

TLS

Leon Plantinga **Beethoven's tumult and triumph**
Michael Hofmann **Sublime, ordinary Brecht**
Edith Hall **Keeping Oresteia in the family**
Anna Girling **Edith Wharton moves on**



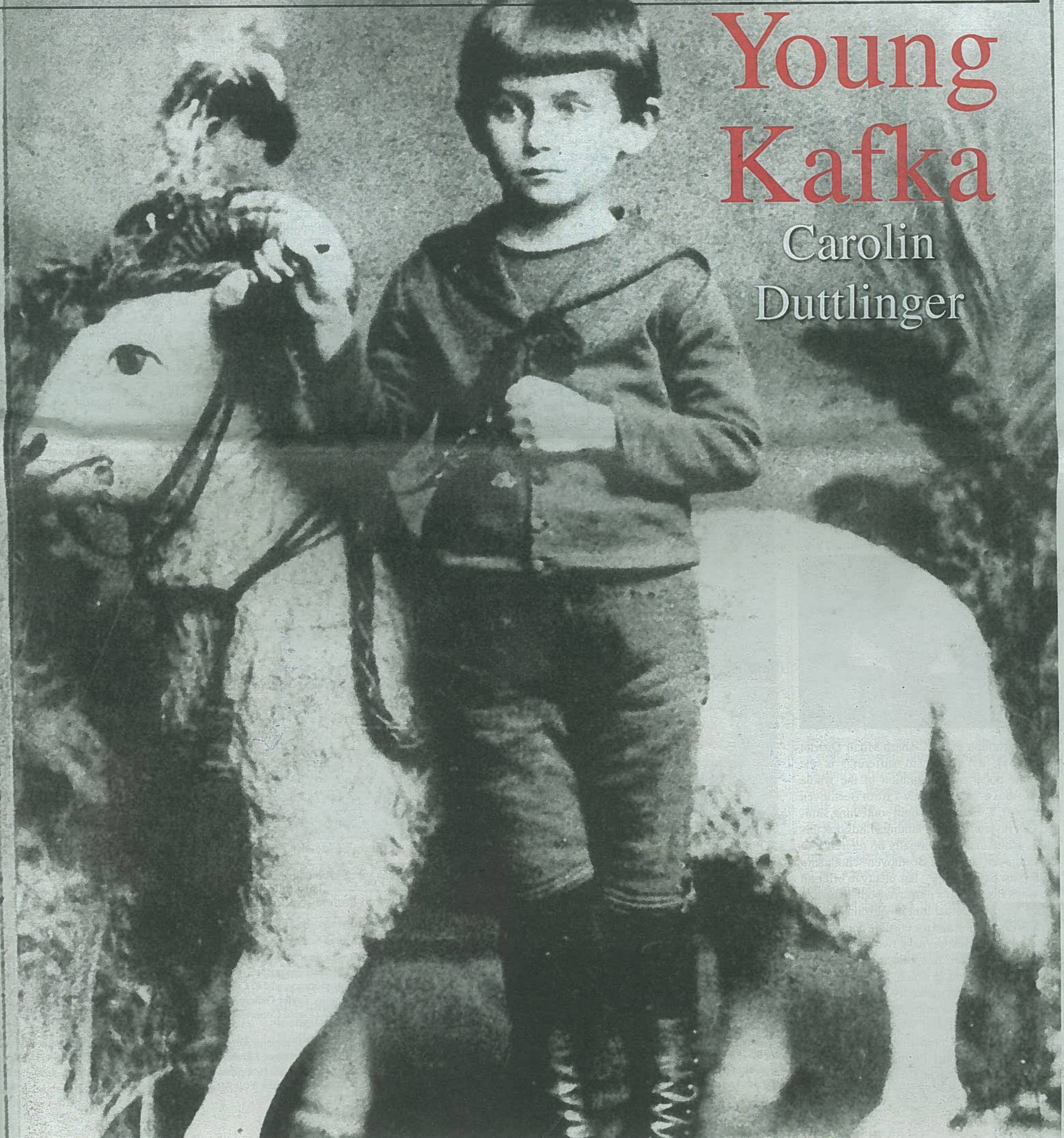
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Young Kafka

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THIS WEEK

The forty-five typewritten pages of Franz Kafka's "Letter to his Father" are, as Carolin Duttlinger says, "the closest we have to Kafka's memoirs". Now, with the publication of *Kafka: Die frühen Jahre* (The early years), Reiner Stach's three-volume, 2,000-page work on the not quite forty-one years of Kafka's life is complete. "Counteracting perceptions of Kafka as somewhat removed from the major events of his time", Stach shows "how Kafka's life story is closely entwined with... the fabric of modernity"; the trilogy is "a true landmark of biographical scholarship". Bertolt Brecht, "a great poet, one of the three or four best in the whole of German literature", had "those three qualities that T. S. Eliot persuasively says are seldom found together except in the greatest poets, and identifies as 'abundance, variety and complete competence' – which brings Brecht into the delicious company of Tennyson. Brother Alfred and Brother Bertolt, the two Dirty Monks together". The reviewer – you guessed it – is Michael Hofmann, the poet and tireless translator who, while mourning the passing of "the old Methuen *Poems 1913–1956*", extends a (very) guarded welcome to a new selection of Brecht's love poetry in English.



"The triumph of the C-sharp Minor Quartet [Op. 131], its answer to suffering, is the supreme poise and integration of the whole work": thus a "massive" new Life of Beethoven (pictured). T. S. Eliot thought something similar. Our reviewer Leon Plantinga finds that this book, while making "virtually no reference to the dominant strains in Beethoven scholarship of the past half-century", has plenty to offer on the ways Beethoven's music responded to "the social and intellectual tumult surrounding the French Revolution and the ensuing Napoleonic saga". Alan Forrest reviews two books – one American, the other "unapologetically French" – on that Revolution, in which "fear was all-pervasive. The terrorist mentality was born here". In 1903, England was enjoying the long Edwardian summer, but Edith Wharton was, "after three fraught years", preparing to part company with John Murray, her English publisher – as Anna Girling explains in Commentary.

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