

Kafka and a job at Generali to discover the world

By Matteo Caccia

On the card, greyed by the years, the questions are pre-printed and occupy the left column, while the space for the answers is on the right, to be filled in by hand, in black ink.

This is the job application form for Assicurazioni Generali's general agency in Prague.

This is Prague, the 2nd of October 1907.

A twenty-four-year-old young man writes to submit his application.

He has graduated in law and has excellent references, coming from Madrid all the way to Prague.

The application will be successful and the young man will be hired, although he will stay in that office for less than a year.

The young man is called Franz Kafka:

Curriculum vitae

«I was born on the 3rd of July 1883 in Prague; I attended the Altstädter Volksschule until year four, then I entered the Altstädter Staatsgymnasium; at 18 I started at the German Karl-Ferdinands Universität. After passing the last state exam, on the 1st of April 1906 I entered into the study of the lawyer Richard Löwy as a practitioner, in the Altstädter Ring. In June, I took the historical "Rigorosum" exam [graduation exam] and obtained my law degree in the same month. As I immediately made clear to the lawyer, I entered his study solely for the purpose of using my time, because from the beginning it was never my intention to remain in the legal profession. On the 1st of October 1906, I began my internship in court, which ended on the 1st of October 1907.»

He is the son of a merchant:

To the question: «Is your father alive? Please state his name, occupation, and place of residence,» he replies: «Hermann Kafka, merchant, Prague, Niklastrasse 36.»

He admits, unconcerned, to never having worked before:

«What are your current financial circumstances? What other income can you count on apart from any salary linked to the employment you have requested?»

Answer: «Until now, my parents have supported me».

Kafka's handwriting is narrow and elongated, resembling the peaks of an electrocardiogram.

He writes in German, the language he knows in addition to Czech, French, and English.

He is single, but he has a friend to whom he writes, called Hedwig Weiler. She is the one to whom he confesses what he desires for his life: distant horizons, windows looking out on unknown worlds.

«Prague – 8 October 1907

I'm at Assicurazioni Generali, yet I hope one day to sit in the chairs of distant lands, looking out of the office windows onto sugar cane fields or Muslim cemeteries».

Ten months later, he will quit for a new job that will not lead him to sugar cane fields, but will allow him to have half a day off to write and, before his death, which will take place sixteen years later at the age of 41, he will write some of the greatest literary masterpieces of all time.

HISTORY

The thousands of personnel files from around the world preserved in the Generali Historical Archives include that of Franz Kafka.

Newly graduated, he worked for nine months, from the 2nd of October 1907, at the general agency in Prague as a clerk in the life insurance branch.

His file contains his application form with a handwritten CV, his medical examination, and the correspondence between Prague and Trieste relating to his recruitment and then to his resignation for health reasons in July 1908.