



“WHEN GREGOR SAMSA AWOKE ONE MORNING FROM TROUBLED DREAMS, HE FOUND HIMSELF CHANGED INTO A MONSTROUS COCKROACH...”

—Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis*

FRANZ KAFKA

Understudy playwright Theresa Rebeck uses the stories and novels of German writer Franz Kafka as inspiration for her play and the fictional play-within-a-play. Kafka, whose family was of German heritage, was born in Prague in 1883 and went on to write a series of classic novels and short stories including *The Trial*, the tale of an innocent man accused of an unknown crime; *The Castle*, a dreamlike work about a man trying to gain access to a mysterious organization; and *Metamorphosis*, the story of a man suddenly turned into a giant cockroach.

Kafka and his three sisters grew up with an intensely overbearing father who, it is widely agreed, was responsible for many of the feelings of intense guilt and self-loathing that play so big a part in Kafka’s work. As one critic wrote, for Kafka and his sisters, life with their father was “a trial in which they were inescapably guilty.” Very few of Kafka’s works were published during his lifetime and, when Kafka knew he was dying of tuberculosis, he asked his best friend, Max Brod, to burn all of his writing once he died. However, when Kafka passed away in 1924, Brod didn’t destroy the manuscripts and instead readied them for publication, feeling that deep down that was what Kafka actually wanted.

Kafka’s unique works of fiction take place in worlds that are irrational, nightmarishly bureaucratic, and darkly ludicrous, in many ways similar to the bizarre, uncontrollable situation Harry, Jake and Roxanne find themselves in during *The Understudy*. Perhaps the most succinct summary of Kafka’s worldview came from the author himself when he said, “In the fight between you and the world – back the world.”

[\(Click here to watch a clip of Franz Kafka’s *The Trial*\)](#)