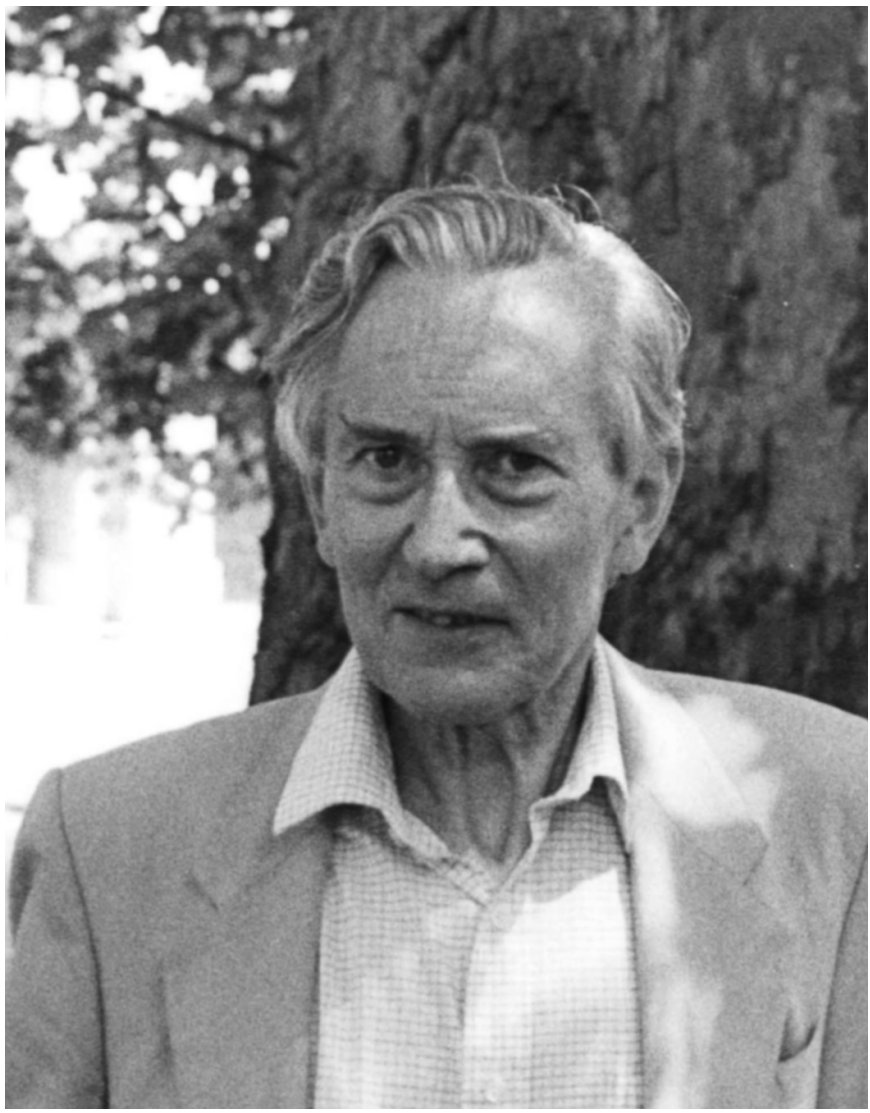

MALCOLM PASLEY *Ulrich Greiner*

John Malcolm Sabine Pasley
1926–2004

MALCOLM PASLEY ACHIEVED A UNIQUE authority as a British scholar in a major area of German literary scholarship, the work of Franz Kafka (1883–1924). Good scholars are often blessed with serendipity, the tendency (it can hardly be called an ability) to chance upon what they need without actually looking for it or even knowing it was there. As with candidates for promotion to General, there is sense in Napoleon's question 'Is he lucky?' A chance encounter gave Pasley's work a new and unexpected direction; indeed, it turned what would always have been intellectually distinguished into something unquestionably central, and directed his meticulous mind to the most basic literary issues.

John Malcolm Sabine Pasley was born on 5 April 1926 in Rajkot, Kathiawar, India, where his father, Sir Rodney Pasley, was teaching history and cricketing at Rajkumar College (Ranjitsinhji's old school). Malcolm once said his birth was the grandest day of his life, celebrated in style by the local maharajas, palaces, elephants and all. He was educated at Sherborne School and Trinity College, Oxford. At 17 he volunteered for the Royal Navy and saw service at the end of the Second World War, using his German for radio traffic interception. (The rumour that he had some involvement with Enigma looks like a legendary back-formation from his later work on Kafka's enigmas.) After hostilities ended, he spent time with the occupation forces in Germany and came away with one useful item of booty, a German typewriter on which all his subsequent writing and editing was done. After graduating in 1949 he held a Laming Travelling Fellowship at the Queen's College, Oxford, which took him to Munich for a year. The college having not favoured his proposal to work on nineteenth-century lyrical poetry, Pasley began research into social

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novelists of that period, initially Fontane, then the Low German dialect writer Fritz Reuter. In 1950 he was appointed a Lecturer at Magdalen and Brasenose Colleges. In 1958 he was elected a Fellow of Magdalen. In 1965 he married Virginia Wait. They had two sons. In 1982 he assumed the baronetcy bestowed on an eighteenth-century ancestor for gallantry at sea against the French.

Quite when Kafka began to fascinate Pasley is not clear. There are no early publications. At that time it was a respected, even revered, vocation to be a university teacher and there was no pressure to rush prematurely into print. Something substantial and considered might well ripen in its own time. That matched Pasley's essentially reserved and fastidious character. The turning point came in 1960, when a tutorial pupil made him aware that a great-nephew of Kafka's, Michael Steiner, was studying law at Lincoln College and, at an energetic remove from what we think of as Kafka's world, rowing in the college boat. The trail led back to Kafka's nieces, Michael's mother Marianne Steiner in London and Vera Saudková in Prague, and to the discovery that their generation (the rest of the family having been murdered in the Shoah) were the legal owners of the bulk of Kafka's manuscripts.

Until then scholars had loosely assumed that these were the property of Kafka's close friend Max Brod. He certainly held them and on one occasion used the manuscript of *The Trial* to disprove the revisionist speculations of a scholar whom he had not allowed to inspect it. Kafka had however three times asked Brod to collect and burn all his manuscripts after his death.[1] The failure to carry out that wish would have left Brod with a somewhat dubious legal title. To be fair, he never claimed ownership of the bulk of the manuscripts, recognising all along the claims of the survivors. Not destroying the papers was a service of unforeseeable magnitude to literature, and was only the start of Brod's positive role in his friend's literary fortunes. Brod was responsible for getting the principal works published in the 1920s, and for again rescuing the manuscripts at threatening moments in twentieth-century history. When the Nazis marched into Prague in 1939, he escaped with the papers via Rumania to Tel Aviv. In 1940 he deposited them in a special safe in the Schocken Library in Jerusalem, where Klaus Wagenbach, the biographer of Kafka's early life and later a collaborator of Pasley's in dating the manu-

[1] Once in conversation, as reported by Brod, 'Franz Kafkas Nachlaß', in *Die Weltbühne*, July 1924, reprinted in *Marbacher Magazin*, 52 (1990), 71; and twice in written form, on a slip Brod found in Kafka's desk after his death and in a never-sent draft letter of 29 Nov. [?1922], later similarly discovered. Both reprinted in *Brod-Kafka Briefwechsel* (see below, n. 4) pp. 365 and 422 f.

scripts,[2] was able to see them; some use was also made of them for the American edition of the works. Then, during the Suez crisis of 1956, Brod transferred them for safety to Switzerland. He still held on to the manuscript of *The Trial* which he claimed was a personal gift, inconsistent though that too was with Kafka's known instructions. At Pasley's suggestion, Mrs Steiner and Mrs Saudková in 1961 generously agreed to have the other manuscripts placed in the Bodleian Library on permanent revocable loan. It was up to Pasley to get them there.

His journey has become a legend among scholars of German: how he travelled across icy roads to Zurich in his exceedingly small car—in the light of Kafka's novella *Die Verwandlung* (*The Transformation*) it makes a good story that it was a Volkswagen Beetle, but alas it was an even smaller Fiat—and collected the manuscripts in person. Only slight adjustments to the story are needed in the interests of exactness. Pasley was in fact already abroad, skiing in Austria, when news reached him of a final agreement with the New York house of Salman Schocken, whose firm still today own the primary publication rights. Though Schocken had always recognised the legal claims of Kafka's remaining relatives, he could somehow never bring himself to loosen his *de facto* hold on the manuscripts. Things moved, however, after his death. Pasley drove to Zurich and matched the bank's elaborate security check of his identity with a rigorous scholarly check of the material they were handing over. The wintry arrival and the confrontation with officials have atmospheric echoes of Kafka's *Castle* and *Trial*. Pasley insured the manuscripts for what now seems the modest sum of £100,000, at which the clerk at Thomas Cook's did not bat an eyelid, packed them into a hurriedly purchased suitcase, and drove his haul back to Oxford. Bodley's then Keeper of Western Manuscripts seemed not unduly impressed by the author's name (it makes a difference having such originals as the *Chanson de Roland* in house) but the Bodleian made up for that later when in 1983, jointly with the Taylorian Library, it mounted a substantial exhibition to mark the centenary of Kafka's birth.

The arrival of the papers in the Bodleian made Oxford the centre of textual scholarship on Kafka, especially of the critical edition in the S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt, on which work now began. A scholarly edition had been expressly foreseen in the contract of March 1965 by which

[2] Malcolm Pasley und Klaus Wagenbach, 'Versuch einer Datierung sämtlicher Texte Franz Kafkas', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 38 (1964), 2, 149–67.

Schocken granted the German rights to Fischer, and Brod too had expected there would eventually be one. The first volumes appeared in the late 1970s and the edition is now (December 2006) complete except for a volume of Kafka's Hebrew studies and the last two volumes of letters. Pasley became the leading figure in a small team of otherwise German editors, and himself took responsibility for the most important texts: *The Castle*, published in 1982, and *The Trial* in 1990. Where diplomacy was necessary among the team or between editors and publisher, he supplied it. The one major material element missing at first was the manuscript of *The Trial*, which Max Brod had meanwhile bequeathed to his partner, Frau Ilse Ester Hoffe. The effort to secure access and edit this text became the centre of a further mini-plot. The manuscript was still entombed in Zurich and only a photocopy was available to work from—wholly inadequate for the kind of minute genetic reconstruction which Pasley was practising. In 1987 and again in 1988 he was allowed to work on the original 'in the ill-lit bowels of a Zurich bank, under the eye of its owner', each time for no more than three or four days.[3] Even to get this far involved prolonged diplomacy on his part: not just personal meetings with and cajolings of Frau Hoffe in Israel, but an elaborate scholarly epicycle, the editing of Kafka's correspondence with Max Brod and their joint travel diaries in two volumes.[4] These, though, were not just a sprat to catch a mackerel. As the central figure in Kafka's life and the precarious preservation of his work, Brod and the record of his friendship with Kafka fully deserved the scrupulous editing that they too received.

Then, suddenly and unexpectedly, in September 1988 the manuscript of *The Trial* was sent for auction to the London branch of Sotheby's. Pasley was able to do some work on it there, but still with interruptions, since the priceless papers were constantly and irresponsibly being flown about the world—to Frankfurt, Vienna, Hong Kong, Tokyo, New York, 'to be dangled in front of potential buyers'.[5] Between underlit Zurich and sporadic access to Bond Street, there can rarely have been more unsettled circumstances in which to carry out a complex scholarly task on a major work. Finally and blessedly, the manuscript was bought at auction by the

[3] Malcolm Pasley, 'Kafka's *Der Process*: what the manuscript can tell us', *Oxford German Studies*, 18–19 (1989–90), 109.

[4] *Max Brod, Franz Kafka. Eine Freundschaft. Reiseaufzeichnungen*. Herausgegeben unter Mitarbeit von Hannelore Rodlauer von Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt am Main, 1987); and *Max Brod, Franz Kafka. Eine Freundschaft. Briefwechsel*. Herausgegeben von Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt am Main, 1989).

[5] Pasley, 'Kafka's *Der Process*', see above, n. 3.

Marbach Literaturarchiv, even then not without some last-minute drama: an unknown figure appeared to have outbid Marbach's visible representative, but turned out to be an agent also bidding on the Archive's behalf, for what tactical reason is not clear. The price was around a million pounds, and there had been a bit more in reserve. It was put together in exemplary fashion with the help of the German Federal government, the Kulturstiftung der Länder (Cultural Foundation of the German States), the government of Baden-Württemberg, and private donations, in particular from the publisher Klaus G. Saur. The Marbach Archive celebrated their coup appropriately with an exhibition in the spring and summer of 1990, in which Pasley played a major part.[6] It coincided with the appearance of his corresponding volume in the critical edition.

By harsh misfortune it also coincided with the early signs, ironically first felt at Marbach, of the multiple sclerosis that was to accompany and end his life on 8 March 2004. In 1986 he had taken early retirement from his college and university posts, to devote himself full-time to editing and writing on Kafka. He also confessed to unease at no longer having total recall of textual detail across the broad range of literature he taught, something that few tutors would claim and fewer still would regard as a necessary condition for continuing to teach. Pasley had, incidentally, been an admirable tutor: unshowy, not voluble, but with a concentrated attention that registered any flaw of argument or formulation, sometimes with a slight catch of the breath. A glance up from one's erring script would meet a famous pair of quizzically raised eyebrows. The scholarly precision did not conceal a cordial personal commitment.

The progress of his illness did not stop Pasley working. He edited a further volume of writings and fragments from Kafka's Nachlass, put together a collection of his own essays and produced new translations of some of the primary texts. It became increasingly hard for him to receive visits, but he went on responding with a prompt and supportive word to the work former pupils sent him: a tutor to the last.

Life was not made more comfortable by attacks on Pasley's integrity over a facsimile edition of Kafka planned by the Frankfurt Stroemfeld Verlag. This had been started with a volume reproducing the Marbach manuscript of *The Trial*, announced as the first in a complete historical-critical edition, although the publisher and editors had not yet even ascertained who owned the manuscripts, let alone sought their agreement. Mrs Steiner was understandably reluctant to grant instant permission.

[6] It is the subject of *Marbacher Magazin*, 52 (1990).

Pasley acted as her representative in correspondence. If his responses were somewhat abrupt, that too is understandable. Having probed the depths of Kafka's manuscript complexity, he was unimpressed by the naïve presumption of the new would-be editors. Transatlantic protesters, including a not unknown professorial grandee, rushed in, invoking the principle of free scholarly access and appealing to the Academy. (In response, a note stating the facts was at once circulated to the Fellowship.) The protesters failed to consider that access to manuscripts, which the Bodleian grants for legitimate scholarly use, does not automatically include permission to reproduce and publish them wholesale.

If it had been more tactfully approached from the start, the project need never have caused such friction, and once the dust had settled, the Stroemfeld edition was able to proceed—rightly in the end, since there is no questioning the vivid impression a good facsimile allows. Nor was there essentially any 'conflict of interests', since the two kinds of edition have different aims and in practice can complement each other. The claims made for the facsimile edition to a 'higher authenticity'[7] were tautological: a facsimile is self-evidently authentic in its own terms, but stops short at the level of primary textual material. Historical, yes; critical in this instance barely, since the edition sets its face against a stable text ('authoritarian text-constitution') and is aimed at an imagined reader who prefers to be faced with raw manuscript material and its still unresolved problems.[8]

As to the fate of the manuscripts, Mrs Steiner and Mrs Saudková have since gifted them to the Bodleian, an astounding act of generosity when one considers the profit private owners customarily make from the lucky possession of important papers and works of art, and the immense sums Kafka's manuscripts would have fetched. A third share is held by another niece, Frau Gerti Kaufmann, but since the shares are notional, not identified, there is no possibility of selling it off separately. It too thus remains

[7] In a brief obituary of Malcolm Pasley in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* for 9 March 2004, also suggesting that the Fischer edition was already 'too late'. My objections to both points appear in a letter published by the *FAZ* on 27 March.

[8] 'Probleme [. . .] wollen nicht gelöst sein, sondern als solche herausgearbeitet und begriffen werden'.—'Wer Kafka mag, hängt auch an den Zügen, der Graphik seiner Handschrift. Und wer sich mit Kafka auseinandersetzt, will wissen, "was geschrieben steht." Hierzu benötigt er nicht einen sogenannten "Lesetext", sondern neben dem Faksimile eine minutiöse Transkription der Handschrift sowie detaillierte Beschreibungen der in Kafkas Nachlaß häufigen internen Manuskriptwanderungen und der Überlieferung (Angaben über Fundorte, Besitzer).' Roland Reuss, introductory volume of the *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe sämtlicher Handschriften, Drucke und Typoskripte Franz Kafkas* (Basel/Frankfurt am Main, 1995), pp. 16 and 17.

in Bodley. In a touching letter of 2 May 1961 to Marianne Steiner, with whom he had been corresponding amicably since the Second World War, Max Brod expressed his pleasure that the manuscripts had found a home in the Bodleian. He called it an event of the highest historical importance ('höchste säkulare Bedeutung') and he recognised Pasley's enthusiasm and commitment to Kafka and his works. Whatever reservations Brod may later have had about new critical directions in the sphere which had been so intimately his own, he had handed on the torch in a generous spirit.

Pasley's place in Kafka scholarship is secure and *sui generis*. His reconstruction of the major texts is authoritative and of an order of intricacy that will surely never need repeating. It matches torn pages, analyses watermarks, measures the ebb and flow of Kafka's inspiration through changes in his (always impeccably clear) handwriting and in the word-density per page, and registers the way in which transition to a new notebook—Kafka used notebooks to give his writing a gently compelling frame—made composition harder, as is shown by the greater incidence of erasures and new starts. Later critics may draw further conclusions from these bibliographical findings, but the essential spadework is done.

Nor is it merely mechanical and external to the form and substance of the texts. For example, reinstating their original punctuation, where Brod had consistently replaced commas by full points, not only restored dramatically the rhythm of Kafka's prose but could be shown case by case to be crucial in constituting literary meaning. Punctuation, *pace* the bibliographer W. W. Greg, was anything but an 'accidental'; it was an integral part of the creative act.[9] Again, retracing Kafka's compositional process as he followed his pen into the labyrinth and improvised a narrative—it was even possible provocatively to say 'in the beginning was nothing'[10]—virtually undid the earlier view that he was a planner and executor of systematic religious allegory, the view popularised by Brod. Indeed, only one work, *The Trial*, can be conclusively shown to have been conceived from the first complete with its ending. Even titles were correspondingly a later addition: only after the accomplished birth (a favourite metaphor of Kafka's) could the child be given a name. Pasley achieved these insights by methods developed as he worked, without prior training in the editorial craft.

[9] Pasley, 'Zu Kafkas Interpunktion', in Malcolm Pasley, *Die Schrift ist unveränderlich* (Frankfurt am Main, 1995), p. 121.

[10] Pasley, 'Der Schreibakt und das Geschriebene. Zur Frage der Entstehung von Kafkas Texten', in Pasley, op. cit., p. 106.

'Not by Brod alone' was the witty heading to the *TLS* review of the first volume in the historical-critical edition. Brod regarded this new textual scholarship as dry positivism, yet in an anything but dry way the account Pasley gives in his textual commentaries and essays takes the reader close to Kafka's mind and hand as he explores his inner world through a tentative pen. In a more precise and fruitful sense than the wearisome cliché that all modern writing is 'really about writing', the twists and turns of the fiction are shown to refer also to the ups and downs of the writer's creative mood, the alternating phases of self-confidence and self-doubt. At the humorous extreme, enigmatic figures about whose meaning much ink had been spilled sometimes turned out, as in the story *Eleven Sons*, to be references to other stories of Kafka's own.[11] None of this gainsays the seriousness and profundity of Kafka's explorations.

At first sight, author and critic were strangely paired. It was paradoxical that, as one obituary notice put it, 'this model English gentleman understood the mind of one of the most idiosyncratic and radical writers of the twentieth century better than anyone else in his time'.[12] He even came to think of Kafka as a younger brother.

As an editor in a less stringent sense of the word, Pasley was also responsible for a volume of essays on the crucial issue of Nietzsche's imagery, and for a high-level introduction to German history and culture by various hands.[13] He was also a founding co-editor of the yearbook *Oxford German Studies*. But Kafka was the centre of his life's work, quietly symbolised by the Kafka manuscript—a simple postcard—on his mantelpiece at home.

Pasley's distinction was early and variously recognised: by an Honorary D.Phil. of the University of Giessen (1980), by membership of the German Academy of Language and Literature (1983), by the award of the Austrian Cross of Honour for Learning and the Arts (1987), and by Fellowship of the British Academy (1991). As important to him as these formal recognitions by the scholarly world was his connection with Kafka's family and home city of Prague, where Pasley was very much *persona grata*. In the Prague Spring of 1968 Kafka had become a central

[11] See J. M. S. Pasley, 'Two Kafka Enigmas: "Elf Söhne" and "Die Sorge des Hausvaters"', *Modern Language Review*, 49 (1964), 1. 73–81; and J. M. S. Pasley, 'Franz Kafka: "Ein Besuch im Bergwerk"', *German Life and Letters*, NS 18 (1964), 1. 40–6.

[12] Kevin Hilliard, in the *Daily Telegraph* for 25 March 2004.

[13] *Nietzsche, Imagery and Thought* (London, 1978); and *Germany, A Companion to German Studies* (London, 1972).

feature of the city's culture and a focus of interest and pride to Czech scholars and intellectuals. Forced underground by the crackdown that followed, Kafka triumphantly resurfaced after the Velvet Revolution of 1989. It was at this point that Pasley paid his last visit to Prague, to be received with enthusiasm and orchids by members of the Franz Kafka Society, surely a day to equal the maharajas and elephants.

In 1995 Pasley published the slender volume, *Die Schrift ist unveränderlich*, bringing together his Kafka essays—or most of them. Leaving out a couple meant there were just eleven.

T. J. REED
Fellow of the Academy