

Ian Ellison

FRAUDULENT KAFKAS?

FORGING AUTHORSHIP IN
W. G. SEBALD'S *SCHWINDEL. GEFÜHLE*.
AND ANTONIO MUÑOZ MOLINA'S *SEFARAD*

In a short, satirical opinion piece in the *New York Times* in 2008, the novelist and screenwriter Mark Leyner purported to expose Franz Kafka as a fake. Here is the article reproduced in its entirety:

In a scandal that's sending shock waves through both the publishing industry and academia, the author Franz Kafka has been revealed to be a fraud.

»The Metamorphosis« purported to be the fictional account of a man who turns into a large cockroach is actually non-fiction,« according to a statement released by Mr. Kafka's editor, who spoke only on the condition that he be identified as E.

»The story is true. Kafka simply wrote a completely verifiable, journalistic account of a neighbor by the name of Gregor Samsa who, because of some bizarre medical condition, turned into a ›monstrous vermin.« Kafka assured us that he'd made the whole thing up. We now know that to be completely false. The account is 100 percent true.«

The disclosure that Mr. Kafka's work was based on reality has embarrassed editors and scholars. »I've been teaching ›The Metamorphosis« for years, said a professor of literature at Princeton, who insisted that he be identified as P. »I've called it one of the most sublime pieces of literature ever written. Elias Canetti called it ›one of the few great and perfect poetic works written during this century.« To find out that it's actually true is devastating.«

The actual condition of Kafka's neighbor, a Prague salesman who didn't return our calls or e-mail messages requesting comment, is known as entomological dysplasia, and is somewhat rare. It results in the development over time of a hard carapace, a segmented body and antennae.

In a telephone interview, Mr. Kafka was contrite and tearful. »I know what I did was wrong,« he said. »I'm very alienated from myself, but that's no excuse to lie. I took someone's life and selfishly turned it into an enigmatic literary parable.«

»I'm not sure how this happened,« said Mr. Kafka's brother, B., of Oxnard, Calif. »My brother is weird, but he doesn't have that good an imagination. A

man who becomes a big bug ... my brother couldn't make that up if his life depended on it. As soon as I read ›The Metamorphosis‹ I knew it was true. Don't they fact-check fiction?»

Mr. Kafka's publishers are now reviewing all his works of fiction stories about singing mice, »hunger artists« and men on trial for crimes they're not aware of having committed to determine whether they too are true.

»We were duped,« said E., Mr. Kafka's editor. »The whole story is pure, unadulterated non-fiction. This guy's a complete con man.«¹

While this column has its tongue wedged firmly in its cheek and is hardly meant to be taken seriously as it jokingly turns on its head Kafka's reputation as a serious, committed writer, it nevertheless does provide a fresh way of considering Kafka's literary legacy, his posthumous authorship, his reception and reputation today, at the remove of just over a century – namely, through the question of forgery. Indeed, as Brian K. Goodman notes in his work on the legacy of Kafka for dissident writers in Prague during the Cold War, »Kafka's imposters are everywhere«.² Such imposters, for Goodman, include not only the »many unofficial translations of Kafka's writings that were circulating underground in Prague in the early fifties«, but also Kafka's far more elusive literary »doppelgänger«, that is to say, fictional characters in other works that purport to be Franz Kafka himself.³

Many works of Kafka reception – perhaps most notably Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975) – are premised on upending traditional readings of Kafka's work. More recently, Pascale Casanova's *Kafka en colère* (2015) develops the hypothesis that the Prague author's stories constitute traps for the unwary reader. His fables and vignettes, as well as his longer prose works, throw their readers off the scent via – among other things – unreliable or deceitful narrators. Kafka is, for Casanova, »the most radical of social critics« who »attempted to pull the wool over our eyes with narratives that are, in fact, subtly deceptive«.⁴ From this perspective at least, one might say that the Kafkaesque and the fraudulent go hand in hand. Cases of Kafka's literary doppelgänger in particular naturally play with the often-employed definition of forgery as a breaking

1 Mark Leyner: A Bug's Life. Really., in: New York Times, 9 March 2008. Available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/09/opinion/09leyner.html>, accessed: 11 July 2024.

2 Brian K. Goodman: *The Nonconformists: American and Czech Writers across the Iron Curtain*, MA, Cambridge 2023, p. 59.

3 Ibid., p. 59.

4 Pascale Casanova: *Kafka, Angry Poet*, trans. by Chris Turner, London 2015.

of the fictional pact with the reader. In this sense, forgery is a kind of foul play because it does not signpost to the reader that something is fiction, or rather it signposts to the reader in a work of fiction that something is, in fact, nonfictional.

What kinds of falsified provenance, then, might our ideas and impressions of Kafka today have? This essay will examine two instances of fictionalized versions of Kafka himself, alongside adaptations of his writing, which appear in acclaimed works by W.G. Sebald (*Schwindel. Gefühle.*, 1990) and Antonio Muñoz Molina (*Sefarad*, 2001). By creating literary doppelgängers of Kafka, then adapting Kafka's fiction, correspondence, and diaries in order to construct their own texts, these two contemporary writers offer comparable yet diverging instances of the two primary – and, seemingly, contradictory – valences of the verb ›to forge‹ in English (namely ›to construct‹ and ›to falsify‹)⁵ with relation to world-literary authorship and posthumous literary reception. One ultimate irony of creating new fictionalized – even forged – versions of Kafka is that, in doing so, Sebald and Muñoz Molina frequently shore up established readings of Kafka's life and work, reinforcing dominant strains of his reception history while obscuring others. In this way, the period of modernity evoked in their texts – and modern literature more specifically – brings about not only a Benjaminian sense of lost originality as regards works of art, but also a sense that events, people, and literary characters have become copies, even forgeries.⁶

Although often seen as an ›icon‹ of the literary modernists, Kafka sits uneasily within this heterogeneous, shifting collective. Despite this, in Anglo-German modernist studies, as in the case of the 2014 edited collection *From Kafka to Sebald: Modernism and Narrative Form*, he is posited as an originating pole of the arc of modernism, which culminates with W.G. Sebald.⁷ Moreover, Kafka inhabits the work of Sebald, at times implicitly, at times very explicitly. In the second section of Sebald's first major prose work *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, ›All'estero‹, the narrator sees an uncanny resemblance to Kafka in twin boys he meets on a bus. In the third section, ›Dr. K's Badereise nach Riva‹ matters become more explicit and Sebald conjures numerous hallucinatory visions of a writer the reader presumes, given many biographical similarities and the eponym ›Dr. K‹, to be Franz Kafka, Doctor

5 See https://www.oed.com/dictionary/forged_v1, accessed: 11 July 2024.

6 Walter Benjamin: *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (1936), in: *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, 7th edition, Frankfurt am Main 1974, pp. 7–63.

7 See Sabine Wilke (ed.): *From Kafka to Sebald: Modernism and Narrative Form*, London 2012.

of Law since 18 June 1906, during a trip to Italy. Not unlike the Sebaldian narrator, this writer lies on his bed, unable to sleep, seeing strange forms in the play of streetlights on the ceiling and disquieted by his displacement beyond his regular haunts:

Am Samstag, dem 6. September 1913, ist der Vicesekretär der Prager Arbeitsversicherungsanstalt, Dr. K., auf dem Weg nach Wien, um an einem Kongreß für Rettungswesen und Hygiene teilzunehmen. Wie von der Qualität des ersten Verbandes auf dem Schlachtfelde das Schicksal des Verwundeten abhängt, liest er in einer Zeitung, die er in Gmünd gekauft hat, so ist die erste Hilfe bei den alltäglichen Unglücksfällen von der größten Bedeutung für die Prognose. Dieser Satz beunruhigt Dr. K. fast ebenso wie der Hinweis auf das Band der gesellschaftlichen Veranstaltungen, das sich um den Kongreß schlingen wird. Draußen bereits der Bahnhof von Heiligenstadt. Ominös, leer, mit leeren Zügen. Lauter letzte Stationen. Dr. K. weiß, daß er den Direktor auf den Knien hätte bitten sollen, ihn nicht mitzunehmen. Aber jetzt ist es natürlich zu spät.⁸

Just like in many of Kafka's texts, it is always too late as the story begins. Sebald's text is a thinly veiled reconstruction of a work trip taken by Kafka in 1913 to Riva for a conference, a city he had visited four years earlier in the company of Max Brod. Crucially, as Uwe Schütte has noted, this particular text is noteworthy in Sebald's oeuvre as it »most expressly demonstrates Sebald's transition from critical to imaginative writing«.⁹ In fabricating his narrative, Sebald draws liberally on extracts from a letter Kafka sent to Felice Bauer.¹⁰ Moreover, »Dr. K's Badereise nach Riva« is explicitly presented as a speculative narrative constructed by the narrator of the second and fourth sections of *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, suggesting by implication that the first section of text is likewise written under a more fictional aspect. In this way, doubling, copying, reproduction, and potential forgery are encoded into the prose on a structural level throughout the entirety of the text.

In his comprehensive analysis of »Sebald's Kafka«, Brad Prager draws parallels between various instances of doubling in Kafka's and Sebald's work, such as both authors' literary alter egos, as well as the numerous instances of allusions to Kafka in Sebald's oeuvre.¹¹ As Richard Sheppard observes,

8 Winfried Georg Sebald: *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, Frankfurt am Main 1990, p. 163.

9 Uwe Schütte: *W.G. Sebald: Writers and their Work*, Liverpool 2018, p. 50.

10 See *ibid.*, pp. 50–52.

11 Brad Prager: *Sebald's Kafka*, in: *W.G. Sebald: History, Memory, Trauma*, ed. by Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh, Berlin 2006, pp. 105–125, p. 105.

»Kafka was probably the foremost of his numerous alter egos«. ¹² Though Kafka is undoubtedly one of Sebald's major literary touchstones, it should also be noted that Sebald nevertheless employs specific versions or ideas of Kafka as a writer for his own ends: »he was hardly exempt from projecting multiple philosophical positions onto that single elusive image«, as Prager notes. ¹³ Prager identifies Sebald's »parallel versions« of Kafka, numerous illicit copyings or doublings of the Prague writer's life and work that retrospectively cast Kafka in certain moulds and are instrumentalized by Sebald in the construction of his own literary worlds, while also at times excessively burnishing particular aspects of Kafka's posthumous reputation. ¹⁴

Sebald's fascination with Kafka combines with Kafka's own inherent elusiveness, particularly the notions of shedding identities and transformation that recur frequently in Kafka's texts just as Sebald's work, too, is replete with characters who desire to transform their identity. Instances of doubling recur throughout *Schwindel. Gefühle.* and, indeed, a *mise en abyme* of repetition becomes the texts' leading motif. The Sebaldian narrator feels compelled to repeat Kafka's own journey, just as Kafka's journey in turn partly replicates a journey to Italy taken by Stendhal (1783–1842) a century earlier, which is recounted in the book's opening section. Kafka and Stendhal thus function as the Sebaldian narrator's doppelgänger, not unlike the 1913 silent horror film *The Student of Prague*, which the Sebaldian narrator conjectures that his Kafka may have seen, and in which the protagonist »stellt sich [...] seinem Spiegelbild, und bald tritt dieses zu seinem Entsetzen aus dem Rahmen, um fortan als Gespenst seiner Friedlosigkeit mit ihm umzugehen«. As Prager observes, »Sebald's Kafka repeatedly appears as an emissary of death, sending us messages from beyond the grave«. ¹⁵ To the extent that Sebald's Kafka is dissolved in *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, he is also reforged out of Kafka's own fictions and Sebald's artifice. Sebald explicitly draws the reader's attention by claiming not to know the actions of his characters: »Wie Dr. K. die paar Tage in Venedig wirklich zugebracht hat, wissen wir nicht«. ¹⁶ Reading Sebald's doublings and copyings of Kafka's life and work, it is difficult not to sense the end of an autonomous writer, as he becomes appropriated and reconfigured posthumously. As Sebald contributes to forging (in the sense

12 Richard Sheppard: Dexter – Sinister: Some Observations on Decrypting the Morse Code in the Work of W.G. Sebald, in: *Journal of European Studies* 35, 2003, pp. 419–463, here p. 443.

13 Prager (fn. 11), p. 105.

14 Ibid, p. 106.

15 Ibid, p. 111.

16 Sebald (fn. 8), p. 170.

of creating) Kafka's world-literary reputation, he also creates a fraudulent version of Kafka in his own fiction.

As well as dizziness, one half of the title of *Schwindel. Gefühle*. also means suggestions a swindle, deception, or sleight of hand. Similarly, the German for »spectre« – »das Gespenst« – derives from the Middle High German for illusion, deception, and enticement.¹⁷ Forgery, then, is an act of haunting, and indeed one might say that the Kafka's spectre also rises in the pages of Antonio Muñoz Molina's novel *Sefarad*, published in 2001, the same year as Sebald's final work of prose fiction *Austerlitz*. A polyphonic testament to the marginalized and the persecuted of twentieth-century European history, *Sefarad* slips between times and tenses, its perspective restlessly shifting. Numerous narrative voices are employed in order to connect the memory of the Holocaust, for which the author draws on the testimony of survivors like Jean Améry and Victor Klemperer, to a far longer history of exile and exclusion. While the title *Sefarad* designates Spain in modern Hebrew, it also evokes the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula in the wake of the Reconquest by the Catholic Monarchs, Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon, which culminated in 1492. The novel's epigraph, moreover, is from Kafka's *Der Process*: »Ja«, sagte der Gerichtsdienner, »es sind Angeklagte, all die Sie hier sehn, sind Angeklagte«. »Wirklich?« sagte K. »Dann sind es ja meine Kollegen«.¹⁸ Right at the outset, *Sefarad* signals its narrative's solidarity with and empathetic imagination of the historical experience of others.

In a recent essay on Kafka's various manifestations in *Sefarad*, Ana Paula de Souza diagnoses three ways in which Muñoz Molina calls up the spirit of the Prague author in his novel. Kafka appears, she argues, either transformed into a fictional character; or through intertextuality established with some of his most significant texts; or, lastly, in a visionary capacity attributed by contemporary writers to Kafka as a privileged thinker of his time.¹⁹ Here arraigned before the reader are, in short, Kafka the icon, Kafka the writer, and Kafka the prophet. Yet, what are these fictional constructs of Kafka if not spectres haunting the pages of *Sefarad*, literary shadows behind the text? At times Kafka even appears to be possessing the narrator himself: »I did not know until this very moment, while I was trying to imagine Franz

17 See <https://www.duden.de/suchen/dudenonline/Gespenst>, accessed: 11 July 2024.

18 Franz Kafka: *Der Process*, ed. by Malcolm Pasley, Frankfurt am Main 1990, p. 93.

19 Ana Paula de Souza: A presença de Kafka no romance contemporâneo: »Sefarad« (2001) de Antonio Muñoz Molina, in: *Matraga – Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da UERJ* 30:60 (October 2023), pp. 463–476, here p. 463.

Kafka's journey on a night express,« Muñoz Molina writes, »that I was in fact remembering a journey I myself had made when I was twenty-two, one sleepless night on a train to Madrid.« It is extremely telling that Muñoz Molina himself seems to become confused between his own memories and his literary imagining of Kafka's journey – where, then, do the factual and the fictional begin and end? The literary forger's loss of identity and the ability to clearly distinguish between original and fake recall the unreliable or deceitful narrators that Casanova considers emblematic of Kafka's writing.

In the »Copenhagen« chapter of *Sefarad*, Muñoz Molina introduces a new character into his already populous narrative. Movement and displacement are central to this particular chapter and the unnamed narrator begins by reflecting on how recounting stories to strangers might allow one's imagination a certain freedom. Similarly to how Sebald lifts material from Kafka's work, in this passage, as de Souza notes, Muñoz Molina alludes extensively to Kafka without any reference to indicate that what follows draws on another work:

A thin and serious man with short and very black hair and large dark eyes gets onto the train at the station in Prague and perhaps is trying not to meet the eyes of other passengers coming into the same car, some of whom look him over with suspicion and decide that he must be a Jew. He has long, pale hands and is reading a book or absently staring out the window. From time to time he is shaken by a dry cough and covers his mouth with a white handkerchief he then slips into a pocket, almost furtively. As the train nears the recently invented border between Czechoslovakia and Austria, the man puts away the book and looks for his documents with a certain nervousness. When the train reaches the station of Gmünd, he immediately peers out at the platform, as if expecting to see someone in the solitary darkness of that deep hour of the night. No one knows who he is.²⁰

The irony of this passage is, of course, that the shy, tubercular Jew conjured by Muñoz Molina is Franz Kafka, as the text makes explicit; all readers know who he is. The coincidence of this train's passing through the town of Gmünd, as that of Sebald's Dr. K. also does, is subtly suggestive of boundaries being crossed and blurred, given the town's location on the border between Austria and the Czech Republic. Moreover, the material recounted here is substantially lifted from Kafka's *Letters to Milena*, which were sent

20 Antonio Muñoz Molina: *Sefarad*, trans. by Margaret Sayers Peden, London 2003, p. 23. For the Spanish original, see Antonio Muñoz Molina: *Sefarad*, ed. by Pablo Valdivia, Madrid 2013, pp. 200f.

by the Czech writer to her friend Willy Haas in 1939, just days before the German army entered Prague. Milena's biography, written by her companion in the Ravensbrück concentration camp, Margarete Buber-Neumann (*Milena*, 1963), who also features as a recurring character in Muñoz Molina's *Sefarad*, was a key source for writing about the relationship between the two. Crucially, however, *Sefarad* does not create new fictionalized elements of Kafka's biography, but rather invents details for certain situations Kafka experienced in a similar manner to Sebald: embellishment, as opposed to outright invention.

In the chapter »Eres«, for example, the narrator imagines the unique moment in the life of each of the many characters who populate the narrative of *Sefarad*, many of which are based on historical figures, when they realize that their identity and place in the world is shifting:

A guest in a hotel, you woke up one night with a fit of coughing and spat blood. The newspaper tells of the laws of racial purity newly promulgated in Nuremberg, and you read that you are a Jew and destined to extermination. The smiling nurse appears in the doorway of the waiting room and tells you that the doctor is ready to see you. Gregor Samsa awoke one morning and found himself transformed.²¹

For Muñoz Molina's fictionalized Kafka, this moment will entail the critical discovery of the worsening of his disease: »You are Franz Kafka,« he writes, »discovering with amazement that the warm liquid you are vomiting is blood«. ²² In this almost hallucinatory passage Muñoz Molina also recalls the metamorphosis in Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*, likening the verminous experience of Gregor Samsa to the experiences endured by the characters in *Sefarad*: the sudden transformation of the healthy into the sick, for example; the Austrian denationalized into a Jew; the obligation to assimilate new identities. Muñoz Molina makes a point of explicitly describing Kafka himself as a Jew who, at the beginning of the 1920s, felt the exclusionary gaze of European society on his skin.²³ And indeed the intimate, hallucinatory qualities of this passage, particularly through its use of the second person, are suggestive of a sense of false perception. Unlike earlier in the novel, Kafka is clearly

21 Molina: *Sefarad* (fn. 20), p. 298. For the Spanish original, see Molina: *Sefarad* (fn. 20), pp. 614f.

22 Molina: *Sefarad* (fn. 20), p. 299. For the Spanish original, see Molina: *Sefarad* (fn. 20), p. 619.

23 For further discussion of this, see Katja Garloff: *Judaism and Zionism*, in: Franz Kafka in Context, ed. by Carolin Duttlinger, Cambridge 2018, pp. 208–215.

signposted by name, while at the same time the reader is aware of the slippage between the words on the page that order them to imagine empathetically that they are Franz Kafka and the very fact that this is not the case.²⁴

From Kafka's fiction and correspondence Muñoz Molina draws out elements of what he portrays as prophetic insight or intuition. In Kafka's *Briefe an Milena*, there are at least half a dozen considerations by Kafka about what it means to be Jewish. He voiced his concerns to Milena about the spread of anti-Semitism and the threats that surrounded Jews, mentioning the danger of being a Jew in Europe at the time. In the chapter »Eres«, then, two of these passages from the Letters, in which Kafka expressed these reflections on Jewishness, are excerpted and cited as material proofs of what Muñoz Molina considers the Czech writer's prophetism: »In a letter to Milena, Kafka forgets for a moment whom he's addressing and writes to himself: *You are, after all, completely Jewish, and you know what fear is.*«²⁵ In this direct quotation extracted from the Letters, Kafka's voice interrupts Muñoz Molina's text, revealing the limits of embellishment or invention in the novel, while at the same time emphasizing – perhaps excessively – what Muñoz Molina values above all for the purposes of his novel: Kafka's quasi supernatural perception of the trajectory of events to come.

In this way, the spectre of Kafka (and Kafka's writing) lurks again behind Muñoz Molina's work. Muñoz Molina reveres Kafka for his purported visionary spirit, drawing inspiration from both the person and the writer. He turns Kafka and Kafka's protagonists into characters in his novel, since they have been subjected to experiences similar to those undergone by his own characters. For Muñoz Molina's purposes in writing his polyphonic novel of memory, his fictional version of Kafka must essentially be constructed as a tragic prophet able, as de Souza notes, to project in fiction an absurd, illogical, but nonetheless possible world that, decades later, would find some correspondence in reality.

Is Muñoz Molina's Kafka, like Sebald's Kafka, another potentially fraudulent or forged Kafka? To a great extent, in a similar way to Sebald's narrator in *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, Kafka in *Sefarad* becomes an inadvertent invention of the narrator, selfishly – to paraphrase the *New York Times* piece quoted at the top of this essay – turning the Prague author into another enigmatic

24 For further discussion of empathetic imagination in »Sefarad«, see Nicola Gilmour: The Afterlife of Traumatic Memories: The Workings and Uses of Empathy in Antonio Muñoz Molina's »Sefarad«, in: Bulletin of Spanish Studies 88:6, 2011, pp. 839–862.

25 Molina: Sefarad (fn. 20), p. 291. For the Spanish original, see Molina: Sefarad (fn. 20), p. 601.

literary parable. This necessarily happens by degrees, however. It is notable, for instance, that whereas Sebald refers to his fictionalized version of Kafka, somewhat archly, as Dr. K., in Muñoz Molina he is either simply Franz Kafka or unnamed.

Forgeries (and particularly forged provenances) try to distract from the fact that they are not real, to shift your attention away from their origins, to suggest the existence of connections where there are none. It takes attention to detail to detect them. In her 2022 monograph *Attention and Distraction in Modern German Literature, Thought and Culture*, Carolin Duttlinger argues that

Sebald emulates Kafka's poetics of digression in texts which repeatedly shift between different times and places. The effect of this technique can be vertiginous, but it enables Sebald's narratives to range widely across history, connecting apparently unrelated incidents, particularly of violence and suffering. But there is a flipside to this mental and narrative agility. Time and again, deep, melancholy contemplation stalls the movement of the narrative, in a pattern which reflects a constitutive tension at the heart of Sebald's texts.²⁶

In gradually digressing both from reality and from textual reconstructions of it, both Sebald and Muñoz Molina find themselves caught between attempted verisimilitude and potentially fraudulent overemphasis. In his 2010 book *Three Sons: Franz Kafka and the Fiction of J.M. Coetzee, Philip Roth, and W.G. Sebald*, Daniel Medin goes a step further. He reveals Sebald's assertion that he often »tipped his hat« to other writers like Kafka to be a misleading metaphor for an act that »belied the aggression inherent in his approach«.²⁷ In fact, he argues, Sebald »forcefully bent the voices of Kafka, Walser, Conrad, and others toward that of his narrator, divesting them of their original spirit to reinforce his own thematic emphases« in what he later calls a »pattern of misreading«.²⁸ In this manner, Sebald (re)forges Kafka to shape his own literary interests and obsessions. The result is a striking division between, on the one hand, the historical and textual record of Kafka's life and work, and, on the other hand, the fabricant Dr. K. required of Sebald in his fiction, as well as the sickly victimized prophet conjured by Muñoz Molina.

26 Carolin Duttlinger: *Attention and Distraction in Modern German Literature, Thought, and Culture*, Oxford 2022, p. 393.

27 Daniel Medin: *Three Sons: Franz Kafka and the Fiction of J.M. Coetzee, Philip Roth, and W.G. Sebald*, Evanston 2010, p. 36.

28 Ibid, p. 36 and p. 138.

The two case studies discussed in this essay offer comparable yet diverging instances of the forging (that is to say, fabricating) and forging (in the sense of creating) of world-literary authorship in action. Folding together discrete elements of Kafka's biography and of his fictional characters, Sebald and Muñoz Molina create composite – possibly fraudulent – Kafkas in order to serve particular literary goals which in turn feed back into wider cultural memory of Kafka. Kafka and his Huntsman Gracchus, for example, are instrumentalized to signify more than they otherwise would by Sebald and Muñoz Molina, and as a result this burnishes Kafka's world reputation as a writer, a prophet, and a cultural icon. Ultimately, the artifice of Sebald's and Muñoz Molina's textual reality reveals the reality of their textual artifice.