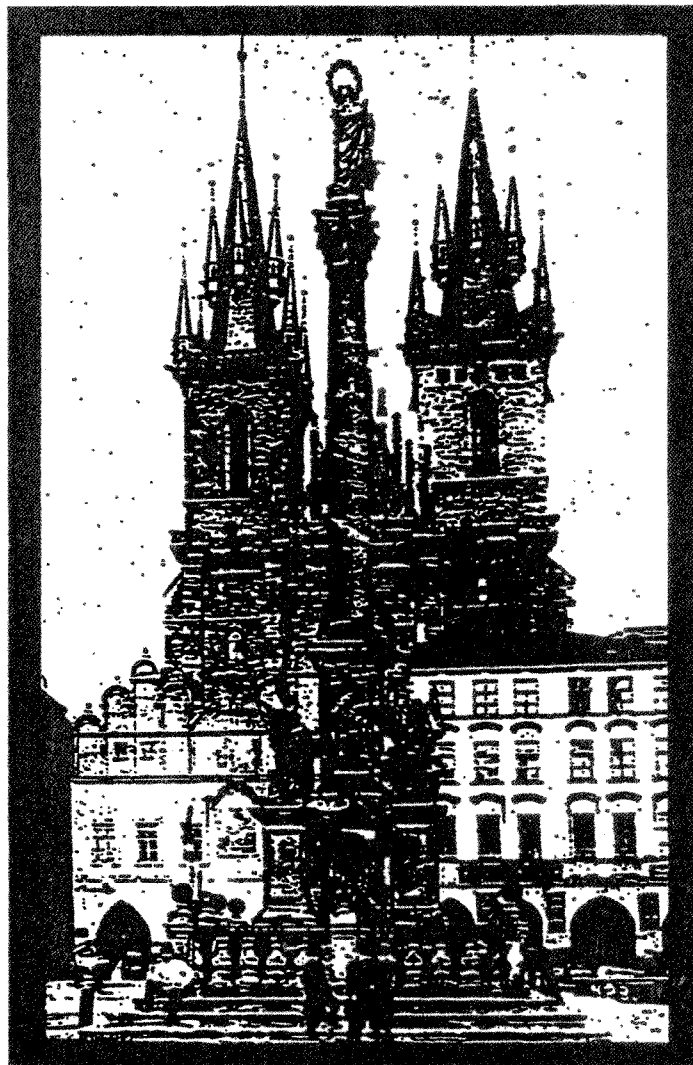


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Thirty-Fifth and Thirty-Sixth Years**

THE SEARCH FOR KAFKA'S LOST LOVE LETTERS & LAST NOTEBOOKS

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"That which is possible will surely happen. But only that which happens is possible."

Franz Kafka, *Diaries*, January 5, 1914

In the last year of his life, Franz Kafka wrote nearly three dozen letters to Dora Diamant, his last love. They met on July 13, 1923 at the Baltic seaside resort town of Müritz in Northern Germany where he had gone for a rest cure, and soon they were dreaming of a life together in Tel Aviv. After a six-week separation between August 8 and September 25, 1923, Kafka moved to Berlin and lived with Dora in three different residences until he was forced to return to Prague on March 17, 1924. Despite his declining health, Kafka and Dora shared what Max Brod termed "an idyll" in Berlin for those few months. When Kafka died in Dora's arms on June 3, 1924 in a sanatorium outside Vienna, Kafka's letters and postcards to her, as well his last notebooks and journals, were in her possession. After Kafka's death, as per his explicit final instructions, Max Brod undertook the work to collect Kafka's letters, diaries, and manuscripts from the various friends who held them. When Brod asked Dora to turn over Kafka's letters to him and whatever else she had of his, she lied and said she had burned everything. Brod shared the loss in a letter to Martin Buber, relating Dora's report that she had "burned some twenty notebooks while Franz watched from his bed."² But that was not the truth. In fact, Dora kept the letters and notebooks, secretly, for almost a decade.

In the postscript to *The Trial* Kafka's posthumous instructions to Brod are well-known: to burn everything as soon as possible. Brod published the two handwritten letters he found addressed to him in Kafka's elegant scrawl, which insisted that all "diaries, manuscripts, letters (my own and others'), sketches, and so on, to be burned, unread."³ Brod laid out his argument for his refusal to follow Kafka's wishes, and also made clear his intent to do everything in his power to preserve all of Kafka's writings, and to present these gifts to humanity. When Brod discovered that Kafka had himself destroyed some of his own work, including ten large quarto notebooks, Brod lamented their loss:

What unforgettable, entirely original, and profound thoughts he communicated to me!... As far as my memory and my strength permit, nothing of all this shall be lost... A small circle of Kafka's friends will see to it that all the utterances of this incomparable human being which remain in their memory shall be collected forthwith.⁴

As Kafka rose to posthumous fame, Dora Diamant (later, Dymant-Lask) was vilified for burning his work, but not for the real role she played in its loss. From Kafka's death in 1924 until April 1933, Dora kept her secret Kafka treasure, safe from publication and from the flame. But shortly after the Nazi takeover in Berlin, Kafka's notebooks and letters to Dora were confiscated in her home in a Gestapo raid. Years after she had confessed the truth to Brod, Dora told an interviewer that, near the end of their life together in Berlin, she had burned a few pages of Kafka's work, at his insistence. She explained why she did it:

He wanted to burn everything that he had written in order to free his soul from these "ghosts." I respected his wish, and when he lay ill, I burnt things of his before his eyes. What he really wanted to write was to come afterwards, only after he had gained his "liberty".... I have been reproached for having burnt some

of what Kafka wrote. I was so young then, and young people live in the present, and perhaps in the future, too. After all, for him all that had been nothing but self-liberation!⁵

In addition to the letters Kafka wrote to Dora in 1923, Kafka also wrote to her from Prague from mid-March until they were reunited at the Sanatorium Wienerwald, on April 8 or 9, 1924. In the interview she gave to J.P. Hodin, first published in the journal *Horizon* in 1948, Dora gives us a clue as to the contents of two of those letters:

At that time I received daily letters from him. There were about thirty-five letters. In one of them, Kafka mentioned “technical errors” in the way man acts towards himself. He was then preoccupied with the question of Tolstoy’s fight for his own liberation and discovered some “technical errors” in that. Another time he told me of a dream he had had. Highway-men had fetched him from his Berlin lodgings, shut him up in a shed in some backyards and gagged him. “I know that I am lost, because you can’t find me.”⁶

At first, Dora objected to Brod’s plan to publish everything Kafka ever wrote, including his personal writings. For her, the choice was between honesty to Brod versus the trust that Kafka had placed in her. She wanted to protect the man she still loved. In a letter to Brod in 1930, she also admitted her ulterior motive:

For even in great love, I am a small, possessive woman.... As long as I was living with Franz, all I could see was him and me. Anything other than himself was simply irrelevant and even ridiculous.... That is why I objected to the posthumous publication of his writings. And besides, as I am only now beginning to understand, there was the fear of having to share him with others. Every published statement, every conversation I regarded as a violent intrusion into my private realm. The world at large does not have to know about Franz. He is nobody else’s business because, well, because nobody could possibly understand him. I regarded it—and I think I still do so now—as wholly out of the question for anyone ever to understand Franz, or to get even an inkling of what he was about unless one knew him personally. All efforts to understand him were hopeless unless he himself made them possible by the look in his eyes or the touch of his hands. And this, of course, he can no longer do.⁷

In 1929, having toured the Rhineland (known then as the “Red Ruhr,” an industrial area rife with Communist activities) for a year as part of a professional theatre company, Dora moved back to Berlin. Horrified by the rise of the Nazi party, she applied for membership in the German Communist Party (KPD) and worked as an agitprop actress with the group, Revolutionary Trade Union Opposition Film and Stage.⁸ At Marxist meetings in the Lichterfelde-Ost cell, she met her future husband, Lutz Lask, a member of a prominent and idealistic Communist family in Berlin. In the spring of 1933, Lask accepted a dangerous assignment: Berlin-Steglitz editor of the Communist Party newspaper, *Die Rote Fahne*. The Gestapo raids began on the homes of well-known KPD members, such as of the Lasks. In 1947, Dora reported the fate of Kafka’s writings for the first time in the interview she gave Hodin: “They were taken from me by the Gestapo, together with his diaries and in spite of all attempts no one has succeeded in finding them again.”⁹

According to Kafka biographer Ernst Pawel, shortly after the Nazi takeover, the Gestapo raided Dora’s living quarters and “confiscated every scrap of paper they could get their hands on, including all the

Kafka material."¹⁰ Pawel's information on the confiscation came, according to his widow, Ruth Pawel, from conversations he conducted in the early 1980s with Brod's former secretary Ester Hoffe in Tel Aviv, and from documents in her possession to which he was granted rare access.

Dora, disconsolate and hysterical with remorse, confessed her folly and appealed for help to Brod, who immediately mobilized the Prague poet Camill Hoffmann, at the time cultural attaché at the Czech embassy in Berlin. Hoffmann, himself one of Kafka's friends, did what he could, but was informed by the Gestapo that the mountainous stacks of paper confiscated in those first days of Nazi rule had already reached such monstrous proportions as to defy all rational attempts at locating a specific document. For all we know, those mountains are still there, as indestructible as the secret police itself, being sifted, indexed, and filed in the bowels of some bomb-proof archives behind the Berlin wall, and may yet disgorge further incriminating evidence in the trial of one Franz Kafka.¹¹

One of the letters Pawel must have seen was written to Brod on April 20, 1933. Only a few words from this four-page letter are known: "Franz's things are gone. Letters, pages from his diaries, and everything else, that I had."¹² This letter, one of seventy letters, postcards and telegrams Dora wrote to Brod over a quarter century, from 1925 until her death in August 1952, was catalogued in Switzerland in the 1980s, as part of the Kafka and Kafka-related materials Brod left to Hoffe, now known as the Brod Collection in Israel. These seventy letters have been locked in legal limbo between Hoffe's heirs and the State of Israel. The four-year trial in Tel Aviv achieved unfortunately only an apparent acquittal, since appeals between courts are predicted to rebound indefinitely. Dora's correspondence with Brod is catalogued in four single-spaced typed pages, listing the contents of two grey-green files, numbered 14 and 15.¹³ The letters are identified by date, postmarks, addresses, number of pages and occasionally, a few words or lines of description. The remaining four pages of Dora's letter of April 20, 1933, and the other letters as well, are extremely important to further identify precisely the scope of the Kafka material taken by the Nazis.

In 1937, Brod reported the loss of Kafka's last letters and notebooks in the German-language newspaper *Aufbau*, published in New York. He didn't mention Dora's role, only saying that "a portion of the manuscripts remained in Berlin after Kafka's death and was later confiscated by the Nazis. Although the Czechoslovakian legation, especially Camill Hoffmann (who has now also become a Nazi victim) energetically tried to intervene, these writings were never discovered. Perhaps they lie today in some stack room or other."¹⁴

In the interview she gave to Hodin, Dora talked publicly for the first time about Kafka's lost papers, taken from her by the Gestapo. Despite the finality of her remark ("in spite of all attempts no one has succeeded in finding them again."), she did not believe Kafka's letters to her were lost forever.¹⁵ And she was not alone in that hope. In the early 1950s, Brod attempted a second search for Kafka's confiscated writings. From Tel Aviv, he enlisted the help of a young Kafka scholar, Klaus Wagenbach, in Berlin, to once again approach the German government for the return of Kafka's missing papers. According to Wagenbach, in the mid-1950s, he and Brod were informed by the Chief of Police in Berlin that the Kafka papers were most likely in a train transport taken by the German Army out of Berlin during the Allied bombing for safekeeping in the eastern territories, most likely in Silesia. As communications and cooperation between East and West dwindled, and as the Iron Curtain descended over Eastern Europe, research in Eastern archives became impossible.¹⁶

New possibilities for the recovery of Kafka's missing papers arose with the fall of the Wall in Berlin and the subsequent collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and Russia. Archives were uncovered

in bunkers, basements, and mines throughout the Soviet bloc, stacked to the ceilings with boxes, bags, and crates of German materials dating back to the Third Reich, virtually untouched for over forty years. A *Newsweek* article in July 1991 reported the opening of repositories in Eastern Europe, and revealed how the advancing Red Army captured German art and materials worth billions of dollars in 1945 and hauled it back to Moscow, much of which was never returned. The article also reported on "a recently ratified treaty...[in which] United Germany and the Soviet Union have promised to return stolen works of art 'to their rightful owners or heirs' and to provide compensation for missing works."¹⁷

The Kafka Project Begins

I first learned about Dora Diamant in a German language class at the University of Georgia in Athens in 1971. We were translating *The Metamorphosis*, when my instructor interrupted class and asked if I were related to Dora Diamant. I had never heard of her, but promised to find out for him. At the library, I read a handful of biographies which mentioned her, and was thrilled to learn about her vibrant, passionate personality and her role in Kafka's life. At the time, I could find no information on Dora after Kafka's death. It seemed she had disappeared from the public record, and the question of our relationship remained unanswered, as it does today. Inspired by Dora's adventurous spirit and motivated by the coincidences that connected us, I began the search for the missing pieces of Dora's life in 1985. Since then my search has taken me on many trips, retracing Dora's steps in Poland, Germany, France, England, the Czech Republic and Israel. When I learned of Dora's role in Kafka's lost work and her hope that it might be recovered, I resolved to do what I could on her behalf when it finally became possible.

In 1996, I formed the Kafka Project as a non-profit independent investigation into the lost last writings of Franz Kafka, taken from Dora Diamant by the Gestapo in 1933. Dora's daughter, Marianne Lask, who died in 1984, helped provide the legal justification for the return of Dora's property. Written in 1977, twenty-five years after Dora's death, Marianne Lask's last will and testament leaves to Kafka's niece, "Mrs. Marianne Steiner, all correspondence relating to Dora Dymant and Franz Kafka, for her to dispose of or add to the Kafka Archives as she thinks best."¹⁸ With the ownership of the letters clearly assigned to the Kafka family, I requested and received a letter of permission from Kafka's niece and her son Michael Steiner to conduct the search on behalf of the Kafka estate. I recruited an international advisory committee of scholars, librarians, and researchers. The Advisory Committee included Kafka scholars Niels Bokhove and Rolf J. Goebel, Anna R. Cohn of the Smithsonian SITES program and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yoram Mayorek, former Director of the Central Zionist Archives, and Bonnie G. Klein, Acting Chief of Cataloging for the US Dept of Defense DTIC, the organization which translated, categorized, and disseminated the tons of German research and development documents taken from Germany by the Allied Forces. Timothy Rodgers, former Director of Western Manuscripts, Bodleian Library, Oxford University, later joined our committee. In 1998, the Kafka Project became official when the College of Arts and Letters at San Diego State University gave the project an academic home.

The Kafka Project was organized in three initial phases, with specific goals for each phase. Phase I included the identification of grants, foundations, and other potential funding sources. In March 1997, I petitioned the German government for an investigation into the confiscation of Dora's property, and made a formal request for its return. The *Bundesbeauftragte*, known then as the Gauck Authority, accepted the case.¹⁹ The petition claimed the confiscated papers as Holocaust-era assets belonging to Dora's deceased daughter and sole heir, on behalf of the heirs of the Kafka Estate. The case was expected to come up for review in the summer of 1998.

Phase II included developing a methodology and research tools to conduct and document a four-month research project in Berlin, from June 1 to September 30, 1998. I planned to be present in Berlin for the period before and after our case was reviewed, to conduct additional archival research. The first

objective was to produce reference materials in German to establish what we were looking for, to provide descriptions of the missing material, and to add context to aid in its discovery. In its first edition, the *Kafka Project ALERT* was ten pages long, and contained samples of Kafka's handwriting and return addresses. The *ALERT* was updated in 2008, and translated into Slovak, Polish, and Czech, as well as German. Other objectives in Berlin were to research and report on Ludwig Lask (Dora's husband) as well as Dora's life in Berlin. This information would add practical and historical context to materials confiscated along with Kafka's papers. We planned to disseminate the *ALERT* to all departments in the German government involved in the archival cataloguing of Third Reich-era documents, and to establish German academic contacts and research resources. Finally, we would document in detail the strategy, steps, and actions taken by the Kafka Project in Berlin.

Phase III of the 1998 Berlin Research Project began at the end of September, 1998 with the analysis of the findings and results. A detailed report was produced, and an article outlining the research was published in Dutch translation in the December 1998 issue of *Kafka-Katern*, the literary quarterly of the Dutch Kafka Circle. Copies of the report were given to the Bodleian Library, the "Landesarchiv-Berlin", the "Jüdische Kulturverein Berlin," and other interested parties. A complete resource list of all German archives, libraries, and government offices visited in the course of the four months in Berlin and a breakdown of every file that we reviewed and/or copied was printed and is available for download online at www.kafkaproject.com.

The Kafka Project's 1998 research in the Nazi archives in Berlin yielded an extraordinary amount of new information on Dora and the Lask family. Most importantly to the Kafka Project was the documentation of the confiscation of property belonging to Dora in 1933. Documents found at the *Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde* and at the *Landesarchiv*, Berlin yielded the Gestapo order, signed by Dr. Best, one of the architects of the SS. The order included the seizure of property and loss of nationality for Dora, her husband, and members of the Lask family. The *Landesarchiv* classified the Kafka Project as official scientific research and assigned a senior archivist, Gisela Erler, to the case. Erler informed us that it would be at least a decade before all Third Reich-era repositories in the former East Germany were identified and the cataloguing could begin. Her last words of encouragement before I left Berlin in 1998: "Don't give up too soon."

The abundance of archival materials uncovered by the Kafka Project in Berlin 1998 led to further discoveries of letters and records in the "Sonderarchiv," the Special Archives of the former Central Archives of the Communist Party.²⁰ The Kafka Project commissioned research in Moscow and was able to obtain seventeen pages from her Comintern file including letters, reports, and other documents. Kafka Project research conducted at the Dumont-Lindermann Theatre Museum in Düsseldorf in 2001, where Dora attended drama school in 1928 and 1929, revealed new biographical data, but no further clue to the missing papers. As Director of the Kafka Project, I attended a symposium on international law and policy surrounding the issue of Holocaust-era assets, sponsored by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in Washington, DC and made valuable contacts in the archival research field working in Russia and Eastern Europe.²¹ The wealth of biographical details, documents, and more than eighty previously unknown family photographs, crowned by the discovery and reunification of Dora's family in Israel and Berlin, made Dora's biography possible for the first time. Commissioned research in Israel uncovered Kafka's hairbrush, which Dora left in Israel in 1950. Media outreach efforts around the publication of my book led to the discovery of three original Kafka letters, written to Ludwig Hardt in 1924. The Hardt letters were the first of two sets of Kafka letters which found their way to San Diego. Before they were sold to the German Literature Archive in Marbach in 2008, Kafka's letters to Hedwig Weiler were also in private hands in San Diego. In 2003, *Kafka's Last Love: The Mystery of Dora Diamant* was published in the US by Basic Books and in the UK by Secker and Warburg. It has since been published in translation in France, Spain, Russia, China, Brazil, and in the fall 2013 in Germany,

by Onomato in Düsseldorf. The German edition includes for the first time, an appendix with Dora's unpublished diary, which Dora gave to Marthe Robert, Kafka's French translator and biographer, with instructions to hand it over to Max Brod. For unknown reasons, Robert kept the diary, where it remains in Paris, as part of her estate. In 2000, I was granted access to the diary and Dora's correspondence to Robert, by her widower.

A decade after the first research project to Berlin in 1998, I organized a second major project in Eastern Europe from June 15 to July 25, 2008. Focusing primarily on Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, the mission of the Kafka Project's 2008 research was threefold: to establish the existence and location of captured German documents in Silesia, to alert academic and archival institutions about the search for the lost work of Kafka and the possibility of its recovery and to verify the safekeeping of archive collections in which Kafka's missing papers may remain hidden. Working with the US Embassy in Warsaw, the US Consulate in Krakow, the Library of Silesia and the University of Silesia in Katowice, we established that captured German documents had been stored in the Katowice area of Silesia, but had since been moved to unspecified locations in other cities, including Warsaw, and perhaps, Moscow. Polish historians and archivists indicated that German material found by the Red Army were stored in repositories until the past decade, when they were secretly dispersed to other, unknown archives. A leading expert in the area of wartime archives, Dr. Patricia Kennedy Grimstead, Senior Research Associate with the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University told me that "German documents did remain in Poland during the Communist period, but most of those from the SS seizures in Silesia became part of the RSHA²² archives...and [material] the Poles found after the war in or near Slawa (Göring's castle used by the RSHA Amt VII) were kept secretly in the Institute for National Memory in Warsaw. The USHMM [US Holocaust Memorial Museum] got a complete microfilm that is now in DC. Later in 1997, those records were exchanged with the *Bundesarchiv* and are now part of record group R58 in Berlin."²³ At present, the Polish National Archives and the Library of Silesia have no records of the captured German documents in Poland. Through contacts with administrators, directors, and librarians at the Library of Silesia, the Polish translation of the *Kafka Project ALERT* was sent in an official memorandum to every library in Poland, including private, academic, and public institutions. The *ALERT* is attached at the end of this report.

The Kafka Project has received support from Kafka scholars in Germany, notably Klaus Wagenbach, Hans-Gerd Koch, editor of the Critical Edition of Kafka's letters, and Kafka biographer Reiner Stach. In a 2010 interview in *Der Tagesspiegel*, Stach reported the Kafka Project's 2008 Eastern European results, and concluded by saying, "So far, these archives are blocked, because the German Republic and Poland cannot find common ground about the return of stolen documents." Referring to the contested Brod collection in Israel, he added, "But I suppose we would know what to look for if we finally could see Dora's letters to Max Brod."²⁴

The issue of captured German documents is highly sensitive and secretive, with apparent financial fortunes at stake. Several Polish historians and archivists told me—off the record—that Germany wants their documents, which remain secretly in Poland, returned (the materials were deposited in Poland for safekeeping by the German Army in the 1940s) but Germany reportedly has controversial documents that Poland wants returned. At this juncture, according to my sources, neither side is budging, and nothing official is being done to inventory or catalogue what is still being hidden from public view. The positive aspect, I was told, is that these documents are considered quite valuable and are carefully safeguarded.

A New Direction

In 2011, I was granted a residency at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC. My proposal was to fully explore resources available in the US and to research policies and

laws surrounding captured German documents in Silesia after World War II. My intent was to understand the complex process of international and foreign government policies for the handling of materials captured during military conflict. At first, I focused on two areas: the Polish government's implementation of the international accords, to which Poland is a signatory, and issues surrounding ownership and rights to physical property and its intellectual content. With access afforded me as a Woodrow Wilson Scholar, between February 4 and March 2, 2012 I was able to conduct interviews with senior archivists at the Woodrow Wilson International Center's Cold War Project, Library of Congress, NARA, and USHMM, in addition to searching all available databases at those and other institutions. Interviewees included Jürgen Matthaus, Director of Applied Research at the USHMM Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, who pointed to three possible locations for the Kafka material. The two least likely were Warsaw or Prague. The third possibility, Moscow, was more promising, he said, since the last inventories were conducted in the 1950s, and the archives have not been accessible. "In Warsaw or Prague, by now the needle would have been sifted out of the haystack," Matthaus said. "Unless, there is a cave in Bohemia or Silesia, in an unknown, unopened repository, with cobwebs. Not impossible."²⁵ Tim Mulligan, PhD, a specialist in captured German and related records at NARA for thirty-four years was enormously helpful in identifying published texts on captured German documents in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. He was made "aware through Soviet publications of the extensive but never described German records in Soviet archives. Since the 1990s we know a great deal more, but still not enough."²⁶ Based on information from the Russian, German, Polish, and Czech specialists at the Library of Congress, our search for Kafka's missing papers must expand beyond Silesia, to Russia. Dr. Trudy Peterson, former Archivist of the United States, contacted the former head of the *Bundesarchiv*, Klaus Oldenhege, on behalf of the Kafka Project. Oldenhege offered several suggestions for follow-up, but did not think there was a general Gestapo policy on seized records and papers, especially during the early Nazi period (1933-1936), but that "it is by all means necessary to contact Moscow."²⁷

Current research widens our focus to unopened archives in Russia. Assisting us in this line of inquiry is Harold Leich, Russian specialist at the Library of Congress, who has provided names and letters of introduction to his colleagues and associates in Moscow. Kafka Project volunteer researchers in Berlin and Washington, DC continue to try to find documents from the Chief of Police of Berlin to determine if there are any records or documentation that lead to the conclusion that Kafka's papers had been taken in a train transport to Silesia during the Allied bombing, as Wagenbach related to me. Based on what we have learned so far, we conclude that one of the following is true: (1) the materials are in one of the former Soviet archives, but have never been identified or catalogued; (2) an individual is holding them, either unaware of their significance, or aware, but not telling anyone; (3) the material did not survive the end of World War II. In February 2013, in response to queries made following the Wilson Center research, a case manager at the *Bundesarchiv* informed me of a new inventory and database at the "Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR", which contains "a concrete indication of a seizure of documents by the RSHA in connection with Franz Kafka."²⁸ Kafka Project researchers searched the record group R58 in the *Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde* in 1998, but since new materials have been added, a return trip to Berlin is a priority, which I intend to undertake in 2014.

New information and research is being published revealing new sources and approaches. Academics worldwide have been publishing in related areas of research, opening doors and possibilities for the Kafka Project. The USHMM Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies' list of academic publications offers more than forty books published in the past decade, and almost fifty papers. A 2008 book, *Robbing the Jews: The Confiscation of Jewish Property in the Holocaust, 1933-1945 and Returned from Russia: Nazi Archival Plunder in Western Europe and Recent Restitution Issues*, published in 2007, provide a new hope for discovery. Kafka's quote from his diary that began this paper, "That which is possible will surely happen. But only that which happens is possible," guides our determination to continue this search. Whether Kafka's missing notebooks and last love letters still exist or are lost forever, the search is

necessary and will continue until we find proof of either outcome. The importance of Franz Kafka's final writings and the missing chapter in literary history that these writings represent to the international literary community cannot be overstated. The discovery of the unpublished unknown contents of Kafka's last notebooks and letters would provide new evidence to understand more fully one of the shapers of modern consciousness. As Royal Literary Fellow and Kafka Project Advisory Committee member Anthony Rudolf noted: "Part of Kafka's legacy, and therefore that of world literature, remains untold in the absence of the documents."²⁹

The text of the *KAFKA PROJECT ALERT* is reprinted below, and is available in German, Polish, Czech and Slovak translation. It is available for download at www.kafkaproject.com. Please feel free to copy and disseminate any of the *ALERT*.

THE KAFKA PROJECT ALERT

The Kafka Project at San Diego State University is searching for the lost writings of the 20th Century literary giant Franz Kafka. The missing 20 notebooks written by Kafka and 35 letters written in the last year of his life were confiscated by the Gestapo in 1933 from the Berlin apartment of his last companion, Dora (Dwojra) Diamant (later Dymant-Lask). Comprised of independent scholars and researchers working on behalf of the Kafka estate of London, England, the Kafka Project is looking for the following missing material:

- **Thirty five (35) letters and postcards from Franz Kafka to Dora Diamant**, written between August and September 1923 and mid-March to early April 1924.
- **Twenty (20) notebooks, octavo or quarto style, belonging to Franz Kafka**, written between July 1923 and June 1924.

DESCRIPTION OF CONFISCATION OF MISSING MATERIALS

The Kafka material was confiscated on or before 20 April 1933 during a Gestapo raid of the Berlin-Schöneberg apartment of Lutz Lask & Dora Dymant (Diamant-Lask), located at 13 Pariserstrasse. Unspecified additional materials were taken earlier, on March 23, 1933, from the home of Berta Lask and Dr. Louis Jacobson-Lask at 11 Mittelstrasse in Lichterfelde, and again on 8 August 1933. Dora Dymant was a member of the Lichterfelde Ost cell of the German Communist Party (KPD). Lutz Lask (Dora's husband) was the editor of the Steglitz edition of *Die Rote Fahne*. Berta Lask was a well-known writer and early KPD member. Dr. Jacobson-Lask was a brain researcher and lecturer at Berlin University.

RESULTS OF PREVIOUS SEARCHES

First in 1933 and again following World War II, Kafka's literary executor Max Brod and others in Germany attempted to locate Kafka's confiscated work. That pursuit ended prematurely when the trail led beyond the Berlin Wall. The Kafka Project, founded at San Diego State University in San Diego, California, in 1997, is the official search for the lost papers since 1956. Between June and October, 1998, the Kafka Project conducted research in German archives, examining Nazi files in the *Bundesarchiv* and *Landesarchiv*, as well as civil records offices. Kafka Project researchers found proof of the Gestapo confiscation of the property and the Finance Office (Moabit-West) responsible for receiving the materials. In 2000, Kafka biographer, publisher and archivist Klaus Wagenbach shared the results of his search conducted with Max Brod in the 1950s: they were informed by the Police Chief in Berlin that the Kafka papers were in a train transport taken out of Berlin in the 1940s for safekeeping in Silesia.

DESCRIPTION OF THE NOTEBOOKS

Kafka kept his notes, literary ideas, sketches, drafts of letters, and his journal in quarto-sized and the smaller octavo-sized notebooks. Twenty of these notebooks were taken in the raid.

- **Octavo** notebook (10.5 x 17.5cm) 50 pages
- **Quarto** notebook (14.5 x 20 cm). 90-95 pages

DESCRIPTION OF THE LETTERS

Envelopes of the letters written from Franz Kafka to Dora Diamant would be postmarked from early August to late September 1923 and between mid-March 1924 and early April, 1924. The letters would bear the following addresses:

From: Either FK, or F. Kafka or Kafka at the following address

- c/o Herr Hermann Kafka, Prag, Altstaedter Ring 6
- c/o H. Kafka, Prag, Staroměstské náměstí , č 6

To: Fräulein Dora Diamant at the following addresses:

- Berlin-Charlottenburg, Jewish Children's Orphanage (August 1923)
- Berlin-Steglitz, Miquelstrasse 8, bei Hermann (September 1923)
- Berlin-Zehlendorf, Heidestrasse 2-26 (March-April 1924)

OWNERSHIP

These missing letters and notebooks are the property of the Kafka estate in London, England. The SDSU Kafka Project is a non-profit volunteer-based organization, working *pro bono* on behalf of the Kafka estate and for the good of world literature. All volunteers and those who participate in the Kafka Project will be acknowledged for their contributions to helping solve a literary mystery and being a part of saving a lost piece of literary history.

CONTACT

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HANDWRITING SAMPLE: Letter from Kafka to Ludwig Hardt, February 1924, mentioning Dora Diamant.³⁰

Lieber Ludwig Hladik, den bekomme ich den Bericht einer Ungleichlichen: der Gottlieb hat die Frage, ob Hladik schon angekommen sei missverstanden sind ihn selbst zum Telefon gerufen; ich vermehre das Unglück durch die Erinnerung daran dass H. vor dem Vortrag zu schlafen pflegt (was doch wahr ist), tröste dann aber wieder damit dass H. nichts stören kann (was doch noch wahrer ist). Nicht einmal ein geschwätziger Brief am Schluss eines Vortragabends. Ist aber kurz: ich kann nicht kommen, bin krank, schickte schon gestern einen Brief durch eine Bekannte des abgesetzten Vortrags. Könnten Sie vielleicht einmal heranzukommen, damit ich Sie einmal sehe nach so langer Zeit? Sehr erfreulich werden Sie hier nicht zu sehen bekommen, immerhin —
 Fr. Ina Diamant, die Überbringerin des Briefs, hat Vollrecht und mehr als das, die Möglichkeit der Zehlendorfer Pflanz mit Ihnen zu besprechen. Wird es möglich sein?
 K. K.

Notes

¹ Max Brod, *Franz Kafka, A Biography*, 197.

² Glatzer, Nahum G., ed., "Brod to Martin Buber" in *Franz Kafka. I Am a Memory Come Alive: Autobiographical Writings*, New York: Schocken, 1974. xiii.

³ *The Trial*, Brod postscript, 328.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 332, 334.

⁵ J. P. Hodin, "Memories of Franz Kafka", *Horizon*, Jan. 1948, 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 43, 44.

⁷ DD t.o MB, May 2, 1930, cited in Brod, *Der Prager Kreis*, 112.

- ⁸ Dora Dymant- Lask, "Lebenslauf", Comintern file 495/205/1573/5, Sonderarchiv, Moscow.
- ⁹ Hodin, 43.
- ¹⁰ Ernst Pawel, *The Nightmare of Reason*, 438.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 438-39.
- ¹² Bernhard Echte, Brod correspondence list, Mappe 14, 2, Archiv Kritische Kafka-Ausgabe (AKKA), Wuppertal.
- ¹³ File 14 contains Letters of Dora Diamant to Max Brod (1924-1937), Letters from Robert Klopstock to Brod (1924-1935); and Letters from Hans Fronius to Brod and diverse other letters of Kafka material. File 15 contents include Letters of Dora Diamant to Max Brod (1939-1952) with some answers from Brod, the last will and testament of Dora Diamant, and three letters about Dora Diamant. AKKA.
- ¹⁴ Max Brod, "Franz Kafkas sämtliche Werke," *Aufbau* (New York), 1937, 23.
- ¹⁵ Hodin, "Memories of Kafka," *Horizon*, 43, 44.
- ¹⁶ Conversation with Klaus Wagenbach and Hans-Gerd Koch, recorded by Kathi Diamant, Berlin, 2002.
- ¹⁷ Karen Breslau and Elizabeth Tucker, "The Heist of 1945: The Looted Treasures of Europe May At Last Be Returned To Their Owners", *Newsweek*, July 15, 1991, United States Edition, 51.
- ¹⁸ Marianne Lask, last will and testament, official two-page document dated June 6, 1977. Private Collection of Johanna Metzger Lichtenstern.
- ¹⁹ Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Foundation of Intercession of the Stasi for the Political and Historic Resolution of the National Socialist Past).
- ²⁰ *Rossiyskiy gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsialno-politicheskoy istorii*. (Russian State Archives for Social and Political History, formerly Central Archives of the Communist Party), Moscow.
- ²¹ December 2008, Symposium on Holocaust-Era Assets, Records and Research <http://www.archives.gov/research/holocaust/>.
- ²² RSHA: *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Security Head Office).
- ²³ Email correspondence from Dr. Patricia Kennedy Grimstead to Kathi Diamant, Feb 6, 2012. The Kafka Project thoroughly researched the record group R58 in the *Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde* in 1998, but since materials have been added since then, a return trip to examine any new files is a new objective.
- ²⁴ Peter von Becker, "Kafkas letztes Geheimnis" *Der Tagesspiegel*, Jan. 25, 2010. <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/literatur/Franz-Kafka;art138,3012019>.

²⁵ Interview with Jürgen Matthaus, USHMM, Washington, DC, Feb 13, 2012.

²⁶ Email correspondence from Tim Mulligan to Kathi Diamant, Feb 24, 2012.

²⁷ Email correspondence from Klaus Oldenhage to Trudy Peterson, Feb 25, 2012.

²⁸ K. Weller email to K. Diamant, Feb 27, 2012.

²⁹ Anthony Rudolph, "The Adventures of Kathi and Dora," *Jewish Chronicle Literary Supplement* (London), Feb 26, 1999, ii.

³⁰ This is one of three letters discovered in San Diego in 2003, in the possession of the son of Ludwig Hardt's last love. Hardt, a professional performer whom Kafka admired, received three letters from Kafka in 1924, and kept those, along with a copy of Hebel's *Schatzkästlein*, which Kafka inscribed to him. Before selling the letters and book to an undisclosed party at auction in 2003, the owner shared facsimiles of the originals, which had been published in *Letters to Friends, Family and Editors*, with the German Literature Archives in Marbach, the AKKA at Wuppertal, and the SDSU Kafka Project.

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