

Audio file

[2024-11-12 KST Kafka 00 Intro Carolin v1.mp3](#)

Transcript

Good evening everyone. I'm delighted to see the Holywell Music Room so full. We've had a long waiting list and I think it really shows what an amazing event we have got here tonight. So my name is Carolin Duttlinger, I am one of the Co-Directors of the Oxford Kafka Research Centre, and I'd like to welcome you all very warmly indeed to the Holywell Music Room, which, as you may know, is Europe's oldest purpose-built concert hall.

So tonight's reading is really the culmination of the year of events here in Oxford to mark the centenary of Franz Kafka's death. We're very grateful, first of all, to Hannah Barry and her team at Bold Tendencies, a not-for-profit arts organisation in Peckham, South London, who first conceived of the idea for such an event, and I should say that a similar, though not identical, version of this programme was read by Kristin Scott Thomas at Bold Tendencies on the 3rd July this year, marking Kafka's 141st birthday.

So we are absolutely delighted to welcome Dame Kristin Scott Thomas tonight, one of the most distinguished actors working today. And tonight she will read a selection of Kafka's short, very short and slightly longer stories, taking us through a range of periods, styles, subjects and voices.

The recitation of literary texts such as poetry and prose writing was in fact a very popular form of entertainment in Kafka's own lifetime. As an art form, it was first professionalised in the 19th century and one of the superstars in the German-speaking context was a man called Ludwig Hardt. Hardt was born just three years after Kafka in 1886. He was a professionally trained actor. But because of his small stature, he started to specialise in recitation and became hugely successful in this. From 1921, Hardt's repertoire also included nine of Kafka's short stories, some of which we will hear tonight. One of Hardt's listeners was the writer Thomas Mann, who went on to read Kafka's stories after attending one of Hardt's readings. And in fact, in October 1921, Kafka himself attended one of Hardt's performances in Prague, where he heard his own stories recited to a large audience. It must have been quite a special moment for Kafka, who also loved to read out loud to other people, both his own works and those of other authors. So it's in fact no exaggeration to say that via Hardt's recitations, Kafka's works probably reached more listeners than readers in Kafka's own lifetime. I very much hope that you enjoy tonight's readings as much as Kafka's first listeners and, indeed, as much as the author himself. Thank you.

