PENGUIN CLASSICS

AMERIKA (THE MAN WHO DISAPPEARED)

FRANZ KAFKA was born of Jewish parents in Prague in 1883. The family spoke both Czech and German; Franz was sent to German-language schools and to the German University, from which he received his doctorate in law in 1906. He then worked for most of his life as a respected official of a state insurance company (first under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then under the new Republic of Czechoslovakia). Literature, of which he said that he 'consisted', had to be pursued on the side. His emotional life was dominated by his relationships with his father, a man of overbearing character, and with a series of women: Felice Bauer from Berlin, to whom he was twice engaged; his Czech translator, Milena Jesenská-Pollak, to whom he became attached in 1920; and Dora Diamant, a young Jewish woman from Poland in whom he found a devoted companion during the last year of his life. Meanwhile, his writing had taken a new turn in 1917 with the outbreak of the tubercular illness from which he was to die in 1924. Only a small number of Kafka's stories were published during his lifetime, and these are published in Penguin as *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. He asked his friend, Max Brod, to see that all the writings he left should be destroyed. Brod felt unable to comply and undertook their publication instead, beginning with the three unfinished novels, *The Trial* (1925), *The Castle* (1926) and *Amerika* (1927). Other shorter works appeared posthumously in a

more sporadic fashion.

MICHAEL HOFMANN was born in Freiburg in 1957 and came to England at the age of four. He went to schools in Edinburgh and Winchester, and studied English at Cambridge. He lives in London and Hamburg, and teaches part-time in the English Department of the University of Florida in Gainesville. He is the author of several books of poems and a book of criticism, *Behind the Lines*, and the translator of many modern and contemporary authors, including Joseph Roth, Wolfgang Koeppen, Durs Grünein and Thomas Bernhard. Penguin publish his translation of Kafka's *Metamorphosis and Other Stories* and Ernst Jünger's World War I memoir, *Storm of Steel*. He edited the anthology *Twentieth-Century German Poetry*, published in 2006.

Amerika

The Man Who Disappeared

Translated with an Introduction by

MICHAEL HOFMANN

PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell,
Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre,
Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Mairangi Bay, Auckland 1310, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

This translation and Introduction first published as *The Man who Disappeared (Amerika)* 1996
Published in Penguin Books under the current title 2007
2

Translation and Introduction copyright © Michael Hofmann, 1996
All rights reserved

The moral right of the translator has been asserted

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject
to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent,
re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's

prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

EISBN : 978–0–141–91131–1

CONTENTS

Introduction
Bibliography

Amerika (The Man Who Disappeared)

INTRODUCTION

Der Verschollene (*The Man Who Disappeared*), is the Cinderella among Kafka's three novels: the earliest begun and earliest abandoned; the last to achieve posthumous publication (as *Amerika*), edited by Max Brod, in 1927; the least read, the least written about and the least 'Kafka'. That said, I agree with Edwin Muir, whose English translation first came out in 1928, that it is 'the most purely delightful of Kafka's books', and there is a weightier case to be made for it as well – not that delight should be lost sight of in the search for meaning.

It seems that Kafka worked on a version (which is now lost) of *Der Verschollene* from 1911 into the summer of 1912. It went slowly, and he was never happy with it. Then, following the writing of *Das Urteil* (*The Judgement*) in a single night (22–3 September 1912), he embarked on a second version, which went swimmingly. Brod reports on his friend's progress:

I quote from my diary notes of the time. 29 September: 'Kafka in ecstasy, writing all night. A novel set in America.' 1 October: 'Kafka in incredible ecstasy.' 2 October: 'Kafka, continuing very inspired. A chapter finished. I am happy for him.' 3 October: 'Kafka doing well.' On the 6 October he read me *The Judgement* and *The Stoker*.

By 17 November he had completed six chapters and thought he could

finish the novel by Christmas, when he had a week off. In the event, things happened differently. For three weeks, he was distracted by *Metamorphosis*, experienced increasing difficulties with the novel, and finally put it aside on 24 January 1913. In June, the first chapter, *The Stoker*, was published as 'a fragment' by Kurt Wolff, and there was some talk of putting it out in another volume, along with *The Judgement* and *Metamorphosis*, to be called perhaps *Die Söhne* (*The Sons*) – a suggestion of how Kafka expected to be read. When his copy of *The Stoker* arrived, Kafka read it aloud to his parents and noted:

Exuberance, because I liked *The Stoker* so much. In the evening I read it to my parents, there is no better critic than myself, reading aloud to my most reluctantly listening father. Many shallows, in amongst obviously inaccessible depths.

Kafka didn't take up the manuscript again until October 1914, when he completed the '"Up, up!" cried Robinson' section (from 'This was most unfair'), and worked on the two final fragments before finally giving up, this time for good. Some of his subsequent judgements were spectacularly harsh – as with all his work – but he never actually destroyed *The Man Who Disappeared*, and the time came when he thought his revulsion came from incapacity, and it turned on himself: 'strength apparently (already) beyond me today.' In 1920, reading Milena Jesenská's translation of *The Stoker* into Czech, he approved of her rendition of 'in his exuberance, and because he was a strong lad', while suggesting she should leave it out altogether, so

little sympathy did he have left for his strikingly young, forthright, cheerful and brave hero. Not only did Kafka expect his writing to reflect himself (and to be better than himself), but to go on doing so.

The version that Brod published in 1927 differs from the present one in at least one matter of substance, and many of detail – if there is such a thing as a detail with Kafka. The substance is the section '"Up! Up," cried Robinson' and the first of the fragments, 'Brunelda's Departure', never previously presented in English. The details range from the title of the book – which, though he may have spoken to Brod about his 'American novel', is only twice referred to in writing, both times as *Der Verschollene* (it is a book about a person, not a place) – to the through-numbering and titles of the later chapters, including 'The Nature Theatre of Oklahoma', which were supplied by Brod. In the text, there are some thousands of differences – most of them merely corrections of such things as spelling and punctuation – from the age of the hero given in the first sentence ('seventeen' instead of 'sixteen') to the very last – Brod originally ended the book 'Such a carefree journey in America they had never known,' a falsely and quite preposterously un-Kafkaesquely ringing summary, instead of where Kafka actually broke off, 'so close that the chill breath of them made their faces shudder', characteristically menacing, peculiar, physical, ambivalent, something visual becoming palpable, words growing teeth, and an odd resemblance too to Yeats's poem of disenchantment, 'Towards Break of Day':

Nothing that we love over-much
Is ponderable to our touch.

I dreamed towards break of day,
The cold blown spray in my nostril.

It may seem an odd thing to do, to go back to a rough, unedited and error-strewn manuscript version of a book: to reintroduce inconsistencies of spelling in the names of Mack and Renell (not to mention Lobter), to situate San Francisco in the East instead of the West, to have a bridge linking New York with Boston instead of Brooklyn, to talk of 'quarter pounds' instead of 'quarter dollars', to provide floor numbers that don't add up and so forth, but for the translator, himself putting out a rough new text, it is pleasing to have a rough old one. Theatre people in particular will understand the importance of freshness of language. Muir's version of Brod has had years to weather and settle; I like to think there is compatibility, if not parity, between the speed and unevenness of Kafka and what I've done. Anyway, this is only a partial exercise. I haven't written 'Newyork' or 'Occidental' in minuscule letters, there is no way of usefully suggesting 'Austriacisms' in English, and so forth. (Nor, incidentally, have I fallen for the obvious temptation – not available to Muir or Kafka – of trying to make my translation sound 'American': that would have been to strive for a misleading verisimilitude. I may have meant 'elevator', but I enjoyed writing 'lift'.) Brod's work is often unarguable and always well-intentioned – and but for him we