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Amerika: The Man Who Disappeared (New Restored Text Translation)



Synopsis

Newly restored to the original text: for this new translation, Hofmann returned to Kafka's manuscripts, restoring matters of substance and detail, and even the book's original ending. Michael Hofmann's startlingly visceral and immediate translation revives Kafka's great comedy, and captures a new Kafka, free from Prague and loose in the new world, a Kafka shot through with light in this highly charged and enormously nuanced translation. Kafka began the first of his three novels in 1911, but like the others, *Amerika* remained unfinished, and perhaps, as Klaus Mann suggested, "necessarily endless." Karl Rossman, the youthful hero of the novel, "a poor boy of seventeen," has been banished by his parents to America, following a scandal. There, with unquenchable optimism, he throws himself into adventure after misadventure, and experiences multiply as he makes his way into the heart of the country, to The Great Nature Theater of Oklahoma. In creating this new translation, Hofmann, as he explains in his introduction, returned to the manuscript version of the book, restoring matters of substance and detail. Fragments which have never before been presented in English are now reinstated including the book's original "ending." The San Francisco Chronicle said Hofmann's "sleek translation does a wonderful job" and The New York Times concurred: "Anything by Kafka is worth reading again, especially in the hands of such a gifted translator as Hofmann."

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Customer Reviews

"Anything by Kafka is worth reading again, especially in the hands of such a gifted translator as Hofmann." - The New York Times Book Review "[Hofmann's] new translation is

more successful in conveying ... a sense of Kafka's unfinished work. - Veronika Tuckerova, Harvard Book Review - "One can hardly fail to welcome Michael Hofmann's more accurate English text. - Washington Post Book World - "Hofmann's translation is invaluable....It achieves what translations are supposedly unable to do: it is at once 'loyal' and 'beautiful.' - John Zilcosky, New Republic - "Hofmann's slick, sleek translation does a wonderful job of keeping those competing forces in balance. - The San Francisco Chronicle - "Unpredictable and funny, as close to a Buster Keaton comedy as you can get. - Jim Krusoe, Los Angeles Times Book Review - "A stirring, singular work, now restored to its original beauty. - John Ashbery - "Michael Hofmann's magnificent new translation restores its rightful place as one of Kafka's most delightful and most memorable works. - Charles Simic - "Of all the recent re-translations of Kafka into English, this volume is the most noteworthy. It achieves what translations are supposedly unable to do; it is at once loyal and beautiful - beautifully disorienting, beautifully confusing, beautifully cruel. - John Zilcosky, The New Republic - "Hofmann's ability to overcome the obstacles presented by this particular work from Kafka marks this as the best translation. - Kirkus Reviews

Franz Kafka (1883-1924) was one of the most important writers of the twentieth century. His major novels include *The Trial*, *The Castle*, and *Amerika*. For his translations, acclaimed poet Michael Hofmann has won the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize, the Dublin International IMPAC Award, the PEN/Book-of-the-Month Club Prize, the Helen and Kurt Wolff Translator's Prize, the Oxford-Weidenfeld Translation Prize, and The Schlegel-Tieck Prize (four times). He is the highly acclaimed translator of, among others, Kafka, Brecht, and Joseph Roth. Horace Gregory was born and grew up in Milwaukee. He was a poet, critic, essayist, translator and biographer, who taught at Sarah Lawrence College for 26 years. He was a member of the National Academy-Institute of Arts and Letters and received the Bollingen Prize for poetry in 1965.

Considering that Kafka never visited America, this book provides a very descriptive scenario of what it was like during the twentieth century; from the social classes to the humanistic senses. Kafka was able to capture in his writings, what America felt like taking it in for the first time as an immigrant. The luxuries cities, with its advanced technological capacities such as: sky scrapers, elevators....etc. Never the less some irony's comes into play through the development of Amerika's

characters, by finding ways to deceive the "poor and innocent Karl Rossmann" (main character) such mood tends to be the main feeling of the plot throughout the book. Kafka did an excellent job with his main character, by giving us (the audience) feelings of pity, for the misfortunate and misfit teenager Karl Rossmann, who never finds a peaceful nor happy place to be. Amerika's plot, can still be related to the perceptions some immigrants have (including myself) when first arriving to the U.S. The sophistication and technologies observable in the major cities, along with the notion of a new start or better opportunities, is one of the main reasons why people all over the world still immigrate to the U.S. In addition, one can easily associate Karl's naiveté's; with those people who are first confronted with the American culture, best defined as "cultural shock". I enjoyed reading Amerika because it offers a simple, and to the point wording, making it artless to understand, and I even like the notion it gives as incomplete, because it leaves the reader longing for more. Ultimately endings tend to be clashes that ruins the good plot.

Clearly early Kafka. This unfinished novel is worth reading if you're already a fan of Kafka, but I would not recommend this book as an introduction to Kafka's works.

This is an interesting book. It is about the main character Karl's American life after he was banished by his parent. In the novel, he experienced many different kind the tortuous things. From the beginning he lived in his uncle's house to he became an Elevator Attendant in the hotel, he had known so many different people and know their life. Every day he was living in between of rich people and poor people. The elevator took him to wherever the other people want, but he can't control it. From the novel, it tells that American life is not as great as other countries people think it is. I think it is a common that other countries people think that if they come to American their life will be better. Like my relative, in their mind, it is like the money grows on trees in American. They thought that when I worked for eight dollars per hour it is a lot because they were thinking that eight dollars change to Chinese money is twelve, so of course that a lot. This book is very true reflection to the American people and out coming people. Life is not living in the way that you willing for. The stories in the book maybe ridiculous, but those are true. Life is hard in everywhere, like the student in the novel, he worked so hard for his school works, and he doesn't even have time to sleep. It is just like the Chinese student. I very like this book. I think the people that dreams about to come to American and become riches, they should read it and realized American life just like other countries, and the money is not growing on the trees. However, the book didn't finish, I think it is just the way it supposed to be because the life is still continue, you shouldn't set in a stable model for the end of

the life. There are still hopes.

As the seventeen-year-old Karl Rossmann, who had been sent to America by his unfortunate parents because a maid had seduced him and had a child by him, sailed slowly into New York harbour, he suddenly saw the Statue of Liberty, which had already been in view for some time, as though in an intenser sunlight. The sword in her hand seemed only just to have been raised aloft, and the unchained winds blew about her form.- Franz Kafka, *Amerika*, page 1

Yes, in this book, the Statue of Liberty has a sword. And she is "so high", says Rossman. The Statue of Liberty, bearing her sword so high in the sky is the first real thing that a clueless Karl Rossmann stumbles upon in his new life in America; a country that seems determined drag him down along with everything he stands for; the old ways in Europe. *Amerika* is the story of Karl Rossmann, a German boy shunned by his parents after impregnating a maid. Let's just come right out and say it; Karl is a blithering idiot, albeit such a fantastic character to read and enjoy. He goes between blindly trusting strangers and super intense paranoia. There's something intriguing about Karl; a childish innocence. Life is something that just happens to Karl. He's completely passive. But, in spite of his intense stupidity, one cannot help but feel sorry for poor Karl. For example, at the beginning of the book, Karl loses his luggage and then he's involved in a workplace dispute aboard his ship with a man he has known all of five minutes. Then he meets his long-lost American uncle, wanders around a huge house in the dark, and then is once more thrown out of his family by said uncle. He finds his long lost luggage, becomes homeless, gets conned by some con artists, is employed in a grand hotel, and is then fired from said hotel. Kind of makes you tired doesn't it? Trying to describe the plot of *Amerika* is like trying to tell someone about a dream you once had ten years ago; it makes perfect sense at the time you had the dream, however when you try and explain it to someone else, it sounds all garbled and confused. And it's not really a plot; more of a sequence of strange scenes, just like a dream. This book is filled with Karl wandering blindly from one bizarre situation to the next. Really, the plot of *Amerika* is a strange; a consistent repeating cycle of despair and happiness; sounds a lot like life doesn't it? With all that said; read it. Read it now. Read it again. It is a fantastic book. Like a train wreck, you just cannot seem to look away. As unfortunate as it may be, that the book was never completed by Kafka, it almost makes the book better. You wonder what fun misspelling is coming next by Kafka, or what weird interpretation of a city or building in *AmeriKa* he will describe; which is obviously not what it really is in *AmeriCa*. My favorite blunder is how he mixes up the East and the West Coasts. It's raw and exciting and it leaves you wondering what poor Karl will go through next. I am not a huge fan of reading really; not because I do not enjoy a good fantasy or plot

but because reading puts me to sleep, no matter if I am tired or not. This book however has me finding myself reading into the wee hours of the morning; leaving me sad that I need to put it down and go to sleep. 2 thumbs up, Kafka; even if you didn't intend on us ever reading this book, I am glad that it was published without your consent!

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