



Kafka: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)

Ritchie Robertson

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'When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from troubled dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous insect ...' So begins Franz Kafka's most famous story Metamorphosis.

Franz Kafka (1883-1924) is among the most intriguing and influential writers of the twentieth century. During his lifetime he worked as a civil servant and published only a handful of short stories, the best known being *The Transformation*. All three of his novels, *The Trial*, *The Castle*, and *The Man Who Disappeared* [America], were published after his death and helped to found Kafka's reputation as a uniquely perceptive interpreter of the twentieth century.

Kafka's fiction vividly evokes bizarre situations: a commercial traveller is turned into an insect, a banker is arrested by a mysterious court, a fasting artist starves to death in the name of art, a singing mouse becomes the heroine of her nation. Attending both to Kafka's crisis-ridden life and to the subtleties of his art, Ritchie Robertson shows how his 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'. The result is an up-to-date and accessible portrait of a fascinating author which shows us ways to read and make sense of his perplexing and absorbing work.

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