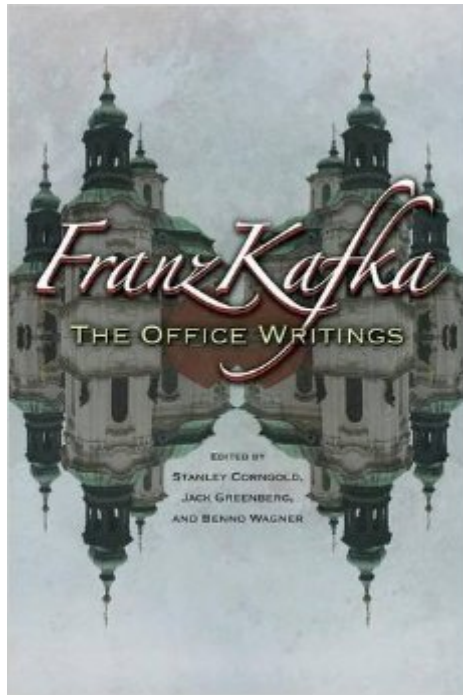


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Franz Kafka: The Office Writings



Synopsis

Franz Kafka: The Office Writings brings together, for the first time in English, Kafka's most interesting professional writings, composed during his years as a high-ranking lawyer with the largest Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute in the Czech Lands of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Franz Kafka (1883-1924) is commonly recognized as the greatest German prose writer of the twentieth century. It is less well known that he had an established legal career. Kafka's briefs reveal him to be a canny bureaucrat, sharp litigator, and innovative thinker on the social, political, and legal issues of his time. His official preoccupations inspired many of the themes and strategies of the novels and stories he wrote at night. These documents include articles on workmen's compensation and workplace safety; appeals for the founding of a psychiatric hospital for shell-shocked veterans; and letters arguing relentlessly for a salary adequate to his merit. In adjudicating disputes, promoting legislative programs, and investigating workplace sites, Kafka's writings teem with details about the bureaucracy and technology of his day, such as spa elevators in Marienbad, the challenge of the automobile, and the perils of excavating in quarries while drunk. Beautifully translated, with valuable commentary by two of the world's leading Kafka scholars and one of America's most eminent civil rights lawyers, the documents cast rich light on the man and the writer and offer new insights to lovers of Kafka's novels and stories.

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Customer Reviews

I originally purchased The Office Writings a year ago, for a Kafka class I took in my final semester of college undergrad. Throughout the class we referenced this book extensively; our whole group was

captivated and delighted by the text. Although the class was a year ago, I continue to think of this text fondly (and return to it regularly). I still giggle as I think about Kafka's second document "The Scope of Compulsory Insurance for the Building Trades"--his Institute wanted everyone to keep their insurance but the people were not going to be required to do so. (Of course they didn't want to pay more if they didn't have to!) The Institute sent a letter explaining all of the benefits and telling people they were going to lose their coverage (oh no!), so Institute would kindly auto-renew it unless the people opted out directly. Of course not many people opted out. Kafka wrote this a hundred years ago, and he was already dealing with auto-renewals much like what we have today. As our banks began offering "Overdraft Privilege" after they were not allowed automatically charging fees for overdrafts last summer, I kept thinking of Kafka's Institute, and the way they twisted insurance to look like a privilege! Anyhow, Kafka's office writings are wonderful! Many of his office writings grapple with the same issues that we find in Kafka's other writings; themes that trouble Kafka in his fiction continue to trouble him at work. The editors of this work provide a skillful analysis of each of Kafka's office documents in the volume. The commentaries are both interesting and relevant and they demonstrate a mastery of Kafka's works. For anyone who has developed a fascination with Kafka's writing, this book is truly indispensable because it adds another dimension to our understanding of Kafka. I love this book!

This collection of official texts written by the lawyer Kafka begins our re-evaluation of the life and career of the enigmatic writer Franz Kafka. He held far more important and meaningful posts in the outside world of work than decades of biographies have recorded. And because of this discrepancy and its resolution in this text, we can now tease out some trails from Kafka's legal mind at work in the day job and to his literary creations. Translator and editor Corngold's introductions that specifically point out links between fictional texts and cases Kafka worked on are most helpful.

Nobody, not even someone such as Sigmund Freud can actually know why anyone writes a story. What one can try to do, in the absence of true knowledge is to create a work of "educated" fiction themselves. Why did F.K. write what he did in the way he did? A good question without a valid answer, I feel. To try to pinpoint F.K. by dragging in random bits and piece of his various written work, may shed more darkness than revealing light, when done at his place of employment with only his bosses, and those directly involved with the insurance claims and evaluations assigned as part of his work chores, as his "audience" readers. What is known is that F.K. never expressed feelings of regret for having been forced by failing health, to leave his employment. Looking out the window to

the moving "specs" below, as a very young, almost isolated child, must have been very important to F.K. and very likely made an enormous difference in the manner he viewed himself, those close by, and the way he recorded his beliefs and feelings, whether in his "fictional" writings, or what he said, what he wrote, or didn't. This present book does raise some ideas, maybe even possibilities about F.K., but falls short of an answer. Down Pat

Much better than "The Complete Geological Surveys of Andrei Tarkovsky 1952-58," and almost as good as "The Land Surveys of Henry David Thoreau 1851-62 (Unabridged Version, 2400 pp): Schocken Classics Series." But when will they finally release his surviving laundry lists?!

Yes, the very same Artemy Lebedev who doesn't want you to save energy by turning off the light when you leave the room. Here he wants to keep you in the dark about this great compendium of Kafka's office minutiae, this literary feast of all things mundane, this intricate web of clerical nonsense, that only Kafka could come up with. No, wait, him and half a billion of other accountants and subrogation service specialists that ever lived. The Office Writings by Kafka easily beats US Tax Code on entertainment value alone, and (unlike the Code) it answers the important question that pops up every single time somebody gets their claim adjustment document - Who wrote this drivel? Kafka did, that's who. At least the ones in this book. Some say this book helps to gain insights into the origins of Kafka's other writings - The Trial for example. That's true - it is about as helpful as reading Stephen King's car service records is to understanding the magic behind From a Buick 8. Seriously, read this book as if it were the last thing you read. It probably will be.

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