchie Robertson, a man who has thought and written extensively on Kafka, Mann and other German authors. Ritchie is succinct, respectful, loving and clear and (miracle of miracles) manages to combine autobiography, analysis and a helping hand to all those either curious or flummoxed over the enigmatic Kafka. He discusses F.K.'s modernist and uneasy relationship with the body, his representation of modernist thought and philosophy, and much more. He even tackles the *Aphorisms*, something not many

writers, academic or otherwise, are willing to attempt. It's hard to believe that so small a book could cover so many bases so well. There are more thorough bios and analyses out there, but for its size (and cost), this tiny one was a delightful surprise. It's a trustworthy place to start.

Almost all of the Very Short Introductions from Oxford University press do at least a decent job of introducing their subject, and most of them are accessible enough that newcomers can gain an appreciation of the topic without too much work. This volume on the iconoclast writer Franz Kafka (1883-1924) is no different. Robertson gives an overview of Kafka's life, and goes on to explore specific themes important in Kafka's writing - with special emphasis given to "bodies" (as in physical bodies) and "institutions". A special exploration of Kafka's religious thought is also quite interesting. Constant reference is made to the plots of Kafka's novels and many of his short stories, and excerpts from journals and letters also appear throughout. However, there is a certain lack of coherent vision or high-level organization in this book; Robertson covers a great deal, but it seems as if the book could have used a bit more editing and re-organization - a bit more fluidity in the narrative and clarity in the layout - to make it great instead of merely good. Despite this, I recommend it to anyone interested in the subject.

This is a small but insightful overview of the life and work of Kafka. Robertson provides new insight into aspects of Kafka's life and legend. He presents the interesting idea that Kafka himself had the idea of this legend and consciously worked to cultivate it. In this Kafka is compared to Byron who too in his own way helped create an image of himself which dominated an Age. Robertson analyses the critical relationship of Kafka to his father Hermann. The overwhelming power and physical presence of his father contributed to Kafka's own sense of inadequacy, fear, frustration. "I will tear you apart like a fish" his father said in one notable childhood incident. Robertson who has written on Heine, on Mann and is an expert in German Literature has a deep, intimate knowledge of the Kafka world. The work gives in a short space a clear conception of the writer whose anxieties and ambiguities, whose sense of fear and foreboding, were transformed into a Literature of incredible intensity, horrifying beauty.

I read this for a research paper on Kafka. I realize that a person could devote her life to reading what other people have written on the very little bit that Kafka published in his lifetime. This book was a pleasure to read and helped me decide what other avenues of research I'd pursue.

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