

**TUESDAY 12 NOVEMBER at 5.30PM**

**OF CHILDREN, ANIMALS  
AND HUNGER ARTISTS**

**Kristin Scott Thomas reads Franz Kafka**

“I enclose an invitation to a reading. To appear in public with your story, and thus as it were with you, will be a strange feeling.”

—30 November 1912. *Kafka, Letters to Felice*

“Cumulatively Kafka’s work is an archive of our era: its anomie, depersonalization, afflicted innocence, innovative cruelty, authoritarian demagoguery, technologically adept killing. But none of this is served raw... Always for Kafka, behind meaning there shivers an intractable darkness or (rarely) an impenetrable radiance.”

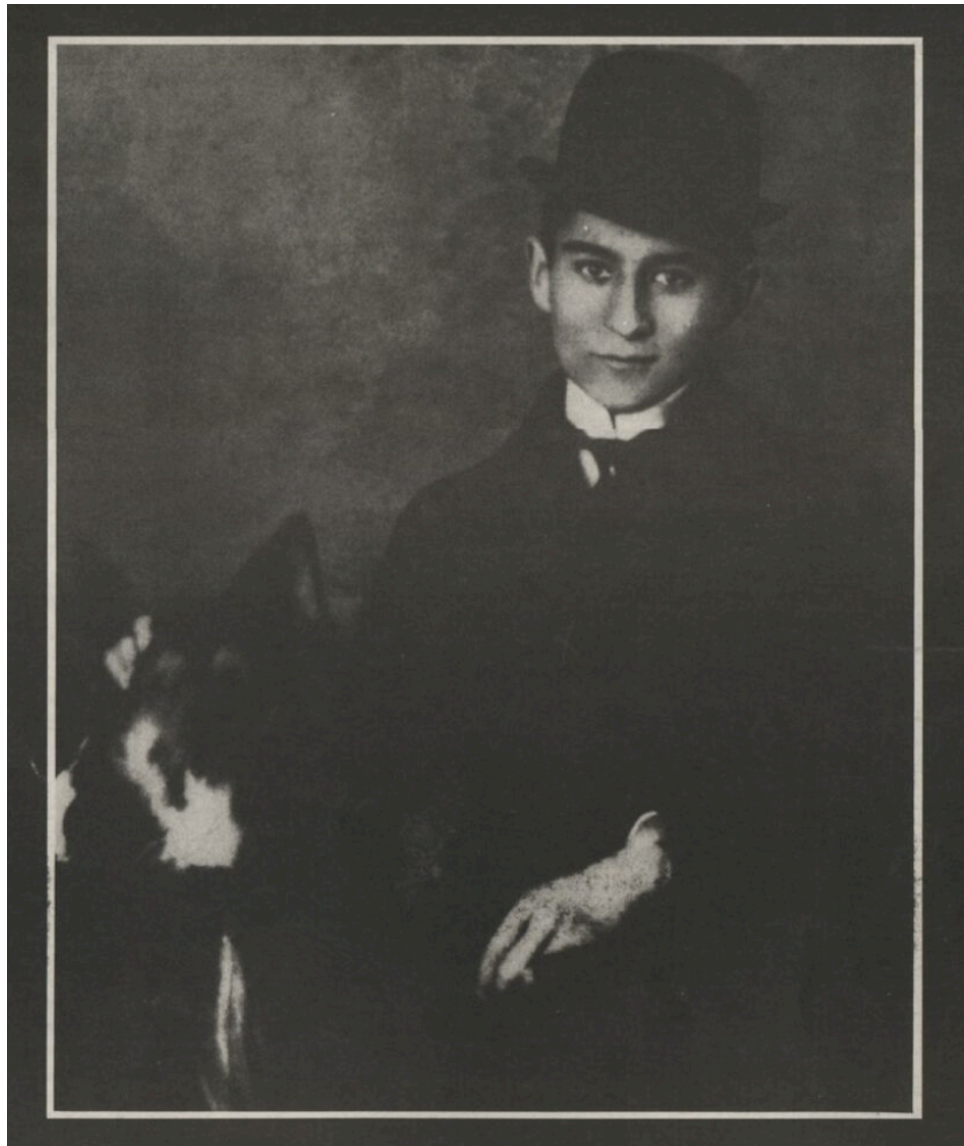
—Cynthia Ozick, *The Impossibility of Being Kafka*, *The New Yorker*, January 1999

**Bold Tendencies Off-Site at Holywell Music  
Room, Wadham College, University of Oxford**

# BOLD TENDENCIES

**Franz Kafka**

**3 July 1883 – 3 June 1924**



FLOORS 7-10  
PECKHAM MULTI-STOREY  
CAR PARK  
LONDON SE15 4ST  
[BOLDTENDENCIES.COM](http://BOLDTENDENCIES.COM)

KAFKA'S  
TRANSFORMATIVE  
COMMUNITIES 

Readings on 12 November 2024

**Resolutions** (ca. 1904–12)

Transl. Michael Hofmann

**Children on the Road** (1912)

Transl. Michael Hofmann

**At Night** (1920)

Transl. Tania and James Stern

**Before the Law** (1915)

Transl. Mark Harman

**My Business** (1917)

Transl. Michael Hofmann

**A Common Confusion** (1917)

Transl. Willa and Edwin Muir

**The Great Swimmer** (1922)

Transl. Daniel Slager

**An Imperial Message** (1917)

Transl. Mark Harman

**The Problem With Our Laws** (1917)

Transl. Michael Hofmann

**The Bridge** (published posthumously 1931)  
Transl. Michael Hofmann

**A Crossbreed** (published posthumously 1931)  
Transl. Mark Harman

**It Was One Summer** (published  
posthumously 1931)  
Transl. Michael Hofmann

**First Sorrow** (1922)  
Transl. Michael Hofmann

**Little Fable** (1920)  
Transl. Mark Harman

On the occasion of the centenary year of Franz Kafka's death, we celebrate the works of this iconic force majeure of 20th century literature. Taken cumulatively, Kafka's sentences are a plainchant for our own traumatic times – full of dread, resignation, sadness and practical impossibilities – yet equally uplifting the wildest of supernatural aspirations. Examining transformative communities that rest at the fringes of a troubled society, his words invite us to read the world differently.

Walter Benjamin spoke of Kafka's universe as a world theatre, where humanity is on stage from the very beginning; and indeed many of his writing's most striking qualities are best appreciated by hearing the prose performed. Regularly reading his work aloud to friends and family, and attending "Rezitationen" (recitals), Kafka's love of recitation as a hybrid acoustic form is well documented – across his diary entries, in letters to friends and lovers; and embedded within his fiction.

In ode to Kafka's fascination with the power of the voice, we are honoured to be joined this evening by distinguished actor Kristin Scott Thomas. Possessing a voice that needs no introduction, we can think of few better suited to animating this sequence of short stories, especially selected from Kafka's archive. Alternately funny and absurd, bizarre and troubling,

captivating and unsettling; these “deep cuts” are all unequivocally unforgettable.

Born into a middle-class, German-speaking and Yiddish-speaking Czech Jewish family in Prague, Kafka initially trained as a lawyer. After completing his legal education he spent a year handling cases for the indigent in the city’s Provincial and Criminal Courts; before being employed full-time by the Workers’ Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia in 1908. Despite being a model official – fastidious, precise and efficient (even pioneering insurance policies such as the introduction of the hard hat) – Kafka deemed his job an obstacle to his true life’s work as a writer.

Forced to live a form of ‘double life’, Kafka dedicated most of his free time to writing, often working late into the night. He belonged to the ring of prolific Prague-German writers dubbed the Prague Circle, and including Max Brod – his lifelong close friend, editor and subsequent literary executor. From their vantage point in the Bohemian capital during the early part of the 20th century, the circle’s work and dialogue explored religion and spirituality, expressionism, activism (and anti-activism), international solidarity with the working class, and transcendence.

Renowned for his fusion of the real and the fantastic, Kafka’s work is typically defined by his protagonists:

isolated; thrust into strange, surreal predicaments; forced to encounter incomprehensible socio-bureaucratic powers. Some of his best known works include *The Metamorphosis* (1915), *The Trial* (1914–15; published posthumously 1925) and *The Castle* (published posthumously 1926); each exemplary of Kafka's key themes of alienation, existential anxiety, guilt and absurdity.

At least 94 Franz Kafka titles have been published, including 76 short stories, five essays, three novels, notebooks and diaries spanning the years 1910–23, and a book of aphorisms. Over the course of his life Kafka penned hundreds to family and close friends (including his father, with whom he had a strained relationship); which have since been collated across five published books to date. His largest collection of some 500 letters were written to Felice Bauer, to whom he was engaged between August 1912 and December 1917; it was said she was the love of his life. Following Felice, Kafka had three further relationships with Julie Wohryzek, Milena Jesenka and Dora Diamant; in the latter of whose arms Kafka died of tuberculosis in an Austrian sanatorium, three days short of his 41st birthday.

Alongside his profligacy in writing, Kafka was a great draughtsman. He is survived by roughly 300 drawings, mainly made between 1901–07, which are as fantastical, referential and uncanny as his writings.

Kafka also dabbled in the writing of travel guidebooks. Conceiving of a business plan dubbed “On The Cheap” whilst travelling across the continent with Brod in 1911, the ahead-of-its-time idea sought to improve upon the traditional Baedeker travel guides – augmenting typical hotel and restaurant listings with insider knowledge and recommendations.

Though Kafka was confident in his creative calling, he was less certain of his creative output. His work was an endless source of personal insecurity, and his struggle with self doubt was lifelong – the author burned an estimated ninety percent of his total work. The majority of Kafka’s works were published posthumously, with those published during his lifetime receiving little attention. When he died he did so in relative obscurity.

In his will Kafka instructed Max Brod to destroy his unfinished work – including his novels *The Trial*, *The Castle*, and *Amerika* – but Brod ignored these instructions. Without Brod, much of the author’s now-canonic writing would not have been introduced to the world; nor would we be celebrating Kafka’s enduring legacy today. In the years following Kafka’s death his writings proliferated in fame in German-speaking countries. His mark on German literature came into evidence in the years following the Second World War; in the 1960s his influence spread



worldwide, and continues to inspire and intrigue artists, composers, philosophers and readers today.

Tonight's unique programme evolved out of 'Franz Kafka: Deep Cuts', which took place at Bold Tendencies on the evening of the author's birthdate, Wednesday 3 July 2024. Delving into the hopeless energy and paranoid humour, sparkling wit and harrowing poignancy present into the author's oeuvre, the research for the programme was supported by the team at Kafka's Transformative Communities, an Arts and Humanities Research Council Project, and part of the Oxford Kafka Research Centre.

As part of 'Deep Cuts', Bold Tendencies hosted a Backstage Pass Session – one of the year-round free and accessible activities that constitute the Creative Learning Programme, the initiative provides community members with the opportunity to experience behind the scenes access to world-class artists, working across the disciplines of live performance. Held in collaboration with Southwark Libraries reading groups, the session was supported by the Mila Charitable Organisation and Penguin Random House, who gifted each participant a copy of *Metamorphosis and Other Stories* (Penguin Modern Classics) as well as depositing copies in local Southwark Libraries.

# BOLD TENDENCIES

Bold Tendencies gives particular thanks to Professors Carolin Duttlinger and Barry Murnane – Co-Directors of the Kafka Research Institute, University of Oxford, and Co-Curators of the centenary exhibition *Kafka: Making of an Icon*, Bodleian Libraries – who, in addition to their academic support, delivered a pre-show talk on 3 July, in further exploration of the impacts of Kafka's work. Traversing Kafka's life and times, work, and imagination and stories; the discussion celebrated the author's achievements and creativity, and the manner in which he continues to inspire new literary, theatrical, and cinematic creations around the world.

Bold Tendencies is grateful to prize-winning literary translator and Kafka scholar Mark Harman for his help and guidance, and to the team at Harvard University Press for permission to work with copies of his new translations in advance of their publication in 2024.

With additional thanks to UKRI (UK Research and Innovation) for their support of 'Kafka's Transformative Communities'.



**UK Research  
and Innovation**



“Not a word is lost, nor is there the whisper of an echo, instead everything grows gradually larger as though the voice, already occupied with something else, continues to exercise a direct after-effect; it goes stronger after the initial impetus and swallows us up.”

—3 March 1912. *The Diaries of Franz Kafka*

**Dame Kristin Scott Thomas DBE** is a British-French actor. A five-time BAFTA Award and Olivier Award nominee, she won the BAFTA Award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role for *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, and the Olivier Award for Best Actress for the Royal Court revival of *The Seagull*. She was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actress for *The English Patient*. She has played memorable roles in *Slow Horses* (2023), Sally Potter's *The Party* (2017) Phoebe Waller-Bridge's *Fleabag* (2016), Catherine Corisini's *Leaving (Partir)* (2009), and Philippe Claudel's *I've Loved You So Long (Il y a longtemps que je t'aime)* (2008); and on the stage in *Elektra* (2014) and Harold Pinter's *Old Times* (2013) and *Betrayal* (2008). Last year she starred in *LYONESSE*, Penelope Skinner's new play, alongside Lily James. She also completed work on her directorial debut *My Mother's Wedding*. She has recently been seen in the fourth series of *Slow Horses*.

The **Holywell Music Room**, housed at Wadham College, is the oldest custom built concert hall in Europe. Designed by Thomas Camplin, Vice Principal of St Edmund Hall, and the likely brainchild of William Hayes, Heather Professor of Music at Oxford from 1741, Holywell opened its doors to the public for the first time in 1748. Prior to the building of the Music Room, Oxford concerts took place in the all-male domains of college dining halls and noisy, crowded taverns. Bringing together people from both the university and the city, the new Music Room offered a high quality listening and performing experience – of “unrivalled charm” and “acoustic properties to die for” (Derek Jole, *Oxford Times*). Restored and refitted in 1959–60 under the supervision of architects Garden and Godfrey, Holywell has

since been the location for many hundreds of recitals and concert series, featuring prestigious visiting musicians, as well as local groups and student performers.

The **Oxford Kafka Research Centre** was founded in 2009. Directed by Carolin Duttlinger, Katrin Kohl, Barry Murnane and Ritchie Robertson, it brings together Kafka scholars from around the globe as well as hosting events for students and the general public. It works in partnership with the Bodleian Library, home to the largest collection of Kafka's manuscripts in the world. The OKRC is currently hosting a three-year major research project, 'Kafka's Transformative Communities', funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. For more information about upcoming Kafka events in Oxford, London, and around the world, please join our **Global Kafka Network**.



**Wadham College** was founded by Dorothy Wadham in 1610, and is one of the largest colleges in Oxford with 250 graduate students and 450 undergraduate students. Wadham is a notable example of Jacobean architecture, designed by William Arnold and erected between 1610 and 1613. During the Wardenship of John Wilkins, 1648–59, Wadham became a focus of scientific interest in Europe, and the regular meeting place for the nucleus of astronomers, anatomists, chemists, and other

experimenters who would come to form the Royal Society in 1660. Wadham was one of the first colleges to allow the admission of women as full members at all levels in 1974.

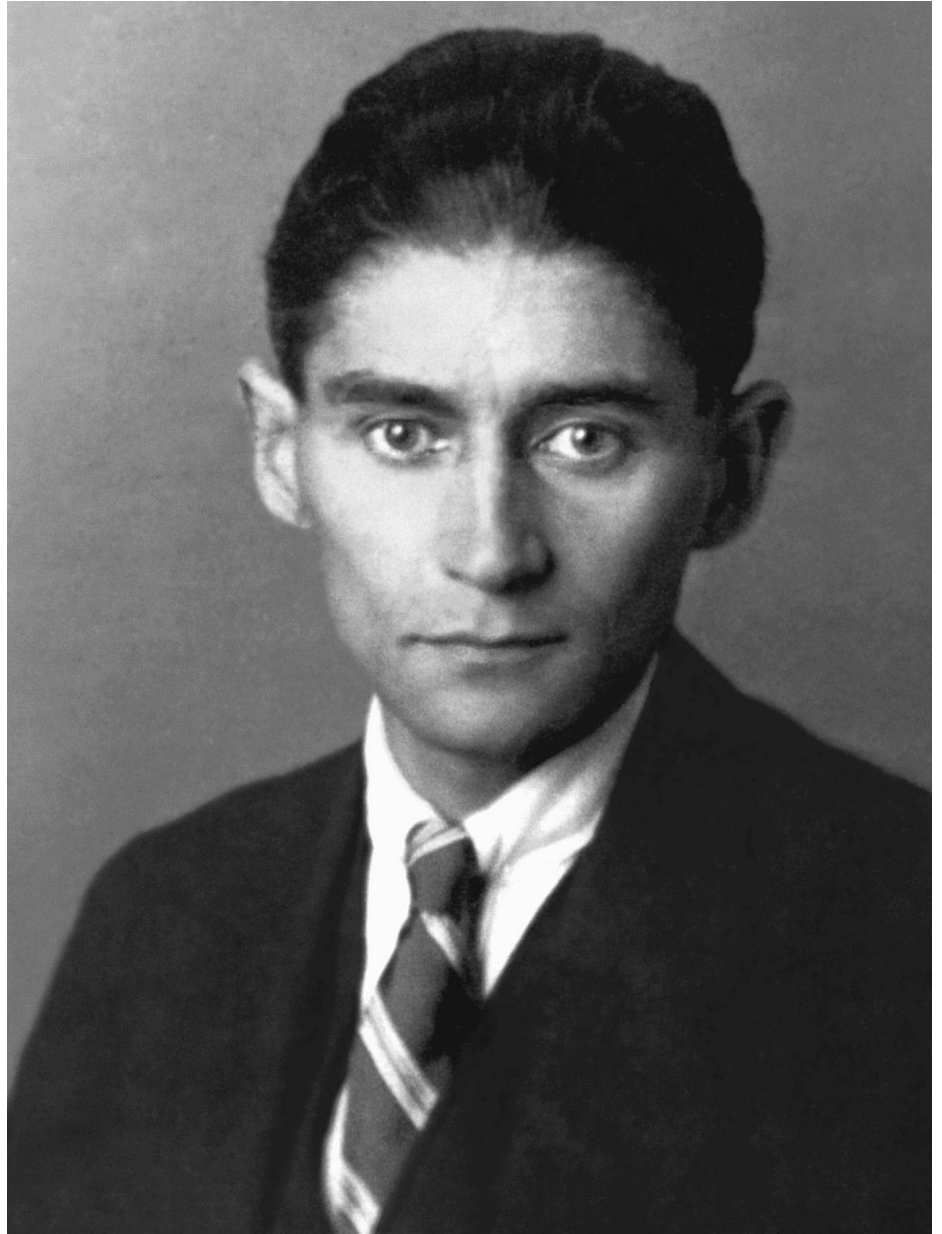
**Bold Tendencies** is a not-for-profit arts organisation established in the rooftop spaces of Peckham's Multi-Storey Car Park in 2007. It has transformed a disused building in the heart of South London into an iconic, much-loved place of culture and assembly with spectacular views out over the city and pioneering architecture project Frank's Cafe. Supporting a new generation of creative voices alongside acclaimed international artists, it delivers an ambitious annual programme of experimental Visual Arts, Creative Learning and Live Events open to the public, offering access, participation and enjoyment of the arts for everyone.

**Carolyn Duttlinger** is Professor of German Literature and Culture at the University of Oxford and Co-Director of the Oxford Kafka Research Centre. She has published four books on Kafka to date, and has also been part of the recent BBC Radio Four 'Orwell vs Kafka' season. She is leading a major three-year research project, *Kafka's Transformative Communities*, which brings together academics and creative practitioners working on Kafka to assess his ongoing influence and legacy today.

## With thanks to the **COMMUNION** Founding Friends

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Marcelle Joseph	Felicity Waley-Cohen
Caroline Karim-Kassar	Don Weniz
	& those who wish to
	remain anonymous





“On the way home told Max that I shall lie very contentedly on my deathbed, provided the pain isn’t too great. I forgot – and later purposely omitted – to add that the best things I have written have their basis in this capacity of mine to meet death with contentment.”

— 13 December 1914. *The Diaries of Franz Kafka*