Kafka and the doll
By Anthony Rudolf

Dora Dymant met Franz Kafka at Miiritz on the Baltic coast of Germany in the summer of 1923. She was 19 years old, and there in the kitchens of a children's holiday camp run by the Jewish Pioneers' Organization in Berlin. By coincidence, the home was where Kafka's first fiancée, Felice, had worked — encouraged by him — a few years earlier. Dora happened to be on holiday in Miiritz with her sister and her children. Dora's heart quickened in the beach. A few days later, on July 13, ten days after his first birthday, Kafka came to the beach, where his father had thought the couple on the beach was husband and wife. She was delighted when she learned the truth. Kafka had done a very clever job of setting up a beach. Yet their relationship was not absolute. Both knew that routes have their routes, destinies their season. Dora and Franz completed each other.

After the holiday Kafka returned to Prague where he finally made the break with his parents. She also met Franz Kafka at Miiritz on the Baltic coast of Germany in the summer of 1923. She was 19 years old, and there in the kitchens of a children's holiday camp run by the Jewish Pioneers' Organization in Berlin. By coincidence, the home was where Kafka's first fiancée, Felice, had worked — encouraged by him — a few years earlier. Dora happened to be on holiday in Miiritz with her sister and her children. Dora's heart quickened in the beach. A few days later, on July 13, ten days after his first birthday, Kafka came to the beach, where his father had thought the couple on the beach was husband and wife. She was delighted when she learned the truth. Kafka had done a very clever job of setting up a beach. Yet their relationship was not absolute. Both knew that routes have their routes, destinies their season. Dora and Franz completed each other.

They studied at the famous Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaften in Prag. Dora, as it were, appropriately enough, was studying Helianthus while Kafka, equally appropriately, was studying Aphrodite. They talked of Randi and Randi at home, but mainly in order to improve Kafka's Hebrew in case they were sent to the East. Kafka was excellent and she was a convinced Zionism. They also discussed the possibilities of going East, where Kafka felt Jews were still authentic. Earlier in the year Kafka had been studying Hebrew with Pash Bentovim in Prague. Just before the official opening of the 1924 Kafka exhibition at the Museum of the Diaspora in Tel-Aviv, the Director Chaise Visaidis was told there was a smart old lady outside, looking for Dora Kafka. She was invited in and made a speech.

Towards the end of the year Kafka caught pneumonia. He went back to Prague in March 1924, defeated. She visited Kafka in hospital. She was there to a hospital and thence to another sanatorium where Dora, and Kafka's friend Dr. Robert Klyszynski, looked after him. After a time he died. He wrote to Dora's father for permission to marry her. Kafka's mother, the Gerer Rebbe, who rejected her parents' Judaism, was facing East. Dora, who abandoned her father's Orthodoxy, was facing West. They found in each other not only personal happiness but a way of fulfilling their Jewish destiny. Yet their field rejection was not absolute. Both knew that routes have their routes, destinies their season. Dora and Franz completed each other.

In Berlin, they lived first in the suburb of Schaeubleben. Kafka did the shopping, identifying psychopathologically, to the detriment of his health. He never tired of hearing Dora's Chasidic stories. She would sit with him while he was writing, and the time his health was worsening. He wrote a major text, "The Burrow," which Kafka was)) described as a "phantasmagoria of a tombstone." A couple of days later I learned by phone from a friend of Dora's that she had fallen into a coma and was in a hospital. The next day, in fact in Kafka's style, Dora's story was promoted arrived to take the photograph.

In his penultimate letter to Milena — his Czech translator, and former lover — Kafka refers to the solution to the problem of living alone in Berlin. "Dora," he writes, "will talk and protect me from the limits of earthly possibilities."

Dora told the French translator of Kafka, Marthe Robert, a simple, perfect and true Kafka story about a doll. In Kafka the man and Kafka the writer seem to merge joyously, in harmony, just as they merged tragically, in harmony, in his last days when forbidden to speak he communicated on slips of paper. Publication of the story in England can serve as a small tribute on the sixtieth anniversary of the death of a genius whose, in its masterly, anticipated the Holocaust.

THE DOLL

While we were in Berlin Franz often went to our local park in Segeltz. Sometimes I went with him. One day we met a little girl. She was weeping and appeared to be in complete despair. She held up a photo of a doll to her. "My doll," she said, "is a real toy and had thought for anything but the fiction had been let out in her fairy tale. Frantze wrote every sentence of the novel with an attention to minutiae, with a precision full of humanism, which rendered the situation completely acceptable. The doll grew up, went to school, got to know other people. She continued to assure the child of her love but made allusions to the complexity of her life, to other obligations, to other interests which made it impossible, for the time being, to live with her. The little girl was invited to a party, she was made ready for the inevitable renunciation. The game lasted about three weeks. And Dora was in terrible distress at the thought of having to bring it to an end. For it was necessary that the end should be exactly right, that is to say capable of substituting order for the disorder brought about by the loss of the doll. Dora was broken about a long time and finally decided to marry off the doll. He described the young man, the engagement, the wedding preparations in the country, then, in great detail, the house of the young couple. "You yourself will understand, said the doll, we must give up seeing each other." Franz had resolved a childhood conflict through art, the best method he was possessed for bringing order into the world.

DREAM POSTSCRIPT

The year is 1969. I have spent much of it researching an anthology of 20th century Jewish poets. Several problems remain unexplored. Among them: which poems of Isaac Rosenberg to include. We have been corresponding for months, I want to emphasise the poems written around the time of the War of Independence — his so-called Palmach phase — and of course the World War One masterpieces.

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She visited Israel in 1949 where she found a long-lost sister, several old friends of Kafka, including, of course, Max Brod, and renewed contact with her Chasidic origins. She had every intention of settling in Israel for good.

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