

KAFKA

FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY



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Contents

Preface	vii
List of Abbreviations for Kafka Citations	xi
Introduction	1
<i>Stanley Corngold and Ruth V. Gross</i>	
1: Running Texts, Stunning Drafts	24
<i>Roland Reuß</i>	
2: “Torturing the Gordian Knot”: Kafka and Metaphor	48
<i>Mark Harman</i>	
3: Nietzsche and Kafka: The Dionysian Connection	64
<i>Walter H. Sokel</i>	
4: What Kafka Learned from Flaubert: “Absent-Minded Window-Gazing” and “The Judgment”	75
<i>Uta Degner</i>	
5: Kafka’s Racial Melancholy	89
<i>Katja Garloff</i>	
6: Strange Loops and the Absent Center in <i>The Castle</i>	105
<i>Jacob Burnett</i>	
7: Proxies in Kafka: <i>Koncipist</i> FK and <i>Prokurist</i> Josef K.	120
<i>Doreen Densky</i>	
8: Kafka, Goffman, and the Total Institution	136
<i>Ritchie Robertson</i>	
9: Kafka in Virilio’s Teletopical City	151
<i>Rolf J. Goebel</i>	
10: Kafka’s Visual Method: The Gaze, the Cinematic, and the Intermedial	165
<i>Peter Beicken</i>	
11: “Samsa war Reisender”: Trains, Trauma, and the Unreadable Body	179
<i>John Zilcosky</i>	

12: The Comfort of Strangeness: Correlating the Kafkaesque and the Kafkan in Kazuo Ishiguro's <i>The Unconsoled</i> <i>Robert Lemon</i>	207
13: Kafka's Journey into the Future: Crossing Borders into Israeli/Palestinian Worlds <i>Iris Bruce</i>	222
14: Kafka and Italy: A New Perspective on the Italian Literary Landscape <i>Saskia Elizabeth Ziolkowski</i>	237
Bibliography	251
Notes on the Contributors	273

14: Kafka and Italy: A New Perspective on the Italian Literary Landscape

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EXAMINING MODERN ITALIAN LITERATURE is a Kafkaesque endeavor, because it is not always entirely clear if it exists. Critics have tended to concentrate on movements or smaller trends, such as *frammentismo*, *decadentismo*, *ermetismo*, *crepuscularismo*, and *futurismo*, or on particular figures, such as Luigi Pirandello, Gabriele D'Annunzio, F. T. Marinetti, Italo Svevo, and Carlo Emilio Gadda, or on regional clusters of various authors. While these approaches have offered a minute anatomy of Italy's various authors and movements, they have also isolated Italian literature from larger comparative studies and necessarily excluded certain authors from consideration. The broader term "modernism," meanwhile, which has recently been used to describe some modern Italian works,¹ frequently mischaracterizes the Italian picture.² This article is part of a larger project that aims to map a distinct but unexamined Kafka tradition in Italian modern literature, a tradition that encompasses a more diverse and representative group of authors than headings such as *frammentismo* allow, without assimilating the particularity of the Italian scene to a larger modernist movement.

Reversing the clever conceit of Jorge Luis Borges's "Kafka and his Precursors," which finds Kafka presences in the past, this study examines Kafka's presences in his Italian successors. Instead of studying direct influence, I use Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblances to consider the Kafka qualities these modern Italian authors share. From the use of animal imagery and oppressive spaces to representations of crises, alienation, and repressive bourgeois relations, the disparate themes of Kafka's fiction are reflected throughout modern Italian literature. By engaging the immense amount of scholarship on Kafka, the project endeavors to revisit and refine the critical understanding of twentieth-century Italian literature. A Kafka view of Italian literature incorporates some less well known Italian texts that are currently excluded from maps of modern Italian literature at the same time as it provides new perspectives on canonical authors such as Svevo, Gadda, and Italo Calvino. In this article I first outline a distinct but unexamined Kafka tradition in Italian literature, which

can reshape the critical understanding of Italian modern literature, and then provide a more detailed example of how reading Kafka with Italian authors enhances the critical understanding of them.

Although critics have called particular attention to Kafka's rise in fame in France, England, and America after the Second World War, his role in Italy has been under-examined, despite the fact that he was a critical presence there well before the war. One Italian Germanist notes that "the first non-German notice" of Kafka came from Italy.³ Kafka's precocious appearance in the Italian literary landscape was due in part to the Austro-Hungarian and then Italian city of Trieste. The labors of the Triestine Roberto "Bobi" Bazlen, in particular, exemplify the city's role. Bazlen recommended Kafka's works to Italians who wanted to improve their German as strikingly early as 1919,⁴ and to notable Italian authors, such as the poet Eugenio Montale in early 1924,⁵ when one critic estimates that Kafka was so little known in the world that only two articles existed that referred to his work, both written by his good friend and constant advocate Max Brod.⁶ Bazlen's friends and correspondents read like a who's who list of Italian literature, and several of them name the Prague writer as an important literary influence. They include Montale, Svevo, Umberto Saba, Natalia Ginzburg, Elsa Morante, Giani Stuparich, Alberto Savinio, Alberto Moravia, Sandro Penna, Elio Vittorini, Enrico Pea, Aldo Palazzeschi, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Giacomo Debenedetti, Carlo Emilio Gadda, and Carlo Levi.

Even outside Triestine literary circles, the early instances of Kafka's Italian presence are remarkable. In 1933, the year some of Kafka's works were being burned in Berlin and a couple of years before *The Trial* (*Der Prozess*, 1925) came into print in English, Frassinelli brought out an Italian translation. In 1947, Alberto Spaini, in the introduction to his translation of *Amerika: The Missing Person* (*Der Verschollene*, 1927), noted that Kafka's influence was widespread: "For more than ten years we have been invaded by *kafkaini* and by a *kafkaismo* that critics have not yet identified, perhaps because his name would not have meant anything to anyone, but which has made Kafka even more popular in Italy than one can imagine."⁷ Spaini's description of a diffuse "kafkaismo" points to the difficulty of uncovering who knew Kafka's work and when: many of these traces have been lost or are impossible to locate in time. Spaini's comment may refer particularly to Dino Buzzati's vexed relationship with Kafka. When critics wrote of Buzzati's debt to the German-language writer, he responded in interviews and in print that he had not known of Kafka's work until well after having written his novels in the early 1940s. These sorts of debates often seem to circle around the concern that artistic debt somehow lessens the contributions of the later author, automatically making the second author secondary. Buzzati's anxiety that his own work could lose some of its originality, its Buzzatiness, if it were revealed to be Kafkaesque may

seem misplaced, but it testifies to Kafka's powerful presence in Italian literary circles at the time.

The cultural history of Kafka's reception provides an important background for the Kafkan reading of modern Italian literature, but questions of source and influence are not decisive for the study suggested here. Instead of focusing on the positivist question of who read whom and when, I wish to emphasize the grounds of the connection and the family resemblances between the authors' works. Rather than replaying the debates about whether or not Dino Buzzati was conditioned by Kafka, scholars should explore the strong family resemblance between Kafka's *The Castle* (*Das Schloss*, 1926) and Buzzati's *Il deserto dei Tartari* (*The Tartar Steppe*), a tale of a man who waits in vain for a military invasion; or between several of Kafka's and Buzzati's short stories, many of which focus on inescapable and maddening power structures.

The question of Kafka's influence on many later writers is less problematic, since a range of authors, among them Cesare Pavese and Calvino, acknowledge Kafka as a particularly fascinating, influential, or beloved writer. The richness and variety of Kafka's presence in Italian literature is notable even in just the direct references to him made in Italian works. Montale, who, as discussed, was introduced to Kafka early, wrote a demanding poem, "Verboten," which focuses on Kafka.⁸ Magris's hard-to-define *Danubio* (*Danube*) (it has been called a novel, a memoir, and a travelogue) includes numerous references to Kafka and has a chapter "Kierling, Hauptstrasse 187" that moves between the narrator's experience in the house in which Kafka died and reflections on Kafka. More playful than these two works is Tommaso Landolfi's short story, "Il babbo di Kafka" ("Kafka's Dad"), published in 1942. The narrator and his friend, Kafka, are forced to deal with the appearance of a huge spider that has the head of Kafka's father. These three very different works suggest the various ways Italian authors used Kafka in diverse genres and also reveal aspects of the Italian literary landscape.

In yet another mode of engagement with Kafka, Primo Levi, the well known author of *Se questo è un uomo* (*If This is a Man* in England and *Survival in Auschwitz* in America), translated *Der Process* and begins his note to the novel: "So this is it, this is human destiny: we can be persecuted and punished for a crime that has not even been committed, which is obscure and which will never be revealed to us by the 'court.'"⁹ As a Holocaust survivor, his reading has striking connotations. Years after returning from Auschwitz, Levi enrolled in German courses at Turin's *Goethe-Institut* and was later asked to translate the novel for an "author translating authors" series. He was probably asked to do so partially because of the popular idea of Kafka as some sort of prophet of the Shoah. A more illuminating reason for Levi's reaction to the translation project, from which he emerged "as from an illness,"¹⁰ relates to Ritchie

Robertson's analysis of Kafka's penetrating portrayals of institutional (broadly meant) power, authority, and violence.¹¹ Concentration camps are an extreme instance of the way institutions can take over all aspects of a private individual's life, and Kafka's depiction of oppressive power resonated with Levi.

Kafka's understanding and literary representations of power as central in the family, one's "first institution,"¹² in fact clarifies why a range of Italian authors whose works are often set in the home have been described as Kafkaesque. Although these three authors have not been considered together, the oppressive familial relationships depicted by Elsa Morante in *Menzogna e sortilegio* (*House of Liars*) can be compared with those depicted in Massimo Bontempelli's *Il figlio di due madri* (*The Son of Two Mothers*) and in Susanna Tamaro's "La grande casa bianca" ("The Big White House"). All three of these eerie works reveal the intense psychological power that familial relationships have in that first "institution" of one's home.

From within the vast panorama of potential Kafka Italian authors, I want to focus on one particular encounter, because it shows how a Kafka lens can illuminate under-studied Italian works and perhaps make them part of larger critical conversations. Although Svevo is primarily recognized for his novels, his story "Argo e il suo padrone" ("Argo and His Master") demonstrates connections to Kafka's "A Report to an Academy" ("Ein Bericht für eine Akademie," 1919). In "A Report" an ape, Rotpeter, learns to act like a man and presents a report of his process of becoming human. The story has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Rotpeter's process of human assimilation has been read as symbolizing several groups who experienced some sort of cultural shift.¹³ Even when not read allegorically, "A Report" presents the crisis of human identity. The work continues to stimulate discussions about animals and their relationship to humans, especially in the growing field of animal studies.¹⁴ Svevo's "Argo," on the other hand, has received scant attention, despite its interrogation of humans' perceptions of themselves as "human" and thus separate from animals, which could contribute to discussions of species and identity.

In "Argo," a man attempts to teach Italian to his dog, Argo, after reading about an impressively expressive German dog, who, like Rotpeter, can "talk like a human being. In fact, rather more intelligently, as they were asking its advice. The dog pronounced difficult German words which even I would hardly be able to say."¹⁵ The ability of the German dog to learn a human language prompts the man to reflect on his own linguistic skills, and, in the end, it is he who learns a new tongue. In the first section of "Argo" the man relates the process of learning to understand Argo, and the remaining sections consist of Argo's monologues, translated by the man. Although in Kafka's story it is the animal who learns human language and in Svevo's a human who learns to understand his animal, both concentrate on the difficulties of communication between species and what this

means about knowledge in general, as well as about the essence of being human.

Rotpeter's language acquisition and attempts at being human begin with a handshake: "The first thing that I learned was to shake hands; the handshake signifies openness. Now, today, at the high point of my career, let frank speech be coupled with that first handshake" (*KSS*, 77).¹⁶ Though Rotpeter claims that his words exemplify the same openness as his first handshake, the reader soon learns that in the beginning Rotpeter did not understand the meaning of any of his actions (drinking, smoking); he simply knew that they might provide an escape. This lack of comprehension raises questions about the meaning of the first handshake, whether it was merely imitative, or had meaning for the humans but not for Rotpeter, or had a different meaning for both Rotpeter and the humans. In addition, it can be asked whether the handshake later had meaning for Rotpeter but was still viewed as imitative by humans. The same questions about meaning and for whom the act has meaning can be, and have been, asked of Rotpeter's entire report. Does he mean what he says, or is he merely imitating academic discourse? Is his audience sincerely listening to his talk, as they would a human's, or do the audience members consider his words as they would any ape's performance?¹⁷ For whom, if anyone, Rotpeter's words have meaning and for whom they are still merely a performance are unanswerable questions.

The issue of performativity and the problem of attributing meaning to gestures are raised in "Argo" as well. Particularly when contrasted with Rotpeter's handshake, the paw-handshake in "Argo" is revealed as complex and subjective. Argo's first gesture, once his master decides to teach him to speak, is to give him his paw, to "shake hands": "The stupid animal, finding himself assailed by gestures and sounds, mustered his entire wit and gave me his paw!" (*AM*, 166; *AP*, 98). Argo does what he has been trained to do, but now the gesture, instead of being a sign of comprehension, represents the failure of Argo to understand the master's efforts: "That evening I had my hands full simply ridding him of his bad habit. If he were to become human, he would have to forget the gestures of the domesticated dog, at which he had stopped as though at the farthest limits of his education" (*AM*, 166; *AP*, 98). Argo and his master's means of communicating are based on training. Once Argo's master stops assuming that this is the only way they can interact, their relationship begins to change.

The importance of physical gestures and their shifting meanings in the two works reveals how even non-verbal communication can be interrogated by the inclusion of an animal's perspective. Both works demonstrate that the human concept of other animals' understanding is primarily due to human perspective. For Rotpeter, communication is hindered by human and other animals' established modes of interaction: "The immediate source of [Rotpeter's] confinement is not physical but epistemological; he

is held captive by how humans perceive him.”¹⁸ Rotpeter is only human if he is believed to be. Similarly, Argo’s master, and not Argo, has to change in order for him to understand Argo’s communications. The master learns to establish a new relationship with Argo as a unique social subject, rather than as a dog to be dominated. He refers to his dog as a person and gets down on all fours, like a dog, to relate better to him.

Rotpeter portrays himself as unexcited by his new ability to speak. The ape narrator of “A Report” learns the language of another species because he sees this new kind of communication as the only possible solution to his predicament, his only way out. Rotpeter carefully qualifies this decision: his “way out” was not taken out of any desire to be like humans or interact with them — speaking was merely preferable to death. In Svevo’s story, the master, as he is referred to throughout the work, does not set out to understand Argo but to teach him to speak. His resulting understanding is the only possible solution he could find for his situation: “The point was to make ourselves understood, and there were two possibilities: Argo had to learn my language or I had to learn his” (*AM*, 167; *AP*, 99). Like Rotpeter, Argo is unenthusiastic about this new ability: “Argo made his communications to me meekly and with resignation” (*AM*, 167; *AP*, 99). Rotpeter and Argo are both resigned to communicating with humans. This accomplishment, which in both stories is the subject of public attention and much human interest, is not valued especially by the animal participants.

Animals’ estimation of humans is not as high as humans’ estimation of themselves. Much of what Rotpeter and Argo reveal about human behavior is hard to interpret positively. “A Report” and “Argo” represent the process of learning to communicate with humans as brutal. Rotpeter, who struggles to imitate humans only so that he can leave the cage that cuts into his flesh, is burned during his attempts to learn. Argo is repeatedly hurt without reason, and the master portrays how he attempts to motivate Argo with violence. The works interrogate the divide humans often assume between bestial animals and humane humans.

Not only are human experiences made strange by the animal’s perspective, but attention is also drawn to the similarities between human animals’ and other animals’ actions. The human handshake, both an expression of politeness and a greeting, is exposed in “Argo” as a basic physical gesture similar to ones that other species employ, just as dogs smell one another: “Men are much simpler animals than dogs, because they smell more than dogs and do so more readily. When one man meets another, they touch hands and don’t seem to worry about what lies behind the other man’s hand. Argo, on the other hand, when he meets another dog, cautiously advances the toothed end of his own body towards the untoothed end of the other’s body and sniffs” (*AM*, 182; *AP*, 112). Argo contrasts man’s seemingly detached shaking of hands with the series of ways in which his

own greeting might unfold, an array which could include — (depending on the other dog) — the leading to a fight and the smell of its “untoothed” parts. All the rituals of social interactions are open to investigation in light of the outsider-perspective of an animal.

“Argo” expresses more clearly than “A Report” the similarities between humans and other animals, partially since the voice of a dog, Argo, is the focus of a large portion of the work, whereas only Rotpeter the person, not Rotpeter the ape, communicates with his human audience. In both works, though, this communication is compromised and questioned. “A Report” often highlights the instability of language by drawing attention to the language being used and to problems of expression.¹⁹ Although Rotpeter may be mocking the academic language often used in talks, his phrasing also emphasizes that meaning is fluid, that words construct a particular reality, and that the reader or listener may not always understand what is intended. Rotpeter consistently underscores that language merely approximates what he is trying to express. This philosophical problem is aggravated by his condition of having been an ape: “Naturally, today I can only try to express my apish feelings of the time in human words, and so I misstate them” (*KSS*, 79).²⁰ The ape cannot discuss his animal experience, because human language lacks the proper vocabulary. As opposed to representing the ape’s thoughts in human language, Kafka’s story leaves openly unknowable what humans cannot know, animal life. Martin Puchner observes:

Kafka thus does not attempt, through sympathy, to represent the ape as ape, supposedly freed from all anthropological machines. As a human writing for other humans about apes, that would be impossible or naive. Instead, his story reveals the animal as a kind of gap, a gap between the ape’s mode of appearance, which is necessarily anthropomorphic — using human language, modes of address, and forms of communication — and the ape’s life, the unrepresentable life which Rotpeter is trying to save by all means.²¹

Svevo constructs a similar “gap” in his story. Although it does represent an animal’s point of view, these impressions are problematized because they are translated by a man, whose grasp of their meaning is imperfect. All the common problems of translation — lexical, syntactical, and hermeneutic — are compounded by the differences in species. Further complicating the transmission of Argo’s thoughts, Argo’s oral communications are transcribed into writing. Since Argo dies before the work is finished, the master is also translating from a lost language, so there is no way to verify his translations. The language is as foreign as a language could possibly be. Though the master claims that the “general sense” (*AM*, 167; *AP*, 99) was not affected by his misunderstandings, several moments of the narrative reveal the difference that a word can make. Although it is unlikely,

the reader will never know, for instance, since Argo cannot be asked, if the master was perhaps “sniffing” a woman he had encountered: “My master had stopped to chat with a woman. [Argo asserts at this point that I ‘sniffed’ the lady, but this is untrue and I do not hesitate to amend his statement. Moreover, the lady was getting on in years]” (*AM*, 175; *AP*, 105–6). The master appears to resist the idea that Argo thought he was flirting with the woman. His parenthetical remarks remind the reader that the master is not an unbiased translator of Argo’s words. The narrator’s comments on his changing of Argo’s wording highlights how differently Argo perceives the world, how language reflects these differences, and how little a reader can trust a translation of his language.

Svevo’s tale contains impenetrable sentences, and the reader cannot be sure if the opacity indicates that Argo’s thinking is difficult for a human to understand, Argo’s master has misunderstood, or Argo’s master has mis-translated Argo’s words. Readers of “Argo” and “A Report” are placed in a tenuous interpretive position, not knowing when the words expressed accurately represent what has occurred, or even the true feelings of the dog or ape speaker. The stories portray something that “defeats our ordinary capacity to get our minds around reality, that is, our capacity to capture reality in language. That dislodges us from comfortably inhabiting our nature as speaking animals, animals who can make sense of things in the way the capacity to speak enables us.”²² Both works raise questions about what lies beyond human comprehension.

Argo and his master’s communication is based, not on anthropomorphizing — in fact it resists anthropomorphism — but on relating to the animal. Argo even “caninizes” human behavior. Assuming that his master perceives the world in the same way he does, Argo believes that his master’s most important sense is smell and, because he smells less attentively than Argo, that his master has an even more acute sense of smell: “But my master walks in the middle of the road without taking a single step aside to enjoy the smells. His senses are more powerful than Argo’s and he doesn’t need to go near to enjoy them” (*AM*, 178; *AP*, 109). Argo believes that all creatures, from humans to birds, perceive as he does. While this may be a cause for amusement, this cynocentrism also asks the reader to consider anthropocentrism and the distortions of anthropomorphism.

The dog in “Argo” and Rotpeter in “A Report” are certainly not the first communicating dog and ape of literature, but these stories of “realistically” communicating animals and descriptions of how they came to communicate set them apart from animal tales of other authors.²³ Both stories preclude readers from feeling as if they have truly understood an animal’s worldview. Unlike most other stories of talking animals, the animals’ transformations are not based on fantastic situations. Nothing unnatural — no witchcraft as in Cervantes’s “A Dogs’ Colloquy,” no scientific experiments as in Mikail Bulgahov’s *Heart of a Dog*, no mysterious circumstances as in

E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Report of an Educated Young Man" — cause the animals to speak or be understood. Rather, the isolation of Svevo's narrator and Rotpeter plays an important part in what enables Argo's owner and Rotpeter to master the others' language. While Rotpeter is taken from his home and caged, Argo's master is banished to a mountain and scorned by the small community of people that lives there. Separated from their own species, Rotpeter and Argo's master are more likely to learn to communicate with another species. While the success of the transformation may be partially due to the particular characters of those involved, it is not difficult to imagine another bored master learning to understand his dog or another trapped ape imitating and "becoming" human. This repeatable, or ordinary, element of the species' changes distinguishes both stories from most tales of talking animals. The stories are constructed so as to appear as plausible as possible. Indeed, "Argo" describes a situation that has been the focus of numerous studies in the past few years: human beings attempting to understand dog language.²⁴

Dogs and apes are perhaps given the fictional power of speech especially often in literature because of their closeness to mankind, in two senses of the word "close" (man's best friend and man's precursor, respectively). This increased closeness can break down further barriers between the species. As Giorgio Agamben has discussed in detail in *The Open: Man and Animal*, this corrosion creates uncertainty: "When the difference vanishes and the two terms (man and animal) collapse upon each other — as seems to be happening today — the difference between being and nothing, licit and illicit, divine and demonic also fades away, and in its place something appears for which we seem to lack even a name."²⁵ As with many of the current debates on animal perception, Kafka and Svevo's realistic, talking animals create communicative confusion and raise the question of what it means to be human. Their works are early twentieth-century examples of a modernist crisis that has gained more attention in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century.

Svevo's wife claimed that Kafka was Svevo's "last literary love."²⁶ Many date his reading of Kafka to 1927, a year before his death, while the few scholars who have compared the writers' work in detail often posit an earlier date, partially because Kafka's "The Judgment" ("Das Urteil"), published in 1913, and "The Death of My Father," a chapter of Svevo's *Zeno's Conscience*, contain strikingly similar scenes.²⁷ Although the relationship between Kafka's "A Report" and Svevo's "Argo" is not historically verifiable,²⁸ the fascinating connections between the stories offer one example of the riches to be found in engaging Kafka's work and criticism with readings of Italian works. The problematic historical connections between Italian authors and Kafka have discouraged scholars from working on the connections between Kafka and early twentieth-century Italian literature, but an examination of Italian modern literature in a Kafkan key

can help draw attention to Italian works, like “Argo,” whose ‘Kafkan’ qualities are one of the reasons they should be read and considered.

Whereas several scholars have examined what Kafka took from his Italian experiences,²⁹ few have scrutinized what Kafka gave to Italy and its literature.³⁰ A Kafkan line of exploration helps to refine and broaden the critical understanding of Italian modern literature. The topics of study are as varied as what makes Kafka modern, from alienated figures to surreal encounters to claustrophobic rooms to crises of identity. Ritchie Robertson’s observation in 1992 that “Kafka studies form a good barometer for the development of literary studies in general”³¹ continues to be true, as the importance of Kafka in the growing field of animal studies attests. The vast international audience and immense body of Kafka criticism stand in great contrast to those of most Italian modernist literary works. Italian literary criticism is often isolated from, and therefore sometimes lags behind, other literary studies. A study of Italian literature that includes Kafka and Kafka criticism can help engage Italian literature in larger critical debates, as well as add to them.

Comparative studies of modern European literature often relegate Italian literature to a brief mention or addendum. When cited, Italian authors are regularly compared, generally to their disadvantage, with French and English-language ones; and authors like Svevo, Gadda, and Luigi Pirandello are frequently omitted from the canon of modern writers, in which James Joyce, Marcel Proust, and Kafka generally reside. While Kafka has been mobilized and deployed in discourses on minor and world literature, this project uses him instead to examine the dimensions of an often questioned and ignored literary formation. This investigation of a Kafkan tradition, which draws attention to unnoted aspects of well-known Italian authors and some lesser-studied ones, suggests one way to construct a possible identity of modern Italian literature.

Notes

¹ See, for instance, Robert Dombroski, “The Foundations of Italian Modernism: Pirandello, Svevo, Gadda,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian Novel*, ed. Peter Bondanella and Andrea Ciccarelli (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 89–103; Luca Somigli and Mario Moroni, “Modernism in Italy: An Introduction,” in *Italian Modernism: Italian Culture between Decadentism and Avant-Garde*, ed. Somigli and Moroni (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2004), 3–32; Luca Somigli, “In the Shadow of Byzantium: Modernism in Italian Literature” in *Modernism*, vol. 2, ed. Astradur Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007), 911–30; and Gino Tellini, *The Invention of Modern Italian Literature: Strategies of Creative Imagination* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2007).

² A brief consideration of Dombroski's title, "The Foundations of Italian Modernism: Pirandello, Svevo, Gadda," reveals the particularly vexed issue of chronology when describing Italian modernism. The works of these "foundational" authors problematically cover over sixty years, spanning from the late nineteenth century to the second half of the twentieth. A modernism that not only encompasses but supposedly begins with these three authors is more diffuse than many other national modernisms. Adding Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863–1938) or Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922–75) to the picture, as is often done, only exacerbates the problem.

³ Lavinia Mazzucchetti, *Novecento in Germania* (Milan: Mondadori, 1959), 188.

⁴ See Stelio Mattioni, *Storia di Umberto Saba* (Milan: Camunia, 1989), 82; and Manuel La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio: vita e scritti di Roberto Bazlen* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1994).

⁵ Eugenio Montale, *Eugenio Montale Lettere a Italo Svevo: Con gli scritti di Montale su Svevo* (Bari, Italy: De Donato, 1966), 178.

⁶ Paul Kurt Ackermann, "A History of Critical Writing on Kafka," *The German Quarterly* 23.2 (Mar. 1950): 106.

⁷ Alberto Spaini, "Prefazione" in *America*, by Franz Kafka (Turin: Frassinelli, 1947), vii.

⁸ See Eugenio Montale's *New Poems*, trans. G. Singh (New York: New Directions, 1972), 83.

⁹ Primo Levi, "Note to Franz Kafka's *The Trial*," in *The Black Hole of Auschwitz*, ed. Marco Belpoliti, trans. Sharon Wood (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 140.

¹⁰ Levi, "Note to Franz Kafka's *The Trial*," 140.

¹¹ Ritchie Robertson, chapter 8 in this volume.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Partly because of Kafka's background, Rotpeter, with all his contradictions, has been viewed by some critics as an allegory for an assimilated Jew. See, for instance, William C. Rubinstein, "A Report to an Academy," in *Franz Kafka Today*, ed. Angel Flores and Homer Swander (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1968), 55–60. Walter Sokel's "Identity and the Individual or Past and Present: Franz Kafka's 'A Report to an Academy' in a Psychoanalytic and a Sociohistorical Context," in *The Myth of Power and the Self: Essays on Franz Kafka* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2002), 268–91, concentrates on "A Report" as an illustration of the problems of adapting to Western society in general.

¹⁴ For example, "A Report" is used as a grounding text for Nigel Rothfels's *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002). The piece also plays an important role in Marian Scholtmeijer, "What is 'Human'? Metaphysics and Zoontology in Flaubert and Kafka," in *Animal Acts: Configuring the Human in Western History*, eds. Jennifer Ham and Matthew Senior (New York: Routledge, 1997), 127–44; and Amy Gutmann, ed., *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999) which includes J. M. Coetzee's two Tanner lectures and the essays of the respondents, Marjorie Garber, Barbara Smuts, Wendy Doniger, and Peter Singer.

¹⁵ Italo Svevo, “Argo and his Master,” in *Short Sentimental Journey and Other Stories*, trans. Beryl de Zoete, L. Collison-Morley, and Ben Johnson (Berkeley: U of California P, 1967), 165. Hereafter referred to as *AM*. The Italian original will be referred to as *AP*: See Italo Svevo, “Argo e il suo padrone,” in *Tutte le opere di Italo Svevo: Racconti e scritti autobiografici* (Milan: Mondadori, 2004), 97.

¹⁶ “Das erste, was ich lernte, war: den Handschlag geben; Handschlag bezeugt Offenheit; mag nun heute, wo ich auf dem Höhepunkt meiner Laufbahn stehe, zu jenem ersten Handschlag auch das offene Wort hinzukommen” (*DL*, 303).

¹⁷ For recent treatments of Rotpeter as an artist-poet-performer see Miguel Tamen’s “The Ape Speaks” and Stanley Corngold’s “Kafka’s ‘A Report to an Academy’ with Adorno,” in *Aesthetics and the Work of Art: Adorno, Kafka, Richter*, ed. Peter de Bolla and Stefan H. Uhlig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 113–25 and 147–66 respectively.

¹⁸ Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fictions of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2008), 203.

¹⁹ Rotpeter frequently refers to the words he chooses by commenting on his own use of metaphors, idioms, and images: for instance, “to continue the metaphor” (*KSS*, 77; um in Bilde zu bleiben, *DL*, 299 and “There is an excellent German saying” (*KSS*, 83; Es gibt eine ausgezeichnete deutsche Redensart, *DL*, 312). Rotpeter also uses the word “sense (or meaning)” (Sinn) repeatedly to clarify the exact significance of his words.

²⁰ “Ich kann natürlich das damals affenmäßig Gefühlte heute nur mit Meschenworten nachzeichnen und verzeichnen und verzeichne es infolgedessen” (*DL*, 303; translation modified).

²¹ Martin Puchner, “Performing the Open: Actors, Animals, Philosophers,” *The Drama Review* 51.1 (Spring 2007): 28.

²² John McDowell, “Comment on Stanley Cavell’s ‘Companionable Thinking,’” in *Philosophy and Animal Life* (New York: Columbia UP, 2008), 134.

²³ For an overview of dog stories (including Svevo’s and with an emphasis on Kafka’s “Investigations of a Dog”) see “Talking Dogs: The Caninization of Literature,” in Theodore Ziolkowski’s *Varieties of Literary Thematics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1983), 86–122.

²⁴ “In the language I am developing here [between the author of the article, Barbara Smuts, and her dog], relating to other beings as persons as nothing to do with whether or not we attribute human characteristics to them. It has to do, instead, with recognizing that they are social subjects, like us, whose idiosyncratic, subjective experience of us plays the same role in their relations with us that our subjective experience of them plays in our relations with them.” Barbara Smuts, “Reflections,” in *The Lives of Animals*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999), 118. Elvio Guagnini’s introduction to a Portuguese translation of Svevo’s shorter works contrasts Argo’s speech with modern canine language experiments. See Elvio Guagnanini, “Svevo: A arte do conto,” in *Argo e seu dono*, by Italo Svevo, trans. Liliana Laganá (Sao Paulo, Brazil: Berlendis & Vertecchia, 2001), 13–14.

²⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2004), 22.

²⁶ Livia Veneziani Svevo, *Vita di mio marito* (Pordenone, Italy: Arti Grafiche Fratelli Cosarini, 1958), 144.

²⁷ See Peter E. Bondanella, "Franz Kafka and Italo Svevo," in *Proceedings of the Comparative Literature Symposium: "Franz Kafka: His Place in World Literature,"* ed. Wolodymir T. Zyla (Lubbock, TX: Interdepartmental Committee on Comparative Literature, Texas Tech U, 1971), 24; and Peter Scharer von Aurau, *Zur psychischen Strategie des schwachen Helden: Italo Svevo im Vergleich mit Kafka, Broch und Musil* (Thusis, Switzerland: Buchdruckerei Werner Roth, 1978), 114–24.

²⁸ Many works mention, but do not explore, the connections between the two men and their works. Bondanella's is the most thorough piece on the two authors and their work to date. More concentrated works on the two authors also include, in chronological order: Giuseppe Antonio Camerino, *Italo Svevo e la crisi della Mitteleuropa* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1974), 135–52; Scharer, *Zur psychischen Strategie des schwachen Helden*, 114–26; M. Jeuland Meynaud, *Zeno e i suoi fratelli: La creazione del personaggio nei romanzi di Italo Svevo* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1985), 306–7; Giuseppe Antonio Camerino "Italo Svevo: Significato e caratteri di una poetica mitteleuropea," in *Italo Svevo: Scrittore europeo*, ed. N. Cacciaglia and Guzzetta L. Fava (Florence: Olschki, 1994), 15–29; Lynn Lara Westwater, "Franz Kafka and Italo Svevo: 'A Blur of Languages,'" *RLA Archive* (1996) Purdue U, 5 Dec. 2007, <http://tell.fl.purdue.edu/RLA-Archive/1996/italian.html>.

²⁹ Maria Luisa Caputo-Mayr summarizes and comments on Kafka's four trips to Riva and Brescia (1909), Lugano, Milan, and Stresa (1911), Trieste, Venice, Verona, and Desenzano (1913), and Merano (1920). See Caputo-Mayr, "Kafka and Romance Languages: A Preliminary Survey," *Journal of the Kafka Society of America: New International Series* 27.1–2 (2003): 4–20. Guido Crespi also describes and summarizes the mentions of Italian and Italian things in general in Kafka's work. See Guido Crespi, "Kafka e l'Italia," in *Miti e contromiti: Cent'anni di relazioni culturali italo-austriache dopo il 1861*, ed. Alida Fliri (Fasano, Italy: Schena, 1990), 107–12. Peter Demetz's *The Air Show at Brescia, 1909* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2002) treats Kafka's significant visit to Brescia and its effect on Kafka — the man and his work.

³⁰ For articles that include a discussion of Kafka's Italian reception see Caputo-Mayr, "Kafka and Romance Languages"; Johannes Höslé, "Italien," in *Kafka-Handbuch*, ed. Hartmut Binder (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1979), 519–29; Giorgio Cusatelli, "Kafka e i suoi lettori italiani," in *Kafka Oggi*, ed. Giuseppe Farese (Bari, Italy: Adriatics, 1986), 1–10.

³¹ Ritchie Robertson, "In Search of the Historical Kafka: A Selective Review of Research, 1980–92," *Modern Language Review* 89.1 (Jan. 1994): 107.