Spring Semester 2012  
GRST/COL 251  
Kafka: Literature, Law, and Power  
Tuesday/Thursday, 2:40pm-4:00pm  
Fisk Hall 412

1. Course Description

Elias Canetti claimed that among all writers Kafka was "the greatest expert on power." In this FYI seminar we will focus on Kafka's narratives of power relations. We will read and discuss Kafka's sometimes painfully precise descriptions of how power is exerted in the family and in personal relationships, and how discipline is exercised over the body. We will also consider Kafka's depictions of physical violence and of apparatuses and institutions of power, and the ethical and political implications of these depictions. The working hypothesis of this course is that Kafka not only tells stories about power, but that his stories also contain an implicit theory of how power works in a "disenchanted" modern society upheld by complex bureaucratic structures and processes.

2. Required Books (available at Broad Street Books):

Franz Kafka, AMERIKA: THE MISSING PERSON, trans. Mark Harman (Schocken)  
ISBN 0805211616  
Franz Kafka, KAFKA'S SELECTED STORIES, ed. Stanley Corngold (W. W. Norton)  
ISBN 0393924793  

Please make sure you own and read these editions only. Working with different editions and translations would present an unnecessary obstacle.

A number of readings are available as PDFs on Moodle (see syllabus). Please print them and bring the hard copies to class.
# Syllabus

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>1/26</td>
<td>Introduction: Why and How to Read Kafka: “The Appeal” (Handout)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Spaces of Power: Farewell, Travel, Arrival</strong></td>
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<td>1/31</td>
<td><em>Amerika: The Missing Person</em>: “The Stoker”</td>
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<td>2/2</td>
<td><em>Amerika: The Missing Person</em>: “The March to Ramses” and “In the Hotel Occidental”</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/7</td>
<td><em>Amerika: The Missing Person</em>: “At a street corner Karl saw...” and “They traveled for two days...”</td>
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<td>2/9</td>
<td>“A Report to an Academy“ (<em>Selected Stories</em>, pp. 76-84)</td>
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<td>2/14</td>
<td>“A Country Doctor” (<em>Selected Stories</em>, pp. 60-65)</td>
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<td><strong>Origins of Law: Myth and Paternal Power</strong></td>
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<td>2/21</td>
<td>“The Judgment” and selections from Kafka’s diary (<em>Selected Stories</em>, pp. 3-12 and pp. 197-200)</td>
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<td>2/23</td>
<td>“Letter to his Father” (Moodle)</td>
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<td>2/27</td>
<td>“The Metamorphosis” (Moodle)</td>
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<td>3/1</td>
<td>“The Metamorphosis” continued</td>
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<td>3/6</td>
<td><em>The Trial</em>: “Arrest“</td>
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<td><strong>Legal Procedures: Establishing Guilt or Innocence</strong></td>
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<td>3/8</td>
<td><em>The Trial</em>: “Initial Inquiry“, “In the Empty Courtroom/The Student/The Offices”</td>
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<td>[3/10-3/25]</td>
<td>[Spring Break]</td>
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<td>3/27</td>
<td><em>The Trial</em>: “’The Flogger” and “The Uncle/Leni”</td>
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<td>3/29</td>
<td><em>The Trial</em>: “Lawyer/Manufacturer/Painter“</td>
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The Power of Law: Judgment and Execution

4/3  The Trial: “Block, the Merchant/Dismissal of the Lawyer”

4/5  The Trial: “In the Cathedral”

4/10 The Trial: “The End” and “A Dream” (in Selected Stories, pp. 75-76)

4/12 “In the Penal Colony” (Selected Stories, pp. 35-59)

The Literary “Unworking” of Law and Power

4/17 [“Diary entry on ‘Minor Literature’”] (Moodle)

4/19 “A Page from an Old Document” and “Building the Great Wall of China” (Selected Stories, pp. 66-67 and pp. 113-124)

4/24 The Castle: “Arrival” and “Barnabas”

4/26 The Castle: “Frieda,” “First Conversation with the Landlady” and “At the Chairman’s”

5/1  “A Starvation Artist” (Selected Stories, pp. 86-94)

5/3  “The Burrow” (Selected Stories, pp. 162-189)

5/8  “Josefine, the Singer or the Mouse People” (Selected Stories, pp. 94-108)

4. Course Policies

Speaking and Listening

This is a small seminar. Please use the opportunity to communicate your impressions, interpretations, and criticism of the readings to your classmates, and listen and respond carefully to their arguments.

Reading and Writing

Please allow sufficient time to read each assignment carefully. Speed-reading will make you miss what is essential.
You are required to write ten reading responses, roughly one per week. If you skip one week, that’s not a problem. However, you may not make up for missing responses at the end of the semester.
Each response should demonstrate that you have read the assigned text carefully and are willing and capable to think independently about what you have read. Please
refrain from merely paraphrasing the plot and from regurgitating common sense. In order to help you think about the assignments, there will be study questions posted on Moodle. You may choose to respond to (some of) them, but it’s not required. Responses should be thoughtful and concise, no shorter than 300 and no longer than 400 words. If you feel truly inspired, you may write more, as long as you make sure to edit your response for redundancies. Responses are due either Monday by 4:00 PM or Wednesday by 4:00 PM, depending on whether you are addressing Tuesday's or Thursday's reading. Responses are to be submitted on Moodle. Additionally, there will be a midterm and a final essay (each should be about 2500 words long), offering you an opportunity to practice a more sustained engagement with one or more of the assigned readings. I will post topics for the essays on Moodle.

**Grading and Due Dates**

Grades will be weighed according to the following distribution:

- Attendance and participation: 20% (Each unexcused absence will reduce this portion of your grade by 5%. If you have an emergency and cannot make it to class, please let me know by email or phone before class.)
- 10 response papers: 50% (due by 4:00 p.m. on the day prior to our class meeting. Late submissions will not receive credit)
- Mid-term essay: 15% (due: March 8, before class)
- Final essay: 15% (due: May 11, 5:00 p.m., to be dropped off at Fisk 411)

**Format of Reading Responses and Essays**

2. Essays: Submit paper copies only. Please use 12-point Times New Roman Font. Include a title and page numbers. For citations, use MLA format: <http://www.library.cornell.edu/resrch/citmanage/mla>

**Classroom Etiquette**

- Arrive on time. Arriving late will lower your participation grade
- Do not use laptops, tablets, cell phones, or similar electronic devices
- Do not leave the room during class
- Do not eat during class