THE ABSURDITY OF REASON
A SEMIOTIC STUDY OF FRANZ KAFKA'S *THE TRIAL*

Dissertation Submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
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Master of Philosophy

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This work is dedicated to the living
Memory of my parents, Dr. Ramanand
Thakur and Smt. Raj Thakur.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **The Absurdity of Reason : A Semiotic Study of Franz Kafka's *The Trial*** submitted by **Ms. Rinky Priyamvada**, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **M.Phil** of Jawaharlal Nehru University, is her original work and has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this university or of any other university.

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Chapter - I

Introduction: An Approach to Analysis

It would be reassuring to begin with the conventional ... "In what follows, I attempt to analyse this particular literary text." But the two words 'analyze' and 'literary text' – make me stop short. Both the verb and the noun are loaded with significance.

What is a literary text and is an analysis possible? Analysis can be perceived as opposed to synthesis, in that it leads to separating of any material or abstract entity into its constituent elements. This process can be employed as a method to study the essential features of the object of analysis and the relations between these features.

The title of the dissertation lays claim to a semiotic analysis of the proposed text. A semiotic approach, to the analysis of a literary text, would imply a concern with the complete signifying system of the text and the codes and conventions we need to understand in order to be able to read it.

A literary text is a complex nexus of interrelated signs. Each sign in language is,a union of signifier (i.e. a sound image or its graphic equivalent) and a signified (i.e. the referent; the concept referred to). This is the Saussurian concept of a sign. But, according to the Cartesian theory, a one to one correspondence between the signifier and the signified cannot be. The significatory role of a signifier lies only in its resemblance with the referent and not in a coincidence with it. It is the union of the field of such a signifier with the field of signified that results in significance.

The literary text is a network of such signs. An abstraction of the latent relations of these signs leads to the unfolding of the discourse. The significance of the discourse lies in the immanent design of the whole which dominates the manifest text. The analysis of the discourse would involve a complete decomposition of the text, for it is only a thorough understanding of the constituting process that can lead to the comprehension of the significance. To decompose is to apprehend the rapport that exists between the various constituting elements of the text, with a view to understanding their significance in the creation of the entire discourse.

Decomposition is rendered necessary for the observation of the sequential functioning of the text. A literary text is constructed by means of sequentially placed elements. But this sequence is a mere diachronic progression of the text or the syntactic manifestation of the discourse. Beneath this manifest sequence, there is an entire latent network of signifiers. The basis of the syntactic progression or the metonymic constitution of the text is the metaphoric, paradigmatic choices that the author makes. If one is to cull out the meaning of the discourse, it is the latent network or sequence which becomes extremely significant. The metonymic relations are manifest. In contrast, the metaphoric relations are latent and are established at an immanent level. A semiotic analysis would involve a perception and comprehension of the immanent relations purely at a semantic level which combine signifiers in a non-sequential order.

The degree of complication and structuring of the various elements in a literary text is usually greater then that met with in other uses of language. A literary discourse is a specific perception of an empirical reality and therefore, creation of a literary discourse results in the creation of a new structure of significance. This literary discourse as a unique structure of significance has, as its constituents, the words of language as cultural signifiers. Cultural signifiers can at best be approximate, and never precise, referents. Each signifier has multiple semantic features and thus, the comprehension of it could be at various levels. All these bring about the problem of ambiguity in perception and interpretation. Since a literary discourse is the presentation of a specific perception, even its interpretation becomes a specific one. In this process, the analyzer's interpretation might be quite different from, or more than, what the author attempted. But, it is in this, that an endeavour at analysis, gets imbued with creativity itself.

After having delineated the approach, I should spell out the aim of the dissertation. The endeavour, in what follows, is to effect a semiotic study of a work of Czèch born, German writer, Franz Kafka. The work was first published in 1924, after the death of Kafka as *Der Prozess*. Due to language constraints, this analysis has to be based upon Edwin and Willa Muirs translation of the original. The translation is titled *The Trial.*

The Trial lends itself well to a semiotic analysis. As Eric Marson puts it, "Kafka's texts, in comparison with other specimens of narrative prose, have a greater density of reference between the composite elements."[1] A close reading of any of Kafka's texts is an experience unique in itself. Every detail of *The Trial* is potentially capable of bearing significance. Each detail is meaningfully integrated with the vast majority of the other elements of the text.

Before I venture forth on the analysis, it would be a good idea to recount briefly the narrative of the text. The novel begins with the arrest of the protagonist, Josef K., on his thirtieth birthday, proceeds with the increasing involvement of K. in his trial and culminates with the consummation of his death-sentence on the eve of K.'s thirty-first birthday. The crucial circumstance about K.'s trial is the fact that the charge against him is never specified. When K. asks, at his arrest, what he is charged with; he is told that while there is no possibility of error, the Court is 'attracted' by guilt, which can thus, evidently, not be in doubt. The existence of a guilt—some guilt—is assumed, but its nature is left undefined and remains unknown both to the protagonist and the reader.

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[1] Marson, Eric; *Kafka's Trial: The Case Against Josef K.*, University of Queensland Press, Queensland. 1975.

Thus, as the reader progresses with the novel, she is stifled along with K. and his unspecified guilt, baffled by the same endless arguments, confused by the inscrutability of the court and finally relieved when the execution is carried out. It is then that the claustrophobia ends.

In spite of its slightly nightmarish quality and the disorienting effect it has on its readers, *The Trial*, for the most part, takes place in a perfectly ordinary setting, in a modern pension owned by Frau Grubach where K. resides, in a bank where K. is employed as a junior manager, in tenement buildings and in offices where there are files and safes. Only occasionally does it move to stranger places, like the cathedral in complete darkness towards the end where the priest recounts the legend of the doorkeeper of the law to K.; the attic with its court officials and the magistrates' court off a remote staircase. Thus, the world of *The Trial* is the world as conventionally seen and commonly accepted. But Kafka sees this world through to its depths and this apparent consistency and conventionality bring out its absurdity.

At the very outset, a clarification becomes necessary. This analysis here, is based on the translated version of Kafka's original text. One cannot overlook the fact that during translation, the translators' particular interpretation of the various semantic features might have crept in. In fact, the original title, *Der Prozess*, has no precise equivalent in English. It contains simultaneous implications of both 'process' and 'trial'.

Besides, Kafka's biography by his life-long friend, Max Brod, talks about the text's conception, realization and publication. *The Trial* is a fragment, and was so regarded by its author. In fact, Kafka considered this work of his to be unfinished. Max Brod excised a considerable amount of manuscript material before the first publication. This exercise was probably to render the manuscript publishable. If the entire manuscript was to be considered, the analysis would probably have some new and different, even opposing, aspects to it. Here, in order to avoid further possible contradictions, in a text replete with ambiguities, the object of study is a Penguin edition. This is a popular edition in English where the fragmentary chapters have been omitted. This text has ten chapters in all. Kafka is responsible for the division into chapters as well as chapter headings, but the arrangement of the chapters was Brod's doing, as he himself admits.

A perusal of any of Kafka's biographies and his published letters (especially to Felice) and portions of his diaries give one the impression of Kafka constantly having a feeling of being on trial. This was due to the unchallengeable authority of his dreaded yet adored father as also due to his inability to reconcile his desire for a close attachment with another person while wishing for a life of isolation and self absorption, which he considered essential for his writing. Being a perfectionist, this sense of being on trial was probably an outcome of the unachievable goals he set himself. As Ronald Hayman puts it, "Nothing was more integral to Kafka's vision than his awareness of himself as a failure, an awareness that burns its way into his narrative style."[2].

The court as the authority symbolizing the patriarch who is fallible but has double standards as regards his own weaknesses and others is quite evident. A number of interpreters argue that his writing self, with its ability to produce texts full of ambiguities and shifting paradoxes, was cultivated by Kafka in order to escape and defy the constraints and false certitudes of the practical, functional, bourgeois world of his father and indeed of his own daily existence.

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[2] Hayman, Ronald; *K: A biography of Kafka*. Phoenix. London. 1996.

Kafka embarked upon *The Trial* in 1914, soon after breaking his engagement with Felice Bauer in the July of that year. Pain and recriminations followed. Felice, alongwith her friend Grete Bloch, confronted him at the Askanischer Hof. It was a coincidence that the word Hof (meaning 'court') featured in the name of his favourite Berlin hotel. In any case, he found the entire confrontation with Felice, Grete and two other friends akin to an ongoing persecution. Obvious connections between Josef K.'s trial and what Kafka himself referred to as his own trial have been drawn up. Though engulfed in controversy, Fräulein Bürstner is often likened to Felice. Quite a few images in the text derive from the Felice experience. The imagery of ropes and surveillance, used in the diary after the engagement party, is developed in the first chapter of the novel, when Josef K. is told that he is being arrested, but not imprisoned. But it was not only the scene at the Askanischer Hof that inspired *The Trial*. The paradoxical combination of freedom and confinement had deeper roots in Kafka's subjective experience. Right from his childhood, throughout most of his life, he had felt neither entirely free nor entirely a prisoner. The reluctance to marrying Felice lay in the fear of loss of freedom or rather loss of that vast loneliness through which he experienced the heightened life of inspired writing.

In his writings in his diary, Kafka called himself K. K. who is Kafka's secret self, his banished self, his suppressed but nonetheless idealized self is the prototype of Josef K. of *The Trial* . "Everything," as Kafka wrote in his diary while working on *The Trial,* "has been subordinated to my desire to portray my own inner life."[3] In portraying his own inner life in *The Trial*, Kafka did so from the point of view of his outer self. The implacable objectivity of his style may be attributed to this duality of personality. For his outer self was a detached, aloof, imperturbable, rather amused, even masochistic observer.

However closely one studies Kafka's life for clues to account for his extraordinary writing, there always remains a gulf separating the unique products of his imagination from the circumstances he shared with other Jews, German speakers in Prague. The best way to study the workings of his imagination is possibly through the imagery and structures of the works it produced. Yet, one cannot forget that these works were not created in a historical, social or intellectual vacuum. Therefore, a delineation of these contexts, which provided at least some of the points of departure, becomes essential.

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[3] Brod, Max: *Franz Kafka: A Biography by Max Brod*; Schocken Books, New York, 1963.

Kafka began his literary career at a time when the new century was perceived as heralding an age of new freedoms but also of new threats to stable identity. The perception of change was fuelled by the economic processes of industrialization, the advent of stock markets and expanding international trade, by new means of transport and communication, by population growth and the changing balance between the rural and urban sectors and by the spread of democratic, political ideals. As perceived by scientific positivism and liberalism, these changes heralded progress towards greater control over nature for the benefit of humanity and towards emancipation from feudal bonds in a new urbane, cosmopolitan culture.

But sustenance of faith in liberal individualism meant turning a blind eye to the effects of the modernizing process: gross class inequalities which made a mockery of promised opportunity; the unfulfilled ambitions of the new proletariat and the poverty of those displaced by new production methods; sprawling urban growth bringing disease and prostitution on an unparalleled scale; generational tensions as sons sought to overthrow paternal authority and find their own way in the new marketplace: the uneven pace of change and the survival of archaic practices in the brave new world; national, ethnic and gender tensions as subaltern people sought emancipation from imperialist domination and women battled against exclusion from the rights of man.

As the old bases of identity rooted in birthright, custom, and religion were displaced by competitive individualism, new pseudo - scientific discourses arose to justify imperial power and class inequality and to fix identity in a world of rapid change. In the context of *The Trial*, with its urban settings, the themes of the old, the new, and the eternal are strengthened. Interpretations of Kafka's works have focussed on the question of identity. In fact, a majority of his corpus of literary production can be viewed as a tension between pursuit of and flight from identity.

This question of identity has to be viewed in the context of Kafka as a male Jew through a period when persecution and baneful ideology were driving Jews towards a collective identification. At the same time, this identification ran counter to other material and ideological facets of modernization which tended to dissipate this Jewish identity. In the new urban world, where identity was in a constant flux, a stabilization at identity was sought within national, racial or class elites defined through exclusions and oppositions. The Jews, legally excluded from nationhood, were attacked for not having an identity and also for trying to undermine the national identity of others through infiltration.

In liberal ideology society is the arena in which the free, mobile individual can rise, prosper and realize talents. If unfulfilled, such promises provoked resentments and scapegoating of minorities, accused of illegitimately profiteering and so blocking the advance of the people. And if fulfilled they provoked fears of loss of privilege, answered by new ways of fixing identity in terms of race, nation or culture to keep out the competition. In this sense, Jews in Europe were the scapegoats of modernity. They were regarded as both atavistic and too modern at the same time. The former view was true of the Jewish refugees from eastern Europe who were more orthodox in their customs and dress while the western Jews were regarded as modern due to their rootless cosmopolitanism. Thus, progressive faith in modernity and reactionary anti- capitalist rhetoric combined to transform old religious prejudice into a new, biologistic anti-semitism.

Acculturated Jews in Central Europe relied on a stable political and social structure for their identity, as also for their physical safety. The promise of stability had grown out of elementary principles of Enlightenment.

These principles were acculturated by European Jews for their entire sense of place in European society depended on them. When the stability of the entire society was drawn into question, to whom could a Jew turn.

George Mosse has described the idealisation of masculinity as the foundation of nation and society[4]. Masculinity is a complex and even contradictory construction. It has to be conceptualised in relation to the construction of femininity. If women were the negation of masculinity, it followed that in their lack of national identity, the Jews were feminine.

In Kafka's days as now, the most pressing threats of violence came from racism, but the most intimate threat to identity comes from gender. Cross-cutting to express racial tension through gender anxiety marks many of Kafka's figures. If social mobility brought the threat of an unnatural mingling of different identities, so too did agitation for the emancipation of women. The interfusing of race, gender and class ideology provides a framework for some elements in Kafka's works.

In chronicling Josef K.'s struggle to discover the nature of his guilt, the identity of his judges, the letter of the law, and his stubborn efforts to pit reason and common sense against the flawless logic of a sentence based on a verdict beyond rational comprehension: Kafka without stylistic extravagance or verbal excesses, demolished the solid, taken-for-granted certitudes of nineteenth-century realism with its black-and-white contrasts and sharply defined outlines. In fact, *The Trial* can be perceived as a revolt against reason, realism and the mores of the Jewish middle class.

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[4] Boa, Elixabeth: *Kafka: Gender, Class and Race in the letters and fictions;* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996.

Kafka, almost demolished the structure of the novel itself as he pursued guilt into the realm of the universal without ever losing sight of the specific, of the most minute detail of gesture or appearance, until the evidence in the proceedings against Josef K. sufficed to justify any verdict twice over. This is applicable not only against the accused but, with at least equal force, against his judges. It is this dynamic ambiguity, that opens the novel to a multiplicity of interpretations, while at the same time closing any claim to one definitive reading.

Kalka's immense technical achievement in maintaining a single narrative perspective is remarkable. This is achieved through total absence of traditional orientating information from himself as author. This means that the author has no standpoint in the stories or novels distinct from that of the protagonist, whose eyes, ears, and mind register everything the author records.

Kafka's writing can be considered as an extended exercise in free indirect speech, where each word is drawn from the vocabulary of the focal character and simply re-cast in the form of third-person statements by a neutral narrator. Thus, any valuation or view of the world expressed in them is to be attributed to the protagonist rather than the author. The reader perceives only what the major character perceives, knows only his thoughts, and experiences the reality of the story only through his mind and senses. Moreover, the unfolding of the fictional reality is unidirectional. The text is more or less devoid of previews or flashbacks.

This narrative impersonalism is to a large extent overcome by the use of textually contained symbols which indirectly allow for the transmission of essential information. Kafka's symbolic objects do not conform to the nature of objects in the actual world. They are subject not to the determinate laws of nature, but rather to the laws of that unique world in which they have their special function. Therefore, we find his images meaning different things not only at different times, but at the same time.

Kafka'a fiction has often been analyzed as the representation of an inner world. Interpreters have perceived, in his work, a hidden level of reality beyond man's cognizance. At the same time one cannot deny, that Kafka acutely observed the world of daily existence and produced novels as full of social and psychological insight as any in the mainstream realist tradition.

The day-to-day, repetitive life of Josef K. is presented in the minutest details. Kafka is deeply interested in every detail, every bit of this reality. Every chapter is an example of the author's remarkable preciseness. It appears as if he attempts to know the world and the souls of men in the most meticulous details.

Immediately bound up with this interest is a pervading irony. Even the most gruesome episodes in Kafka's writings are a curious mix of humour, an investigator's interest and tender irony. An instance of this is the fifth chapter of *The Trial* which contains the Whipper episode. In fact, the devices of irony are used to undermine the protagonist's perceptions, interpretations and evaluations of his world. It is through this literary device that the strictly mono-perspectival aura of Kafka's fictions are made hazy. A fine balance is achieved between the point of view of the protagonist and that of a narratorial consciousness which makes its presence known subtly but insistently

Kafka's writing is subtle, multi-layered and allusive. But his allusions are not coded messages. These allusions surround the central images of his stories, extending and controlling their implications. Kafka's novels are exercises in sustained irony, and are designed to induce a fine balance in the reader between emotional participation and the poise of superior knowledge.

Kafka derived a great amount of his knowledge of the world and of life, as well as his skeptical pessimism from his experiences in the office, from coming into contact with workmen suffering under injustice and from having to deal with the long drawn-out process of official work and from the stagnating life of files. Whole chapters of the novel derive their outer covers, their realistic wrappings from the atmosphere Kafka breathed in the Workers' Accident Institute.

There is not a word in Kafka's presentation that does not lend new colour to the text, not a word that is meaningless. Kafka shows skills of this keen observation that is never boring. Examples of this are the scenes of office life, which have been so thoroughly experienced or of the rivalry between the clerks in *The Trial.*

Difficulties of interpretation are bound to arise from this intermingling of obscurity and precision, mystery and pattern, specificity of event and multiplicity of meaning. Though a reader might experience distraction and at times, even despair while reading Kafka: the author's love for detail actually brings out his love for real life. And this points to Kafka's belief in the "indestructible" in human beings. *The Trial* can be perceived as the author pleading guilty to being human. Thus, Josef K. is supposedly made to suffer by the court not because of any identifiable wrongdoing but simply because he is a human being.

Language contains multiple possibilities for ambiguity and uncertainty which affect both the sending and the reception of messages. Kafka exploited this potential in language so as to preserve the aura of the mysterious and 'uncanny' around the things emerging from his strange inner world, but also to allude to a whole range of shared cultural references.

Kafka's literary corpus can be seen as the product of one of the greatest experts on power. The social and psychological sphere in his texts are shaped principally by relationships based on power. This is further complicated by the mixing of the naturalistic, the iconic, and the fetishtic in his novels. *The Trial* especially becomes an unsettling mix of different signifying systems.

The Trial is a record of the struggle of Josef K. to achieve a balance between essentially reconcilable opposites. Just like his creator he was incapable of compromise.

The interpreter of *The Trial* metamorphoses into another participant in this struggle.

Chapter - II

Latent Linkages

In this chapter, the endeavour is to present the semiotic structure of the discourse. The text under consideration is *The Trial* as translated by the Muirs and is a Penguin edition. The entire text consists of ten chapters. To render the analysis convenient, I have divided the entire text into fifteen sequences. These sequences can be considered as the major signifying units. The limited scope of the work has made it impossible to delve further into the text by dividing the sequences into subensembles and microensembles. Nonetheless, the main signifying ensembles have been paid attention to. The latter was necessary to bring out the various interlinked strands in the text, which lie beneath the syntactic progression and are responsible for the metaphoric relations of the discourse.

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The sequences are as follows:

I. The Arrest

II. Conversation with Frau Grubach, Fräulein Bürstner, and her friend Montag

III. First Interrogation

IV. The Offices, the Student, the Washerwoman

V. The Whipper episode

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VI. K.'s Uncle

VII. The Advocate and Leni

VIII. The Advocate

IX. Manufacturer: the Bank Work

X. The Painter — Titorelli

XI. The Commercial Traveller—Block

XII. Dismissal of the Advocate

XIII. The Cathedral: the Italian Guest

XIV. The Legend

XV. The End—Journey and the Execution.

For Josef K., hero of *The Trial*, the dream of a typical bourgeois male, once realised, turns into a nightmare. Even having a large office with a large window in his capacity as a chief clerk of a large bank offers no protection against the intrusion into his life of an unknown court which robs him of all peace of mind and eventually has him killed in a quarry at the edge of town.

Kafka shares out parts of his own name in various forms or disguises amongst Josef K., Franz (one of the guards who informs him of his arrest) and three officials from K.'s bank: *K*ullich, *K*aminer and Rabensteiner (the last name is related to his family name). The arrested, the arrestor and the witnesses, in other words, are all ' K's. The raven's colour is then picked up as a motif in the black coat donned by Josef K. for his first meeting with an official from the court, in the black suits, coats or hats worn by the men who arrest and execute him and by those present at his first hearing before the court, in the black eyes of the advocate's nurse Leni and the ' darting black eyes' of the audience in the court room, and in the black ' Tartar' beard of the doorkeeper who is said to stand before the entrance of the Law.

The artistic structure, which binds together the materials of *The Trial*, is based on the method of motif repetition and variation. Before attempting to answer the larger questions of Josef K.'s 'guilt' or the 'meaning' of his trial, it is necessary to examine in detail the links between the elements of the fiction created by means of this technique of interweaving.

First of all, I would like to bring out the latent linkages between the first and the last sequence.

Thus the action which begins on the morning of Josef K.'s thirtieth birthday ends, neatly, on the eve of his thirty- first. The novel begins and ends with K. in a semi-prone position: he is sitting up in bed when he first sees a guard from the court, and is made to sit down by his executioners who then lean him against a stone on which they bed his head. One of the executioners lays his hand on K.'s wind pipe which is exactly where K. had kissed Fräulein Bürstner on the night following his arrest. There are two executioners in the last sequence just as there are two guards in the first. Just as one of the guards pats him on the shoulder at the beginning, so one of the executioners pats him on the back at the end. Just as Josef K. paces up and down the room during his first interview with the supervisor, so he is lead back and forth in the quarry until a suitable spot is found for his execution. Having donned his best black coat to meet the supervisor in sequence one, K. awaits his executioners in the same formal manner. Whereas the guards had instructed him to get dressed for his first interview, he is undressed by the executioners in the last sequence. If the tightly stretched gloves, Josef K. wears on the night of his death echo the tight fitting garment worn by the first guard, which he thought resembled a travel suit. So this in turn foreshadows K.'s last journey through the town in the company of his executioners. As he walks between them he catches sight of a female figure who strikes him as being very similar to Fräulein Bürstner, the woman in whose bedroom the supervisor had formally announced the fact of his arrest. Puzzled by his strange arrest, K. had reflected that he lived in a state under the rule of law; on the way to his place of execution he sees several policemen whose duty it would be to enforce those laws if he were to appeal for their help. On the morning of his arrest. Josef K. is annoyed to see first an old woman and then an old couple watching him from a room across the street: on the night of his execution. similarly, he notices a pair of little children in a lighted window across the street. One of the last things K sees before he dies is a single figure at a window at a distance. Like the many other parallels and echoes. the chiasmus(one. two; two, one) formed by these figures is probably a product of highly conscious artistry. The two sequences. the first and the last correspond to one another.

Certain aspects of Josef K.'s behaviour in the last chapter reinforce the impression of an action reaching its appointed and proper end. A suggestion for this is when he awaits the executioners in formal dress even though he has not been informed of their visit in advance. The impression that the action has a known and accepted goal to which it should move is confirmed when the sight of the patrolling policemen prompts K. to pull his executioners off at great speed in the opposite direction. Once they have reached the quarry, K. cooperates with the executioners' efforts to position him satisfactorily, and he knows precisely that his duty would now be to take the butcher's knife from their hands and kill himself with it.

Certain other details of K.'s behaviour indicate that as far he is concerned the ending does not bring matters to a satisfactory conclusion. Although he had anticipated a visit without it having been announced, the two executioners do not quite conform to his expectations. Although he eventually takes the lead, he, at first, resists being frog-marched through the streets by them. Although he takes up his position for the execution voluntarily, his attitude remains forced and unconvincing. His very last gesture is to raise his hands, with fingers stretched wide, in response to the distant figure he sees leaning out of a window and apparently stretching out its arms towards him. This indicates that, only moments before he dies, Josef K. is still ready to accept help and sympathy, still convinced that there remain objections which he had forgotten to make, still protesting that he has never seen the judge or reached the high court. In short, although the last chapter brings the action to an end, it appears to be riddled with unresolved contradictions.

This lack of resolution also contributes to the pattern of correspondences linking the end of the novel with the beginning, since the first sequence, too, had revealed peculiar contradictions in K.'s behaviour. Confronted with the representatives of an unknown court, who lack any form of legitimation, it occurs to K. that he should telephone an influential friend, the state prosecutor Hasterer. The supervisor agrees to the request, but adds that he can see no sense in it. K. finds this comment astonishing yet his own decision, not to call Hasterer after all, is just as astonishing and self contradictory. One might speculate that K. changes his mind out of fear of reprisals, although the supervisor actually urges him to carry out the decision, pointing to the next room where the telephone is kept. Alternatively, the decision not to call Hasterer may reflect some sub- or semi-conscious acknowledgement on K.'s part that the appearance of the court in his life does indeed have little or nothing to do with the state prosecutor. K.'s response to the imminent departure of the guards and the supervisor is similarly ambivalent. As they make to leave, K. suddenly feels his independence of these people increasing and imagines that he can now play with them by running after them and offering them his arrest. However, sarcastically intended, and however much at odds with his earlier objections to the announcement of his arrest, K.'s imaginary gesture may in fact mean just what it says, namely that K. is now asking to be arrested by this unofficial court.

The last sequence of the novel still shows K. behaving, towards the court, with the same perplexing mix of co-operation and resistance as he had shown in the first. *The Trial* is clearly a very peculiar kind of crime story. In this genre final chapters generally solve the mystery, making it clear, at long last, who did what to whom, and why. In *The Trial* by contrast, the usual question, 'Which criminal fits this crime?'is inverted, so that the reader is left asking, even at the very end, what crime, if any, the arrested and executed Josef K. has committed. Indeed, so thoroughly does Kafka re-orient or subvert the genre that things normally taken for granted in crime fiction, in particular the justice and practices of the arresting authority, seem to require at least as much investigation as the actions of the accused. Because K. is not informed of the charges against him, he is unable to offer a defense, because he does not know his accusers, he cannot cross-examine them; because the judge is anonymous, there is no way of knowing whether he or she is disinterested; because the crime is not stated, at least not to the reader as representative of the public, it is not possible to assess the proportionality or fitness of the extreme penalty in relation to the offence. Justice, by any normal definition is not seen to be done.

Now let us take a look at the rest of the interlinkings through the entire text keeping in mind the other sequences. As the novel opens, the male citizen is lying in bed. Following Josef K. himself and the anonymous slanderer who may not exist outside of his defensive imagination, the first figures to be mentioned are three women: the cook, the landlady, and then the old woman looking into K.'s bedroom from the window opposite. Thus the first sign of something wrong is the failure of a female to bring a man his breakfast in bed, and the very first intrusion, preceding the arrest, is the gaze an old woman who will witness K.'s disgrace.The narrator begins by informing us of the arrest but then moves back to just before Franz's entry so that the reader is positioned along with the woman as a witness from above. The first exchange between K. and the intruder concerns the missing breakfast and K.'s first gambit, greeted merely by sniggers, aims to confirm his right to issue orders and be waited on by a woman. K.'s first loss of status, then, is a loss of power to command a woman. The seizure of the breakfast is comically trivial yet profoundly wounding, the triviality deepening the humiliation. Domestic arrangements are intrinsically trivial and part of the unchanging, natural order of things. But by the same token, they belong to the very basis of patriarchy. Life begins anew every day with breakfast, served typically to the man by a woman, a routine stretching back further than memory can go. For an adult man to be so humiliated under the eyes of an old woman evokes an archaic female power from which the adult citizen had thought himself emancipated. Just as the chief clerk's shame at being arrested is compounded by the low vulgarity of Franz and Willem, so the woman's senile air adds to the humiliation of an intelligent, ambitious man, though her senility may be a projection of K.'s resentment of a maternal gaze arriving through windows.

Franz can be seen as an accusatory alter ego bearing his author's name. Eating the apple can be seen in defiance of the Father's Law. But it is merely ridiculous when performed in a lodging house rather than the Garden of Eden. Josef K.'s private shpere is sustained by a money transaction: the room is private by virtue of the rent he pays. But the locations of the arrest are like the layout of a family flat in disguise. After Josef K.'s room, corresponding to the son's bedroom, the location of the next phase is Frau Grubach's living room, corresponding to a family living-room. Relations between the chief clerk and his landlady echo the position of Kafka as an educated professional within his family. As a middle-class client paying for a service Josef K. is Frau Grubach's social superior.

Josef K.'s eyes are drawn to how the string of her apron cuts into Frau Grubach's powerful body. But the apron strings cut needlessly deeply into the powerful body: the relationship of mother and son belongs within a patriarchy which maternal services sustain. Frau Grubach's power as head of a household, earner of money and guardian of decency is undermined by the servility with which she performs typically feminine tasks for her well situated lodger and by her maternal affection towards a young man. Thus, this relationship mimicks mother-son relation as also the class relation of an inferior to superior.

Later, Frau Grubach is suitably self denigrating, doing her best to restore K.'s ego in suggesting that his is not an ordinary, vulgar arrest but a special, intellectual matter beyond her comprehension. But Frau Grubach almost spoils things when she steps over the bounds between landlady and lodger by weeping ande giving advice. The subtext of the whole episode could be read as a guilty desire that mothers should be like landladies, there to service sons but without unsettling displays of love which might make emotional demands. The female witnesses add to Josef K.'s humiliation at the hands of the men who arrest him.

In the first half of the second sequence, the older women threaten to infantilize the chief clerk. In the second half Fräulein Bürstner predominates, a woman somewhat younger, and sexuality displaces maternalism. When Josef K. is summoned to meet the Inspector, the threat is of being treated like a schoolboy. K. is ordered by Franz and Willem to put on black jacket, like a schoolboy before an interview with the headmaster.

As the scene moves on from K.'s bedroom and Frau Grubach's living room into Fräulein Bürstner's bedroom for the main phase of the arrest, the uncanny mixing of social spheres and signifying codes intensifies. The intrusion of male court officials and bank employees into a woman's bedroom lends a mysterious significance to all the ordinary objects in the room. The man who now joins the old couple opposite strokes his reddish-blond beard, and the curling, stroking fingers convey a lewd effect.

The Inspector has had the bedside table moved to turn it into an interrogation table. His fingers press on the table, touch and move around the objects, even count the matches in the matchbox. The inspector's fingerings re-enact K.'s prying, later re-enacted yet again in K.'s re-enactment of his arrest when he plays the part of the fingering Inspector. K.'s shame at the court's violation of Fräulein Bürstner's privacy surely reflects back on his own shameful desire to violate. The three colleagues who interfere with the photographs are at once rivals and a horrible externalization of K.'s secret lust.

Fräulein Bürstner pays her rent on a par with Josef K. and so is worth reckoning. By the same token, however, she threatens male superiority. Fräulein Bürstner enjoys life and goes to the theatre. The landlady, motherly guardian of traditional values, takes a mixed view. Fräulein Bürstner is basically a good girl but in being seen in distant parts of town with different men is risking her reputation. The independent woman walks uneasily balanced along a borderline. Although she earns a living, she must not stray too far.

As an independent woman who works through the day but goes out at night with men, Fräulein Bürstner unsettles hitherto clear distinctions. Elsa, the girl whom K. visits once a week, follows an opposite time table. She works through the night as barmaid and consorts through the day with men for money. Here things are clearer. Elsa is a lower-class prostitute. She is financially independent but at the cost of selling her body.

The simile likening K.'s kiss to an animal lapping water evokes also a dog licking its mistress's face. K.'s thirsty kisses anticipate the demeaning relation between Kaufmann Block and Leni, of dog to mistress and K.'s death like a dog. The simile also echoes the comparison in Psalm 42 between the hart's thirst for water and the soul's for God, but in context the cross cutting of religious and sexual discourse is not mystical but parasitic, anticipating the mixing of biblical and pornographic motifs in Leni.[1]

Following the thirsty kisses, K.'s lips linger in a sinister echo of a vampire. This is later parodied when Block is forced by Leni to signify his dishonour in kneeling to kiss Huld's hand, like a supplicant before a lord bishop. The hand kiss ostensibly indicates the wooer's subjection to his mistress but within a sexual economy in which the mistress's mastery is a lie. Gallant kissing of the hand no more signifies that actual women have power over men than does masochistic groveling. The power lies with the image in the man's imagination.

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[1] Boa, Elizabeth, *Kafka: Gender, Class and Race in the Letters and Fictions*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 19961996.

Just as knitting and an apron are Frau Grubach's maternal emblems, Fräulein Bürstner's emblem is a white blouse. White signifies virginal purity, an impression fortified by the innocent objects on the bedside table, the pincushion being suggestive of maidenly sewing as a predecessor of maternal knitting. The white blouse was also the virtual uniform of the new woman office worker; white blouse employment was the equivalent of white collar work. The blouse signals both Fräulein Bürstner's virginal and her socio-economic status. But hanging there in the window it shows that the emblem can be taken off.

When Josef K. finally goes to bed he is pleased with himself, K's last thought on falling asleep concerns the captain as potential rival. Thus the order of things has seemingly been restored. Male rivalry is the threat not female independence, and the New Woman has returned safely to the old role of token in male battles for supremacy. But the final reappearance of a woman looking like Fräulein Bürstner just before Josef K.'s death like a dog suggests that his victory was pyrrhic and that the New Woman still presents an unresolved challenge to the order of things.

The arrest involves men only but takes place in a lodging house where, as in the household, women predominate. Its re-enactment for Fräulein Bürstner means that she joins a sequence of female witnesses.

The public Interrogation Chamber, in a further disturbing mingling of spheres, is set in the attics of a slum tenement. The location brings a strong social dimension into the novel. First Interrogation moves through three spheres—a bank, an urban slum, and the court. The court intrudes into the bank, via a telephone message; a middle class stranger strays into the slums; and the court opens out of a slum household. Such a sequence suggests a socialist angle of vision; the transporting of the chief clerk in a bank and his fellow-accused, mainly businessmen to the slums suggests that the class structure under capitalism is at issue.

The pullulating life in the slums contrasts strongly with the male freemasonry of businessmen whose leisure is taken up by activities furthering their careers, such as the sailing party proposed by the deputy manager or K.'s evening at the Beerhall. This is juxtaposed against family life in the slums. Men hang out of windows smoking or holding little children tenderly to make sure they do not fall, something unimaginable as a public act by deputy managers or chief clerks. Bedclothes hang out of the windows and beds can be seen through open doors. As the innards of the household are displayed outside, so parts of the body, which the middle classes hide, are visible. The men are in shirt sleeves, one is barefoot, children wear flimsy nightshirts, young girls seem to wear only aprons and women suckle babies as they cook. To be sure women cook while men lean out of windows, but the division of labour between male and female and of spheres between public and private falls away among the poor who cannot afford privacy or servants to look after their children and who have a different, less shame-ridden relation to the body than have the middle classes.

Josef K.'s feelings towards the children of the poor are less than tender. The children look angrily, though that may be a projection of Josef K.'s discomfort at the sight of pinched faces. K. in the alien land of the poor, thinks that next time he must bring sweets or a stick to bribe the children or beat them off, a thought realized in the Whipper episode. The bachelor's inability to cope with the children clinging like limpets to his trousers out of fear of their crying, should they hurt themselves, has its comic side. Such double alienation of the chief clerk from the poor and of the bachelor from children labels the working class fathers as doubly different, so producing a double guilt in the middle class bachelor.

The woman with dark, sparkling eyes who is washing children's clothes, the emblem, following apron strings and white blouses, of a further female type. That a mother should point to the door into the scene of Josef K.'s first interrogation continues the sequence of women who are witness to the man's trial.

K. initially sees the company in the room behind the door, divided into groups on the right and on the left with even poorer spectators in the gallery, like a political meeting. But his opening indignant correction that he is not a painter but chief clerk in a bank, shows little sign of socialist solidarity. For a moment K. had tried to reach across barriers to the public as people with whom he might identify. But when the political meeting turns into a congregation of old men in a room reminiscent of a synagogue with its surrounding gallery, the men become alien to K. even though they seem to be an emanation from his own psyche. K. sees little black eyes darting furtively from side to side, pendulous cheeks, and long, stiff, brittle bears. The mysterious badges suggest conspiracy. Such an image comes close to the anti semitic portrayals of conspiratorial Jewish elders.

The elders conjured forth by K.'s fears could either be racial other of the dominant Christians or the accusatory ancestors of an assimilating, upwardly mobile Western Jews. This effect is intensified by the generation gulf between them and the 30 year old bachelor emancipated from family pieties. Later the woman with the dark, sparkling eyes who points the way to the open door has becomes the object of a sexual advance under the dark eyes of these old men who, in blocking Josef K.'s way towards the spectacle, seem to threaten his freedom.

Frau Grubach's living room was the antechamber to the main phase of the arrest in the virgin's bedroom, now the washerwoman's living room is the antechamber to the first interrogation. On the table in the Interrogation Chamber corresponding to the little table in Fräulein Bürstner's room, lie the pornographic law books. The titillating title, How Grete was plagued by her *husband Hans*, places wives as whores to service their husbands perverse lusts, and the book, lying where it does, places marital relations at the heart of the first interrogation. Hans and a grown up Gretel, transported from a children's fairy tale into adult pornography, suggest incest.

The young student finally carries the woman off to give her to an old superior in a grotesque reversal of the traditional procedure. In a mobile class society there is little piety towards elders: power lies not in age. but in institutional status. The man with status gets and parades the woman as an emblem of his esteem in other men's eyes. The Court Attendant colludes in his double humiliation as servile lowest of the low in the institution and cuckold in the sexual comedy. The student is particularly repulsive. As he fingers lasciviously in his red beard he links up with the observer during the arrest in actively furthering K.'s sexual humiliation. Bertold's success stems not from phallic power but future prospects. This future status in the hierarchy is the first thought which comes into K.'s head on seeing him.

More than the woman's legs it is her silk stockings, a gift from a man, which are erotic. K's desire is further aroused by the fantasy of a victory over the Examining Magistrate. Just as Fräulein Bürstner becomes sexualized the more other men look at her photographs or finger her belongings, here the wife becomes the more alluring the more she is valued by other men. When the woman says that she was attracted to K's dark eyes just as her dark eyes had been what K. first noticed in her, he sees her as a loose woman who offers herself to anyone. As a subject feeling promiscuous desires she is contemptible but as a promiscuous object of other men's lust she is desirable. This sequence highlights the sordid power games in which women collude. Kafka shows a woman not immersed in instinct but caught up in male ambitions in which she participates indirectly through exploiting, not sinking in her sexuality. The climactic obscenity is K's fantasy of revenge which turns into exchange. He would like to take Bertold with him to Elsa so that Bertold might have to beg in vain for sex as K. just has. The adulterous wife no longer poses a subversive threat to the patriarchal order but merely reveals the sordid disorder of modern society.

In the world of work and in the Court women are marginal to the hierarchical ladder which they ascend indirectly via men. A few women are more directly involved, however, though like Fräulein Bürstner, who is just a typist, the girl assistant to the Clerk of Inquiries does not rate a title, she just helps. Women are entering the system, but still in subordinate. The girl assistant is comradely in a double sense as when she tries like a nurse to direct Josef K's towards the sickroom, so anticipating Leni in her role as nurse.

If Fräulien Bürstner and the friendly assistant suggest that as women increasingly gain access the system may be changing, K.'s uncle and advocate Huld represent the deeply conservative philosophy not of changing but of playing the system, and both are backed up by female assistants. If the uncle is specialist in family connections, Lawyer Huld is an archetypal wheeler-dealer. He never questions, never seeks to topple a chaotic and oppressive bureaucracy, but cultivates connections and entangles his clients in the long drawn out processes of law. The name Huld, literally 'grace', points to a satire of institutional religion.

Where the Uncle has an assistant in his tell-tale daughter Erna, the lawyer has Leni as servant, mistress, and nurse. Her name, a shortened form of Magdalene or of Helene, echoes religious and mythical archetypes of the sexual woman. Her large dark eyes signal sexuality but her rounded facial features are doll-like, making her seem like a play thing. Leni, the little doll endangers Josef K. by distracting him from the main business of his trial. Leni has a smell like pepper which hovers ambiguously between the attractive and the repulsive. Thus female sexuality appears as a lure which threatens to distract men as patriarchs who make the law or who, like K., are accused under the law to which they must answer.

Leni's is a two-edged collusion with the Advocate's system. On the one hand she is handmaiden to Huld and his clients. In her white apron she nurses and cooks and even kneels at Block's feet to clean dripping candle wax from his trousers in an image which mingles the religious with the obscene. On the other hand, she participates actively in the sadistic ritual of Block's humiliation which the Advocate instigates in his effort to retain K. as a client.

Like the man from the country who pleads with the fleas in the doorkeeper's collar, Block has been fingering the fur rug on the Advocate's bed. His humiliation is complete when Leni jerks him by the collar like a dog as she orders him to listen to his master, the Advocate.

The idyllic illusion which coloured Josef K.'s first impression of working class life was quickly destroyed. The process of disillusion goes further in K.'s visit to Titorelli's room where their meeting is observed by a chorus-like bevy of nasty little girls. They show K. the way to the side-stair to Titorelli's attic and so belong in the sequence of females who point the way.

Like the other locations, this scene too mingles different spheres. The artist's room is located in an even poorer suburb than the first court offices but turns out to have a door behind the bed into further offices which appear indistinguishable from the earlier ones. Next he glimpses apprentices in a workshop hammering a piece of metal, a scene which comes across as a strange world of labour remote from K.'s experience. And then as he climbs the stairs he meets the little girls and their hunchbacked ringleader. As in the earlier slum visit, social corruption is signified through female bodies. This is partly a matter of K.'s prim bourgeois perspective. Imbued with the ideology which renders sexual desire guilty unless sanctified in marriage, K. finds his own desires repellent so that the objects of desire are perceived either as sullied victims like Fräulein Bürstner or as saturated with an obscene sexuality like Leni.

The triple difference of class, age, and gender makes the little girls on the threshold of puberty at once childlike yet corrupt in K.'s eyes. The ringleader's hunchback is both a metonym of poverty and a metaphor of corruption. Titorelli episode is a sour exercise in demythologizing. In mythical urban bohemia, squalor is transfigured in the beauty which the artist's eye distils even in the slums. Titorelli is haunted by little girls whose sharp gaze suggest an eye to the main chance. Yet their clamour for Titorelli's attention is also narcissistic: in wishing to be the artist's model, they are grasping after the transformation of their own image into the dream of beauty which will negate the ugly reality of slum life and twisted bodies. Titorelli's name echoes Botticelli, Titian and Tintoretto, so evoking the most exquisite, opulent, and decorative art of the Italian early and high Renaissance, and baroque.

As the girls watch K.'s partial underssing on Titorelli's bed with voyeuristic fascination, the dream of beauty evoked through the artist's name is further tarnished by a mood of lewd curiosity and the grotesque reversal of the role of male observer of female beauty. But Titorelli, it turns out, serves not beauty but power. Rather than transfiguring little girls into Venus, his paintings transfigure petty men into judges. Tirorelli at once lyingly elevates them but also constructs an image of elevation, figured as the goddess of justice, from which the petty officials in turn derive their authority. The representational status of Titorelli's paintings is obscure. Just as there is no goddess into whose image the artist transforms his model, so there is no high judge (or probably none) whose image the artist presents as that of the petty official. And even if there were such a judge, there is no connection between him and the image on the canvas. Titorelli's portraiture again and again performs the same function of signifying the legitimacy of power.

In the eyes of K., positioned as the accused rather than the judge, the goddess of justice turns disconcertingly into the goddess first of victory and then of the hunt: the law does not serve justice but power to be won or lost in a struggle in which the losers fall prey to the victors. The Titorelli episode comes between the two encounters with Huld and Leni. The latter offers a demystifying commentary on one of Titorelli's paintings before K. ever meets the artist. Such a sequence invites analogies. The trio of Huld, Leni, and Block as the accused uncannily echoes the painted judge and Justitia with K. as the potential third accused figure. K.'s fear of falling prey to the goddess of the hunt turns Justitia into Diana, who is often represented with hunting dogs.

What was implicit in the earlier scene becomes explicit in the later scene where Block is at once dog and prey in Leni's clutches.

As we look at K. looking at Titorelli's portraits we have a model also of ourselves as readers of *The Trial*, just as the competing interpretations of the parable will later model the dilemmas of reading *The Trial*. But whereas the production of the parable is left obscure it comes, so the priest asserts from the writings which preface the law, a claim which lends the text aura. The paintings are demystified, first in Leni's comments and then through insight into the conditions of their production in Titorelli's attic. Portraits purport truthfully to convey a likeness of their sister. But Titorelli's portraits construct and endlessly repeat images, designed to legitimate power, which do not correspond to any referent, neither the purportedly real judge nor the overtly mythical goddess. The goddess ostensibly signifies the concept of justice, but in K's eyes the signified shifts and changes. In effect the distinction between realist and symbolic representation threatens to collapse. The figure of the judge is perhaps no more a likeness of a real person than is the goddess.

The reader might well conclude that the figures in *The Trial* too neither represent nor convey meaning. Leni is perhaps no more a portrait of a woman or a meaningful symbol than Titorelli's figures. And even if both Titorelli and

Leni continue to exploit the system which they see through, they both make plain enough that Titorelli's paintings serve an ideological function: to aggrandize petty officials and legitimize the court. Nor is realist representation entirely demolished for Leni claims to recognize the portrait on Huld's wall as the heightened image of an actual official, hence as a sign with a referent.

The Trial self-reflectively questions representation and attacks the pretensions of power seekers in contrast to Titorelli's idealizing portraits which serve to bolster them.

Although *The Trial* shows little progression but rather oscillates between suffocating submersion in the process of the trial followed by an ever shorter coming up again into normality. Patterns of analogy and repetition make the events of *The Trial* after the opening shock, less surprising and more expected, albeit in an eerily uncanny rather than reassuring way. The effect is of an ever deepening engulfment in the imaginary, as the ordinary world, while never absent, becomes remoter, the large scale movement being repeated also within individual encounters.

Leni and Block as mistress with dog look back to the night-time encounter with Fräulein Bürstner where K. licked his mistress's face like a dog. His role as a spectator with Huld, Leni, and doglike Block repeats his position in the Whipper episode where his alter ego Franz is the dog. On leaving the lumber room, K. explains away Franz's scream as the yelping of a dog in the courtyard.

This episode comes across as a ritual. First the three men as K. first sees and re-sees them, seemingly quite unaltered, the next day. The effect is on an endlessly repeated sequence or of an unchanging state: someone is always about to inflict pain upon another human being.

The men kept waiting on a bench outside the chief clerk's office in the bank parallel the accused kept waiting in the corridors of the court offices hidden away in dirty slums. The lumber room setting suggests the hidden, yet banal and everyday cruelty of a social order in which underlings compete to rise and sustain the hierarchy which exploits them by oppressing one another. The men K. observes come across as economically, culturally, and physically different from him in a scene in which the predominant legal discourse of crime and punishment is infused with class guilt and increasingly also with erotic undertones. The men's differences from K. make them both repellent and attractive to him and there are unsettling hints that beneath the difference there is identity. Legally, Franz and Willem are guilty of petty pilfering of food and clothes. Ultimately, at the basis of political economy are bodies to be fed and clothed. But food and clothes also have cultural meanings. Willem lusts after the fine underwear of a man whom he addresses as 'Sir' and finds an even more childlike pleasure in getting food for nothing. These crimes of the poor may be vulgarly petty but their violent punishment is shamefully out of all proportion. The desire to punish the poor was already clear in K.'s instinctive reaction to their children on his first visit to the slums. His efforts to undo the harm causes by his denunciation take the vulgar form of petty bribery which was his second reaction to the children. It uncovers an ugly mix of class contempt and guilt in K. and it uncovers the petty coruption and the lust of Franz and Willem for the food K. eats and the clothes with which he covers his body. Above all it uncovers class fear, hatred, and envy.

Ageing Block suffers many humiliations, beginning with when he faces fully clothed K. when only semi-clothed himself, a motif going back to the very beginning where K. woke up trouserless in bed. Later K. holds Block by the braces like a dog on a lead, just as Leni later jerks him by the collar, K. jealously imagines Block to be Leni's furtive lover, forgetting how furtive his own behaviour is. K. feels his own status enhanced through contrast with Block. Read in the historical context of 1914, one meaning of K.'s refusal to follow Block's road is refusal of minority assimilation to a dominant community of a different faith. If Huld is an exponent of the pragmatic doctrine of playing the system. Block represents the member of a minority trying to play the system of the majority.[2]

In Block K. sees an alter ego who follows one of Titorelli's options: the path of postponement. K.'s death like a dog ends postponement and comes as the climax of a process of (self) punishment for which the various tableaux vivants are the foreplay. The final scene is like an accelerated replay of the whole novel. Thus K. is again arrested at home, but this time he is dressed and ready, pulling on his gloves without having to be instructed, as he had to be first time round.

The interlocked unity as K. and his executioners march towards the execution suggests that the three figures are an emanation from one imagination. The meaning of K.'s death has been much disputed. Should he have taken the proffered knife and killed himself, so salvaging a vestige of autonomy, or does his refusal of self execution at least deny recognition to the henchmen of might cynically pretending to be right. Nor is it clear that K. does refuse self-execution, for if his executioners are an aspect of himself, then the close is ambiguous between execution and self-execution.

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[2] Boa, Elizabeth, *Kafka: Gender, Class and Race in the Letters and Fictions*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996.

The oscillation between power and powerlessness ceases when K. accepts the position of victim. That K. refuses to execute himself and that his last words suggest not guilt but shame constitute a minimal rebellion against the Court. To accept guilt or to seek acquittal would be to accept the Court's legitimacy: K.'s death like a dog does neither. But while K. withholds recognition. he cannot break free because the Court externalizes the logic of the world he inhabits. a logic that is so ingrained within K. himself that he cannot simply pluck it out.

In the last sequence. three omens hint at hope for a good life. Two small children framed in a lighted window behind a grille are the first sign. They stretch out their little hands to one another. The children promise future hope, not as a stark choice of being either inside or outside the law, but as motion towards contact. They also belong in a series of generational signs beginning with the old woman from a past order observing the arrest of the man of the present. These infants belong in a future beyond K.'s death and the grille of time which cuts them off from K. Fräulein Bürstner. or the woman who looks like her, is a second, more ambiguous sign. Her appearance causes K. to drop all resistance in response to the lesson for him which she represents. But as she turns off in another direction. the woman moves towards what may be a different future. The last omen is ambiguous between hope and despair. It repeats the gesture of the children as K. now sees only arms in the lighted window trying to meet, but the gap between the outstretched arms of the other who leans from a window and K.'s raised hands with their spread fingers is wider now, and in the end all that seems to outlive K.'s end is the shame of it. The parallel movement between children's and adults arms which fail to meet could mean either that the hope of childhood is doomed to be extinguished in adulthood, or that hands which cannot now meet, may meet in the future. Even the shame is ambiguous: it adds to the horror of K.'s demise, but also denies recognition to the punitive law. Despite K.'s drastic end, then, the omens deny total narrative closure, leaving openings for the reader to think further.

Now let us look out the various linkages between the court's behaviour and K.'s. Seen from the perspective of Josef K. the court appears to be a strange organization. He is struck above all by the differences between the particulars of the court and those of the world with which he is familiar. The guards who arrest him, for example, present no written authority when asked to do so. He is shocked to learn that bribery determines what happens to any clothes taken into the court's depot. The court sits not in the palace of justice but in a tenement house, where its offices lack all the dignity he expects of a court, housed as they are in the attic of the building amidst rows of washing hung up to dry. Whereas K. has a large, well-lit office at the bank he hears that the advocates attached to the court have to be careful not to put their feet through a hole in the floor of their room. Where K. is so punctilious about order that he insists on pointing out to his neighbour, Fräulein Bürstner, the slight rearrangement of her photographs during his first interview with the supervisor, the books he finds in the courtroom are tattered and dusty. Even less salubrious are the burst sewer pipe and the rats he encounters as he enters the building in which Titorelli, painter to the court, lives and works.

For all that it strikes K. as very alien, the court, seen from the rather different perspective of the reader has many characteristics which mirror K.'s life and world to a remarkable degree. To begin with perhaps the most obvious similarity is, both the world of the court and K.'s world are hierarchical and bureaucratic. His initial contact is with two guards, but they soon usher him into the presence of a supervisor who receives him from behind a makeshift desk. When introduced to the offices of the court, K. passes rows of people sitting in the corridor, all waiting to be attended to, just as his clients at the bank have to wait outside his office until he is ready to deal with them. Titorelli's account of the different categories of acquittal, ostensible acquittal and indefinite postponement is couched in the language of the bureaucrat full of convoluted explanations and multiple qualifications. The equally complicated processes of supplication and influence outlined by K.'s advocate of the patience sapping efforts involved in petitioning any public authority remind one of the ways of the bureaucracy.

The hierarchical character of K's everyday world is attested by numerous details. When asked at his first hearing if he is a housepainter, for example, he retorts indignantly that he is the chief clerk of a large bank. Since his rank is just below that of the deputy director, he rejects equally firmly the supervisor's description of three juniors from the bank as colleagues. His sense of hierarchy extends beyond the bank to his relations with others, as when he tells himself that his designs on Fräulein Bürstner are bound to succeed since she is only a little typist who will not be able to resist him for long. The officials of the court belong to a similar hierarchy, and their conduct is equally governed by mutual suspicion and ambitions for advancement. A young student of the law, for example, is someone to be feared because it is expected that he will become a judge some day. As if being whipped for a misdemeanour were not punishment enough, one of the guards complains to K. that they have now lost all prospect of being promoted in their turn to the office of Whipper. The current Whipper then adds insult to injury, claiming that all this talk of career prospects is ridiculous. Within this oppressive hierarchy, loyalty, even between colleagues at the same level, cannot be expected: thus the guard. Franz. makes a whispered plea to K. to intervene at least on his behalf since his older colleague. Willem. is less sensitive to pain and has already lost his honour. K. naturally applies his own experience of hierarchies to the court. reassuring himself that the difficulties he is experiencing with the guards will be cleared up as soon as he is able to speak to someone of equal rank to himself but then resenting just as much the pedantic tone of the supervisor who turns out to be younger than he is. Whether there truly is a person of high or highest authority in the world of the court. K. is never allowed to discover.

The court also shares certain bourgeois insignia with K. It is expected of him, for example, that he put on a black suit (i.e. formal dress, according to German convention) to meet the supervisor. As the latter prepares to leave, he in turn picks up his hard round hat (the typical headwear of the lower middle class) from Fräulein Bürstner's bed. The other accused men who line the corridor of the court offices, and who mostly seem to belong to the same class as K. keep their hats, the most obvious symbol of their social status, under seals while they wait. After K. has been helped out of the court offices by two officials, he finds his hat on the pavement beside him; and K's last action before leaving his flat with the executioners is to pick up his hat.

Josef K. is surprised by the entry into his life of officials belonging to an authority which is unknown to him. Yet unofficial forms of accusation. judgement and punishment are in fact part and parcel of his everyday world. Even before he knows that he has been arrested. K. decides that his landlady must 'answer to him' for the intrusion. K., for his part, expects that he will have to give an account of himself for arriving late at the bank and therefore considers calling on Frau Grubach as a witness of the events which detained him. When Frau Grubach later passes judgement on the character of Fräulein Bürstner, whom she suspects of sexual impropriety. K. considers punishing his landlady by handing in his notice, but then immediately suspects his own motive for wanting to move out of the flat is the fact that he had been arrested there that very morning. At the end of his interview with K. the supervisor explains that his task had been to inform K. of his arrest and to see how he 'takes the news'. K. in his turn assumes the role of the observer when, during the days that follow his arrest, he has the three junior clerks who had been present come to his office repeatedly, 'for no other purpose than to observe them. At the moment of his death, it is again K. who is the object of just such an investigative gaze as his executioners put their faces close to his, 'in order to observe the decision'.

The court which arrests Josef K. mirrors, it would seem, a number of important features of his life outside the court. As he has organized his life, so the court which will take his life appears to be organized. Yet the court also inverts the normal order of K.'s life. Whereas he has been used to judging and punishing others, for example, it is now he who is subject to judgement and punishment. Having occupied a high position in the hierarchy of the bank and in Frau Grubach's lodging house, he is now willing to seek the help of even such lowly creatures as the court servant and his wife. Just how little status an accused man has in the world of the court is made plain by the sight of the merchant Block crawling around in front of his advocate, little better than a dog, as K. observes. On the point of death K. will apply the same verdict to himself.

The inverted image presented by the court is expressed partly in social terms. Although the supervisor and the executioners wear bourgeois clothes, almost to the point of parody in the case of the latter, the court generally seems to be a poor organization and to be associated with poverty. One of a row of uniform, tall, gray tenements occupied by poor people, there is nothing to distinguish it from the neighbouring buildings in a distant suburb which the well-situated K. has never visited before. What is more, the court's offices are located in the poorest part of the building, high up in an airless attic.

Admittedly, the court employees do what they can to conceal its poverty by scraping together enough money to ensure that at least the information-giver's elegant uniform creates a first impression of dignity (an effect spoiled, however, by the man's habit of laughing constantly). The elaborate throne shown in a judge's portrait, so K. is told by Leni, is in reality an ordinary kitchen chair.

Josef K., by contrast, attaches importance to the fact that he is fairly well. He enjoys having an elegant suit with a waist so fashionably tight that it has attracted the attention and comments of others. The fact that he has been able to lend Frau Grubach money when she needed it gives him power over her and presumably contributes to his status as her best and dearest lodger. So attached is K. to the outward signs of wealth and status that he fancies his social position must give him an advantage over the court officials who are housed in mere attics, whereas he himself has a large room in the bank with an antechamber and can look down on the town's lively square through an enormous window pane. According to the guards, who finger his fine shirts with evident envy, K. can now expect to wear much poorer shirts. In the event K. is not subjected to impoverishment by the court, but he is partially stripped of his bourgeois clothes for his execution, so that the loss of reassuring status symbols is combined with the shame of public nakedness.

The parallels and inversions in the relationship between K. and the court reinforce one another. Where his position in the bureaucratic hierarchy of the bank once enabled him to enjoy a life free of poverty, a bureaucratic, hierarchical organization now confronts and threatens him with poverty and humiliation. The court thus embodies the fears which haunt a bourgeois life, holding up a mocking mirror to it (the laughing information giver) and subjecting K.'s previously secure existence to experiences from which he has been at pains to distance himself both physically and socially.

Another important source of fear exploited by the court is K.'s sexuality. In this area, too, the court both mirrors and inverts features of K's behaviour. Until his arrest the women in his life have been restricted to the stereotype antithesis of mother or 'pure woman' and whore. After the shock of his arrest he feels at first that the only person he can speak to is an old woman, one whose sexuality offers no threat. Seated at the table with Frau Grubach and sliding his hand into socks from the pile she is mending, K. regresses to the condition of a little boy seeking comfort from his mother.

Control is also central to K's relations with Elsa, a barmaid who only receives visitors from her bed during the day-time. One such is K., who visits her weekly, as part of his well-ordered routine. K. leads an almost solitary existence, preferring to spend the few leisure hours which work permits alone or in the company of other officials or drinking beer with a group of old men. This kind of arrangement with a prostitute was not at all unusual in European society at that time. Prostitution had the merit of keeping sex at a safe distance, conveniently out of sight in those parts of town where it could give no offence to respectable ladies and gentlemen.

When Frau Grubach addresses the question of Fräulein Bürstner's her sexual propriety more directly, however, K. claims she has misunderstood his remarks. These contradictions reveal a man out of control in an area where it is clearly very important to him to be in control.

The court's choice of Fräulein Bürstner's bedroom for K's first interview is nicely calculated to arouse anxiety in him by confronting him with a source of contradictory feelings. Sexual attraction causes his tidy and disciplined life to be invaded by fear and desire in equal degree. K's loss of control during the conversation with Frau Grubach culminates eventually in a loss of physical restraint when Fräulein Bürstner returns to the flat late that evening. As he lies waiting for her to appear, the mixture of desire, resentment and guilt he feels is displaced into blaming her for the fact that he has missed not only his evening meal but also the sexual visit to Elsa he had planned for that evening. As he talks to Fräulein Bürstner in her room, his frustrated sexual desire again focuses his gaze on the way she crosses her legs, props her head on the cushions of the couch and strokes her hip with her free hand. Whether she intends to do so one cannot tell, but seen through K's eyes Fräulein Bürstner appears to be continuing the work of 'seduction' initiated by court's choice of her bedroom for his first interview. Conversely, her resistance to K.'s advances recalls the discipline imposed by the guards.

K.'s kissing suggests both a form of vampirism, as if he wished to suck the air from her (he will later struggle for air in the offices of the court and at the house of Titorelli), and a threat to avenge the disturbance produced by the desire she has aroused in him. Before, actually carrying out the assault, K. calls out his own name very loudly, ostensibly to imitate his earlier summons to the supervisor, and thereby alerts the rest of the house to his presence in Fräulein Bürstner's room at this unusual and improper hour. The shouted name is both a boast and an act of self-denunciation, and as such typical of the way self-gratification and self-chastisement are inextricably intertwined in his psyche.

K.'s sexual attitudes are reflected back to him in to two ways when he revisits the empty courtroom; in some books he finds there and in the court's mimicry of his treatment of women. In neither case, does K. appear to recognize himself in these reflected images. Both the tattered and dusty books he finds lying on the table of the examining judge are indecent.

K.'s evaluation of these images as indecent and crude reveals more about him than it does about the picture, which could equally well be described as sad, since it shows two people in an intimate situation but incapable of communication. That K. should condemn such an image of embarrassment and alienation as indecent shows him caught in a vicious, self-defeating circle, unable to acknowledge the melancholy of sexuality without emotional closeness. It may be that K. recognizes in some corner of his mind that the false perspective is his own rather than that of the artist, but he shows as little sign of admitting this as he does of seeing a connection between the couch in the picture and that in his own room (on which he lay waiting for Fräulein Bürstner) or the ottoman in Fräulein Bürstner's room.

The mimicry of K.'s sexual conduct with the court begins when the law student assaults the court servant's wife in the middle of the proceedings, and screams to attract attention just as K. had shouted loudly in Fräulein Bürstner's room. K.'s selfish and, at times, manipulative attitude to sex, whether with the prostitute Elsa or Fräulein Bürstner or the wife of the court attendant, is matched by the patent self-interest of the court attendants wife in offering herself to K. in the hope of escaping life in the service of the court. K. calculates that it is worth yielding to the temptation she presents, because it offers an opportunity to strike back at the court, there being perhaps no better way of taking revenge on the examining judge and his hangers-on than by depriving them of this women and taking possession of her for his own pleasure. Appropriately enough, his plan is immediately frustrated by the arrival of the law student to carry the woman off to the judge, which forces K. to acknowledge his first undoubted defeat at the hands of the court. K. tries to console himself with the thought that he had only sustained the defeat because he had sought the fight. But the symmetry of events adds more meaning to his words than he knows, in that his intention to use the woman as a means to an end has been frustrated —or punished — by the court's use of her in exactly the same way.

The same cycle of temptation and humiliation is to be found in all K.'s relationships with women throughout the period of his trial. At the house of the advocate Huld, he is immediately attracted by the dark eyes of Leni, the young girl who tends the old and reputedly sick advocate. The advocate appears to be well connected with the official in charge of the court, for he is in conversation with the official in charge of the court chancery when K. is shown to his bedroom. K. throws away the opportunity presented by this chance meeting, however, when he simply walks out of the room to visit Leni, who has attracted his attention by crashing a tray to the floor. By this action K. rebels against his uncle's eagerness to have him pursue his case by the usual means and more generally against the procedures of the court which demand subordination and supplication from him. Yet he leaves the room slowly, as if giving the others a chance to hold him back presumably in the hope of being saved from the foreseeable consequences of placing desire above discipline. Ironically and appropriately, Leni's motives appear to be as mixed as his, for she urges him to yield and confess to the court even as she presses her body against his, promising, quite illogically, that only if he confesses is there a chance of slipping out of the court's clutches. Whereas K. flatters himself that he has made yet another conquest, it is she who takes possession of him and who provides yet another mocking echo of his treatment of Fräulein Bürstner as she bites and kisses his neck. The predictable punishment comes in the form of his uncle's anger at the wasted opportunity and in the advocate's later humiliating revelation that Leni treats all accused men in the same way.

In other words, K is no more and no less attractive to Leni than that miserable worm, the merchant Block. Whether he yields to impulse or relies on his habitual calculation of tactical advantage. both of which are elicited by the court. it seems that K. is facing too powerful an enemy.

Finally K. meets a number of little girls who laugh as they crowd around him on the stairs leading to the room of the artist Titorelli. One in particular. a thirteen-year-old hunchback whose knowing looks and hitching up of her short skirt indicate to K. that she is already completely corrupt. confronts K.'s sexual desire with its object in its most taboo form. Like everything and everyone else he encounters. these girls belong to the court. K. is further humiliated by having to take off his coat while the girls peer excitedly through the cracks in the walls of Titorelli's overheated room. As Titorelli explains, they think he is about to undress in order to be painted. The motif of undressing links this scene with that of K.'s execution in the quarry where he is exposed, not to the stifling, airless heat he finds in all the rooms belonging to the court but to its complement, the cold, deadly air of the night. The shame Josef K. feels as he dies half naked brings into final. concentrated focus the conflict within him between desire and discipline which has been exposed and intensified by the eruption of the court into his seemingly orderly life. K.'s sexuality is not the only thing which reduces him to the condition of a dog at the moment of death. but it is one of the most powerful contributors to that overwhelming sense of shame.

Josef K.'s death at the hands of the court is the culmination of a series of violent experiences reaching back over the year of his trial. Just as the court's intervention in his life elicits unaccustomed sexual conduct from him, so it unleashes violent impulses in him more or less simultaneously.

Chapter - III

So Many Misreadings

Kafka commenced *The Trial* immediately after the breaking off, of his engagement, with Felice Bauer and its writing coincided with the beginning of the First World War. The text itself shows little signs of the larger public context and clues to the private trauma are quite obscure and have to be painstakingly established. Connections with family relations are remoter, for instance, on comparison with *The Metamorphosis*. Here, the father has shrunk to an uncle; the son has moved out into bachelor's lodgings; maternal functions have been transferred to a landlady; the sister has dwindled to an offstage cousin.

The Trial can be described as a grotesque imitation of the conventional crime story. The subtlety of style, full of incongruities and ambiguities leads to a failure in establishing identification. The reader can neither identify with the forces of law against the criminal nor with the outlaw against injustice as she oscillates between judging Josef K., judging his judges, and losing faith in all basis of judgement. As pointed out in the Introduction to this work, the unilinear perspective limits the reader to K.'s perceptions and knowledge. Yet as the story progresses, she finds herself increasingly unable to identify with K.'s moral and emotional responses. K.'s attitude of mixed aggression and servility parallel the behaviour of others, both in the ordinary world of the lodging house, the bank or the slums and in the precincts of the court. Kafka, in *The Trial*, effects a blurring between the psychic, the social and the metaphysical which corresponds to generic blurring between fantasy, realism and symbolism. Such a blurring renders the reader uncertain how to read.

A major source of uncertainty comes from the intrusion of naturalistically represented symbolic figures into a realist setting. As Ritchie Robertson puts it, Kafka works by, "bending and distorting the semiotics of Realism."[1] Kafka effects quite a radical mingling of different sign systems in *The Trial*. The discrete levels are indiscreetly mingled in the crossing-over of naturalistic techniques into symbolic representations. In *The Trial* the arrival of the court emissaries initiates a confusion of signifying levels as the symbolic underpinnings of the social order emerge into the empirical world. Thus, three of the harbingers of justice are at the same time employees at a bank and the warders are not ethereal messengers but are naturalistically embodied, as the fat, fleshy Willem. But such naturalist detail attached to symbolic emissaries of the law immediately becomes loaded with obscene meaning: unveiled in naturalistic depiction, the sacred phallus turns into that which it forbids or taboos.

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[1] Robertson, Ritchie: *Kafka: Judaism, Politics andLiterature*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1985.

Elizabeth Boa describes it as the sado-masochistic construction of male sexuality arising from the double taboo.[2] The masculine subject as agent and the phallic body as implement lead to the tabooing of the male body as a sensual apparatus which feels pleasures and pains and whose desires and fears might overwhelm the subject. The sado-masochistic structure is frequently mixed with racial and class elements and may be figured in homosexual terms as a ritual between men or as a heterosexual, transgressive cross-over where the man adopts the feminine position of object and the woman becomes the dominant agent. The Whipper episode and the ritual humiliation of Block in *The Trial* exemplify the two types of rituals. This can also be associated to Titorelli's paintings, which show male judges but figure justice as a goddess. And so the discourse of law and punishment is sexualized.

This field of gender and sexual ideology mixed with racial and class elements, provides a context for many of Kafka's representations of the doubly tabooed male body. In one sense, these bodily motifs belong to the sphere of the collapsing old order, but they also signify the failure of liberalism and of European enlightenment to cerate a new, freer world.

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[2] Boa, Elizabeth Kafka: Gender, Class, and Race in the letters and fictions, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996.

Instead, there is the threat of regression into barbaric violence, played out in sexual terms and fuelled by class and ethnic or racial antagonism.

In Kafka's work, traces of various modes of narration (as developed through the entire history of literature) are inter-woven together so that the reader is left unsure of how to read. The moral commentary and poetic subtext intervene externally and internally to become hopelessly cross-contaminated. *The Trial* can be seen as a confusion of the discrete textual levels prevailing in realism. What should have been the authoritative moral commentary has become embodied in the likes of Willem. At the same time, the moral master plot of law and justice is sexualized. In psychoanalytic terms the latent subtext has become manifest and has also contaminated the master plot of crime and punishment because the law has become embodied.

Kafka's mingling of modes undermines patriarchal discourse but also makes it difficult to assess the religious import of his work. These two aspects are really not disconnected since the two religions alluded to, Judaism and Christianity are deeply patriarchal.

Kafka makes the invisible or spiritual visible in incongruously naturalistic detail and also indulges in a literal display of the uncleanliness of the servants of justice. This lends it all a scurrilous effect.

In *The Trial,* the strand of the disparate discourses—visionary religion and a naturalism particular to European literature of the industrial age are not so closely knitted and are rather jarringly juxtaposed. But the grafting of different discourses—religious allegory; poetic realism; naturalism; mythic allusion—in the text means that the novel cannot be claimed for an exclusively German, European or Jewish tradition. These traditions, in any case, are not sealed off from one another, and in the combination the elements are decisively transformed.

The blurring of literary modes and textual levels robs the reader of any clearly fixed position which is superior to the identity of psychic, social and symbolic structures. For the court emissaries have that uncanny quality of seeming to come from inside Josef K. himself and at the same time also emanating from the outer world of banks and city slums. The textual oscillation between fantasy and realism makes it uncertain whether K. is the author of his own misfortunes – the Whipper and the whipped externalize K.'s authoritarian yet servile mentality – or whether he is the victim of political totalitarianism or of social conditioning – the cupboard is after all, in a bank, an institution emblematic of capitalist society. Yet the very mingling of signifying systems to produce a seeming fatality is also an invitation to escape the cul-de-sac, for it shows the executors of the law as embodied human beings not angels. *The Trial* does not contain a blueprint for reform. but in demystifying authority through its radical semiotic transgression. it challenges readers to think for themselves.

The Trial not only dismantles form but also meanings As Josef K. passes by to his death. he perhaps sees a chink of light from a window. like the light which the man from the country in the priest's story perhaps sees streaming from a door. But these abstract emblems offer no further indication of where to look for a way out. A more substantial if more ambiguous sign is the figure of Fräulein Bürstner. whom K. thinks. he glimpses turning off from the path he is on with his executioners. Women appear marginal to the main action: the accused are all men, as are the lawyers and judges. The traditional authority—the symbolic system, which the transgressive mixing of modes undermines – is a patriarchal law executed over men by men. But women are on the fringes and beginning to enter the court precincts officially: Fräulein Bürstner, about to take up a job in a lawyer's office, could like the girl assistant to the Clerk of Enquiries, shortly join the court. As she walks on ahead at the end she might be acting for the court in leading the procession. yet she turns off in a different direction before K.'s shameful demise. Such position on margins from which a different path might lead suggest also that women stand outside of law or of power but that their increasing entry might change the nature of law and the workings of power. Fräulein Bürstner is textually marginal too, appearing early on only to disappear until that fleeting reappearance at the end. Such significant placing yet under elaboration of the appearing/disappearing Fräulein Bürstner suggests suppressed concerns. The reader sees Fräulein Bürstner through K.'s eyes rather than hearing her from her own mouth.

The reader constantly has the uncanny sense of the familiar becoming strange, but equally of the strange being some how familiar. This effect comes from the cross over of elements from one sphere, such as a bank, into a different sphere, such as a bedroom, resulting in a grotesque estrangement of both.

In entering paid employment, Fräulein Bürstner crosses the border between the private sphere, to which bourgeois patriarchy confined respectable women, and the public sphere of civil society. To join the court, she would traverse further borders, whether of the state or of the symbolic systems of morality and law. These are the borders traversed during K's arrest. The border location of women between the domestic and the public spheres is thus crucial to the questioning in *The Trial* of bourgeois culture and to the quest for signs of change as the border was shifting in the modern world.

As the chapters move through interconnecting spheres, beginning with the boarding house as an estranged family household, *The Trial* never quite loses the connection to a realist ground. Physical settings and objects, possessions and clothes, physical appearance and sensations, all are elements which might also figure in the stage directions of a naturalist play.

The structure of *The Trial* is dramatic. It develops as a series of dramatic confrontations moving towards a climax. In the very first chapter, K. is confronted in turn with the guards, the Inspector, Frau Grubach and Fräulein Bürstner. In keeping with the dramatic character, the action covers a short span of time. The time span of *The Trial* is precisely stated as running from K's thirtieth birthday to the eve of his thirty-first, and the first five chapters cover only two and a half weeks.

The setting is urban, with emphasis on slums and squalor, rendered in naturalistic detail. Josef K. is forced to penetrate such settings populated by crowds of children, and to discover that court premises occupy almost all the attics in the city. Without sacrificing their realistic authenticity, settings tend also to become symbolic. By relinquishing verisimilitude, Kafka manages to describe similar scenes with great symbolic intensity: the crowded slums, the attics, the lumber – room in the bank where the guards are punished, all suggest aspects of K.'s inner world. The mysterious locker or abandoned room can be seen as Kafka's forays into the Gothic. Gothic mode pervades *The Trial* in the sense that the reader can never be sure how far K's antagonist, the Court, exists independently of his own mind.

The reader constantly has the uncanny sense of the familiar becoming strange, but equally of the strange being somehow familiar. This effect comes from the cross-over of elements from one sphere, such as a bank, into a different sphere, such as a bedroom, resulting in a grotesque estrangement of both.

The details of Josef K's room or of Franz and Willem's clothes belong in the same wider human and social world. It is the intrusion into the private sphere of figures from the public sphere, which is disconcerting. A survey of the intermingling modes and spheres in *The Trial* could provide some interesting insight.

Bourgeois political economy distinguishes between the state, civil society, and the private sphere. To this day the citizen's right to privacy remains a central liberal tenet. The opening of *The Trial* conveys a public intrusion into the private sphere as men, who seem to be state officials but turn out to be also associated with his place of work, penetrate a citizen's bedroom and arrest him. These public, yet secret, yet strangely familiar emissaries immediately bring a frightening vulnerability into the so-called private sphere where men sought refuge from their public lives. The strains of public and private ran along gender lines which excluded women politically, socially, and economically from much of the public sphere. These exclusions also worked differentially along class lines. The male emissaries from the public sphere disturb the internal balance of household relations involving differences of age and class as well as of gender.

The protagonist of *The Trial*, Josef K. is the one who is guilty. Now the question arises— what is the guilt of K. for which he has to face *The Trial*. Nowhere in the novel is the purport of his guilt formulated. This is probably because what is at issue is not a single, empirically determinable offence committed by Josef K. K.'s guilt is his ignorance of the law. Furthermore, it is K. himself who has unknowingly brought about his arrest. His guilt rests in him or in the very fact that he considers himself innocent.

Josef K. has concealed his self, has devoted himself completely to the work – world and holds a respected position at the bank. He is in the habit of spending his evenings with a companionable group of men at regularly reserved table. With carefully considered self-discipline, he visits his mistress

Elsa, once a week. What is more, he treats even his trial like a business transaction. He has succumbed utterly to the impersonal sphere of business. He represents the average citizen of modern society. Perhaps it is this that makes him guilty without knowing it. This is why he harps on his innocence. None of these average citizens would ever charge themselves with any sort of guilt that could not be established legally or in accordance with the conventional moral code.

The first idea that might leap to one's mind is an attempt to equate K.'s guilt with the original sin. But one has to remember that the doctrine of original sin holds everyone guilty. Not withstanding that the court is universal, only Josef K., Block the businessman, and some others, most of who belonged to the upper classes are arrested and involved in court trials. Many others like Frau Grubach, Fräulein Bürstner, K.'s uncle, the Manager and the Deputy Manager of the bank are all free.

Kafka seems to liken the total earthly existence to a vast judiciary system. Those who know nothing of such a court and consider themselves guiltless are the ones who are guilty. It is the urban modern-day citizens who conceal their inner infallible law and their inner self that passes judgement upon them. This is achieved by means of motivation upon which today's human being builds her life. Such a one if accused can never be really acquitted, as they want to prove their innocence to a court that is impervious to arguments.

If everyone belongs to the court, then man's total life reality has been a court of justice all alone. Defense of one's case in such a court would imply a justification of one's total life. But such a petition in which one surveys one's total life and examines it from every angle is impossible. On the other hand, a human being can not live unjustifiably but is responsible for her entire life. It is this contradiction that is Josef K.'s undoing. This relates to the Legend where interpretation requires looking at it from all angles which is nearly impossible. The court can also be viewed as an expression of Josef K.'s own inner state. All the ambiguities and the enigmas of the court have their basis in K. himself. In this court, he has to come to terms with himself alone and in the process has to attain clarity about himself.

A sharp distinction is made between the concrete, temporal authorities and the Supreme Court that is inaccessible to everyone. The court authorities become the manifestations of the irreversible, inherent laws of the earthly world. The inevitable nature of life on earth renders all demands of change for the better absurd. Based on the same logic, all accusations leveled against humans for their fallibility and their sinking into a meaningless existence becomes absurd on account of the unavoidable conditions of modernity.

K. is set above the officials at the same time that he is subordinate to them. He stands in the same relation to the officials, as does the man from the country to the doorkeeper of the Law. As a free man, he alone has a chance to break through the conformity of the world and attain to the interior of the true Law. He alone sees the inextinguishable radiance that shines forth from the interior of the Law. On the other hand, he is subordinate to the officials. On this earth, he exists in a relationship of dependence to them and tries to gain assistance from then in enrolling himself into the world organization. But instead of waiting like the man from the country, if K. had inquired into the determination of his existence with self – confidence and had refused to be hypnotized by the menacing power and superiority of the world; his liberation would not necessarily have entailed death.

Another possible reading could be to take Josef K. to be the alter ego of Kafka. The author of *The Trial* and his hero are both obsessed by strange visions which haunt their sleep. How can one rid himself of such anguish which torments the inner most layers of the subconscious and which are ready to rise to the surface, the instant awareness of reality flags. This can possibly be done by an effort of the consciousness. And that is precisely what Kafka does. Literary composition, in this sense, would be a catharsis for him. That is why *The Trial* is a plunge into the night, a long nightmare which takes us through the stifling atmosphere of the darkest regions of Kafka's ego.

Josef K. is arrested one morning after getting up. K.'s arrest is the beginning of a nightmare or, more exactly, of a series of nightmares. The action, therefore, takes place in Kafka's soul, and the plot is symbolic of manifest or repressed tendencies.

The characters of *The Trial*, whether they argue with K. or agree with him, are aspects of his ego. The novel is a dialogue Kafka has with himself. It is not by chance that one of the police inspectors actually bears the name "Franz". These nightmares haunt him at night and on Sundays – during those hours when daily toil spreads a protective screen of banal tasks over the subconscious. K. knows very well that this mishap could not have happened to him at the office.

Kafka was a strange personality who from childhood on struggled with the difficulty of being for he wanted to live in an authentic fashion. But he could not express this strangeness. Language is important because it is general; it is a tool created by the impersonal "we" and can only translate the forms of being which are of the least common denominator. Kafka could therefore use language only allusively.

For Kafka, there is an incommensurability between the specific and the general. The strange individual is unhappy, for his uniqueness cannot be communicated. Besides, he must struggle against a society which, seeks, by every means at its disposal, to wipe out the particularity of the human who wishes to live faithful to herself. Thus, guilt grows in such individuals like Kafka and by extension, in Josef K. The odd individual is therefore guilty and Josef K.'s crime is in part rooted in his oddity. K. follows set paths only superficially. In truth, he lives on the periphery of society, misunderstood, unhappy over his absurd work at the bank while he feels vaguely within him an infinitely rich and complex world that causes him anguish.

The individual who stands apart from the rest therefore feels guilty over his apartness. Furthermore, his guilt feeling is aggravated when he wishes to reveal his singularity, for he must affirm it against the established order, against his singularity, for he must affirm it against the established order, against his father, against the Judaism he perhaps represents, and even against Christianity.

The Court can be seen as a representation of the Jewish synagogue while the Cathedral becomes a symbol for Christianity. The divine Law is unknown and the Court has lost its key, for God is the creator and keeper of moral values. Henceforth any moral judgement becomes both true and vain, for it is true only because its truth is human and relative. That is why the Court who summons Josef K. is made up of subordinate corrupt judges. The Supreme Court is inaccessible. The court scene is to a certain extent an oblique but violent attack on the type of Judaism practiced in the Prague synagogue. Religion, once the highest manifestation of the human spirit, is so degraded today that it deserves to be relegated to the attics where the court sits. Obscene ones have replaced the sacred books.

And so there is no salvation in Judaism. But what about Christianity? The cathedral is empty, desperately empty and dark. It is no longer a place for meditation; it is an historical monument which Josef K. visits. He does not bring a prayer book, but a sightseers' guide. The priest, who seems inspired by the faith of old, does not preach from the main pulpit since for him it must represent the pulpit of deceit. He is satisfied with a small pulpit and chooses for his sermon a most unusual hour when the building is not profaned by an anonymous crowd who pay only lip service to faith. He would without doubt be stoned as a heretic if he wanted to bring religion back to its original purity.

Kafka, therefore, rebels against Judaism and Christianity. Both are obstacles to his subjectivity. His uniqueness demands a break with the synagogue; it also requires solitude, and like his Josef K. he chooses the celibate life after having broken his engagement five times.

Kafka's ego is torn by antinomies. No matter what he chooses, he still sins and is forced to punish himself. He is on the side of his executioners, like Josef K. who is overcome by pity for the inspectors who have arrested and robbed him; and he goes back to the Court although he has not been summoned. This anguish dominates his life, his sleep. He is the culprit and the judge.

What was the way out of this impasse? How could he make a choice? The Law is no longer understood and life is absurd. K. regards his arrest as a ridiculous nothingness. He would like to be integrated into a hierarchy. These are vain hopes for the judges he meets are subordinate, corrupt judges.

Up to his thirtieth year, Josef K. was a man like other men. He led the life of an automaton and found peace and security in the world of daily routine and work. He would stay at the office until nine; then he would take a little walk, alone or with colleagues, and round out the evening at the cafe, where he stayed until eleven, usually at a reserved table in the company of older men. There were exceptions to this regime: The Manager of the Bank who thought highly of his work occasionally invited him to take an automobile ride or for dinner at his villa. Once a week K. visited a young lady named Elsa who was night waitress at a cafe and during the day entertained her visitors from her bed. One cannot imagine a more impersonal, anonymous existence. His name, reduced to a simple initial, is symbolic from the outset. Josef K.'s life is a superficial one, like the lives of all those who, in an attempt to escape the anguish of original dereliction, take refuge in an arbitrary system of the world.

Josef K.'s arrest is the question that has surged up from the depths of the original chaos existing in humans in a latent state overladen and concealed by preoccupation. His deepest "I," which is truer to him than he is to himself, reveals itself in the form of fear and trembling. If Franz and Willem proceed to arrest Josef K. in Fräulein Bürstner's room, and not in his own, it is not a chance occurrence K. obliged to choose between two existential possibilities, had chosen unauthentic existence and betrayed what was deepest and most personal in him for the benefit of a superficial and reassuring way of life. He is guilty because he had not taken his total "I" into account. He therefore can not be arrested in his own room which is part of his environmental world. He is arrested in Fräulein Bürstner's room, for it represents a world foreign to K., and yet close to him: it is the dark, subconscious part of his "I". The workmen's quarter. which on Sunday is swarming with disorderly primitive life, Fräulein Bürstner. the girl who is so near and yet so remote. the sheriff's wife, the nurse Leni, simply represent the repressed demoniac forces that constitute a constant threat to every day life, but are also the promise of a higher, regenerated, richer, sincerer life than the spiritless one led by Josef K.

K.'s Court, which represents the Synagogue of Prague. is also a manifestation of this vague feeling of basic guilt. Demoniac characters appear. They stand on a plane superior to normal existence. On that level. only being is of importance. It scarcely matters whether one is a bank clerk or house painter. The are attributes whose values exist only in a humanized world. But K., in spite of all warnings, remains a stranger to this world of being and assumes a deep guilt with regard to it. He does not understand the warning that was issued him. His servitude to the world of unauthenticity is too powerful for him to be able to free himself.

He protests that Franz and Willem have eaten his bread and butter, and have stolen his linen on the pretext that they would hold it in trust. But this is an invitation to turn away from the human world of preoccupation and focus his attention on a world of real values, rooted in the most authentic aspects of man himself. It is the price of such surrender that he might escape from a banal life. But he does not wish to escape from the hold of this average banal world.

He tells Fräulein Bürstner all the details of his arrest. What is he expecting? To free himself from that anxiety which, once described into everyday language, will, he hopes, cease being disquieting. He accepts the suggestions of his uncle who, as a man of action, sees in K.'s arrest a threat to the entire family since it holds the unauthentic life upto doubt He will therefore seek out a lawyer who is content with describing and remaining in the domain of the finite and foreseeable. His world is at odds with the world of the court. Huld personifies abstract and general knowledge. He describes, without even questioning Josef K., and moves in the sphere of the finite, without ever being able to suggest a solution for the problem of human destiny. He cannot put an end to *The Trial* is a strictly personal affair and can be won by the accused only. Besides, the new forces that have aroused in Josef K. anxiety leads him to escape, leaving his uncle and lawyer to dispose of him as of some thing inanimate, and he follows Leni, the symbol of tendencies that can not be reduced to the intellect.

He grows tired of his lawyer; since human reason cannot in any way help him, he will seek out the artist. Perhaps human art will bring back to him the peace he wants at any price. The solution suggested is of very little consolation. The painter lives in appearance and cannot obtain any definite acquittal. Only "ostensible acquittal" and "unlimited delay" exist for him. The solution is only temporary. The painter is simply a merchant of illusions. He does not live in the world of being: his world is one of appearances. Thus Josef K. cannot turn to anyone, he is always brought back to himself, for salvation resides only in him and in a courageous decision to shoulder life.

We therefore see the unfortunate Josef K. oscillating between two worlds: he comes back to the court although he has not been summoned, because he, like Frau Grubach has the feeling that his happiness is somehow involved. Yet he still turns his back on the solitary life and seeks in the community a remedy for his anxiety; but the human community henceforth rejects him. Frau Grubach, as well as the two inspectors, refuse to shake his hand. He is at hone neither in unauthentic society nor in the world of authenticity represented by the court that is located in attics and sits only at night and on Sundays in a dehumanized region exempt from the workaday world and abstract categories. But Josef K. lives on the border of two worlds and in his confusion finds no lifebuoy he can hold on to.

Only now can we understand the numerous reasons why Josef K. is sentenced to death. He must die because he does not seek out the Law. He finds it by chance, in the cathedral, but does not understand the deep causes of his anguish.

No matter what direction Josef K. takes, he finds himself in an impasse, and there is no way out for him other than death. He is such a model of a utilitarian world that he rebels against the world of authentic being and in his struggle has recourse to all operations of an all too human logic. When, several moments before Josef K.'s execution, Fräulein Bürstner is seen at the turning of a side street, his executioners' hold relaxes on Josef K. for he starts to follow her. But he does not understand the warning; he gives up his pursuit and the executioners tighten their hold.

Kafka therefore appears viewing himself in a double mirror. On the one hand, he faces Josef K., on the other the more flattering face of the cathedral scene is rich in meaning. Time seems to be in abeyance, the years spent by man standing before the gates of the Law roll by rapidly in contrast with the duration before the gates of the Law roll by rapidly in contrast with the duration that is so charged with events, and constitutes the substance of the other chapters. We are in the deepest recesses of the individual soul. Shortly before he dies, the man from the county is astonished and asks his doorkeeper. Everyone strives to attain the Law, how does it come about, then that in all these years no one has come seeking admittance but me? The doorkeeper bellows into the ears of the dying man, "No one but you could gain admittance through this door, since this door was intended only for you. I am now going to shut it."

Kafka believed that life should not be anonymous but personal. Each man should seek out his Law and become himself, even if he has to struggle against society, its fixed ideals, its bloodless codes, and its thingness. The doorkeeper himself is simply the symbolic representation of the world as obstacle in the path of the quest of our deepest, unconditional personality. Josef K. does not understand this parable. He is not sufficiently detached from the material world. The light of the Tabernacle counteracts the light of his electric lamp and prevents him from noticing the carvings on the altar. The lamp which the priest gives him to hold goes out in his hand.

But the priest tells Josef K. that there are holes in the character of the guardian of the Law. That is why one can, in this life, have access to the world of truth and the absolute. This truth is one which must be discovered phenomenologically because it is hidden.

To penetrate that region of feeling, one must be able to give up this world. Josef K. understood nothing about the mysterious nature of his anguish. He did not understand that it was no question of theft but of custody when Franz and Willem carried away his linen. He did not understand that everything earthly would be given back to him when he found his Law and built his life on solid foundations.

Josef K. dies because, he is protected neither by god nor by an existence established on the deep foundations of the authentic being. His life is therefore no longer based on the absolute. Faith is dead: men, whether Jews or Christians, have killed it. Life is set adrift. Man is nothing more than a wreck; he must rediscover the meaning of life. The Court is in this respect, like many symbols in the novel, a polyvalent symbol. It represents the fallen synagogue and the New Law, constructed on the depths of being. Josef K., lives in an anguish that does not create new values because he is not able to discern its meaning clearly. He sinks into absolute nihilism, because he cannot find a remedy for this anguish either in religion or the inoffensive world of day to day existence. He cannot find himself, although summoned by his anguish to the Court of his deepest. "I" which aspires to be, totally and absolutely, an ultimate instance. He ought to kill himself. But this would give meaning to life. So he lets himself be executed by his two executioners. When

Josef K. dies, the alarm is over. Life has ceased being problematic, for K.'s anxiety was really a threat that compromised tranquil existence.

Even though the structure of this court exceeds and bursts the bounds of political ideologies, in Kafka's works, (who for many years was closely associated with socialistic and anarchistic trends of thought), the element of social criticism can never be completely overlooked.

Josef K. represents a subject constructed by patriarchal and class relations in forms they assume in an urban, capitalist society which also has a strong, if chaotic, state apparatus and is riddled with ethnic tensions and with anti- semitism. The court externalizes K.'s psyche and models relations in cities, banks, and families and between artists and patrons. Sexuality is a crucial transmission point of power relations in the form of a sado-masochistic masculinity and the systematic subjection of women in which they themselves collude. Conservative Frau Grubach guards of traditional values; the Court Attendant's wife finds social advancement through men; Leni uses her sexuality as a weapon but within a material context and a symbolic order still dominated by men. In that K.'s mentality tends to reproduce the social relations which produced him, his death implies a radical refusal to continue along that path. Older patriarchal values are crumbling but K.'s sexual subjection of Fräulein Bürstner on the night of his arrest suggests that, rather than inaugurating a new free partnership, liberal emancipation might, initially at least, pathologize relations between the sexes as men feel their masculinity threatened by the changing social status of women. That K. sees a woman like Fräulein Bürstner at the end marks his recognition of the woman's autonomy, but too late, for in dying his shameful death he also withdraws from the search for free partnership. Liberal emancipation did not address class inequalities. In constantly showing the intertwining of class and gender in shaping desire, for instance, the contrast between Fräulein Bürstner and the slum girls—*The Trial* at once challenges liberal individualism and orthodox socialist idealization of the working classes. Power relations are shown to be interfused with erotic value, shaping desires, coded also through racial discourse, which the subject cannot excise by an act of will. Power relations are also shown as being materially grounded, so that the body cannot simply be rewritten, for the body's food, its clothes, its pleasures, and its meanings are produced in an economic environment. Willem and Franz have the desires of poor men. Leni of the webbed fingers and Block risk perpetuating sexual and racial stereotypes. But Leni has an acerbic insight into official pretensions and priestly authority and Block is not without dignity when he questions K.'s right to feel superior. K.'s way of seeing is clearly implicated in constructing the constantly shifting images of the female others and of his own alter egos which are further destablized textually though generic mixing.

The Trial could imply that the accused's guilt is his whole way of life at the time of his arrest. It is the existence of a representative bourgeoisie, most of whose relationships before his arrest are based on the cash nexus or on a superficial need for diversion. The first Interrogation does take place in a poor quarter of the town, quite unlike K's own quarter, and since the assembly of people there is compared with a 'political meeting', it seems that K. might be on trial for his political beliefs or perhaps for his lack of political activity. There is also a reference to the different attitudes towards K. of the crowd on the right and the crowd on the left. Yet this political guilt does not seem conclusive enough for at the end of the chapter, the same sense of indeterminate accusation persists.

Another interpretation could be the Oedipal view of *The Trial*. Here the accused can be treated as the son while the father has been depersonalised, generalised and elevated into an accusing court. The Oedipal nature of the court system is powerfully represented in the third chapter where Berthold, the law student in the service of K's. judge, tempts K. into aggression for the sake of the attendant's wife— whose marital status suggests not only a desirable sex object. but a mother figure as well— and then thwarts K.'s attempt to gain the woman for himself. *The Trial* gives us the impression through out of a court enjoying sexual powers & liberty while denying these to the accused. This tendency is enunciated by the prison chaplain when he warms K. particularly against seeking the help of women. which he suggests is not true help.

This Oedipal view of *The Trial* is consistent with the assumption of total guilt of the accused. For we find that the court's apparent hostility towards K's sexual fulfillment is only part of a general hostility towards his worldly self. The adult ego of the modern bourgeois is to be broken. humbled. impoverished and made ready for death.

At the same time, we have to remember that K. is not imprisoned. The court allows K. full freedom to continue his normal life. He is free to choose whether or not to heed the court's summons, for, no sanctions are mentioned for disobeying the summons. This freedom, in fact, strikes K. as inconsistent with his idea of being arrested. For the defendant is thus enabled to accept or reject his trial. not only once, but every time he is summoned to it. *The Trial* is the accused's own consent to it & implies his tacit acceptance of an unspecified guilt.

An undefined guilt may also imply that the accused has to discover what his guilt is. From this perspective, the arrest is the alerting of the accused, and his trial is the invitation to discover himself in his search for his guilt. Many details point to the structure of *The Trial* as a travelogue. For instance, the first member of the court to appear to K. seems to be wearing travelling clothes, and K., in pursuing his trial, continuously discovers unknown locales, unfamiliar districts, unsuspected, circumstances and so on. According to this inference, *The Trial* should be considered a process of exploration and questioning. The double meaning of the German title, *Der Prozess*, meaning both trial and process, supports the view that *The Trial* is, or should be, the process of discovery of K.'s guilt.

At one point in *The Trial,* K. thinks of dismissing his lawyer and starting work on a plea by himself. His plea would recall and examine every one of his actions and experiences and try to illuminate it from all angles. This total self-examination he feels is necessary because of his ignorance of the charge. He would have to devote nights and Sundays and every available free moment to this labour. Here K. comes close to realising that his trial should be a process of self-confrontation. He also realises that it would be endless. However, K. fails to understand that the reason for this unending nature of the process is not the amount of work required but the essence of self-confrontation itself. An unspecified accusation concerning an unknown guilt cannot be related to a particular fact or facts to be discovered by detective work. The unknown guilt in K.'s trial is identical with his being, not in the sense of original, but as a consequence of the silence of the court as to what constitutes guilt. Whatever the accused might discover would still come up against this silence. This process of self examination is marred by the impossibility of not only a good outcome but of any outcome at all and the reason for this is not only the silence of the court. Even if a dialogue with the court were conceivable, there would not still be a possible end to the process. For the self that is to be examined is living and continuous and constantly adds new acts and aspects to itself during the very process of self-evaluation. Only death can put an end to the process that is *The Trial*. K.'s trial has a different route of self-discovery and that is self-revelation through action based upon choice.

In the first chapter it is K. who, ringing his bell for his breakfast has made the warder Franz appear before him. Literally and unconsciously, he calls for his own arrest. That his trial is a free choice by K. becomes clear at the beginning of the chapter two. K. receives a phone call at his office, telling him to appear at the court for his interrogation the following Sunday. But for that Sunday he also has an enticing invitation from the Deputy Manager of his bank. to spend the day on his yacht. When K. prefers the court's summon to the Deputy Manager's invitation, he clearly makes a choice that can be called existential. He deliberately puts his trial above his pleasure and social advantage thus establishing a pattern. which he will follow henceforth. By this choice. K. defines his true self.

The obvious policy of the court is to allow K. to reveal himself by this freedom to choose. This existential policy differs markedly from the Oedipal strategy of breaking the self and its will. There is within the court system itself, a conflict between the two views of the trial. This conflict is explicitly stated by the law student Berthold who severely criticises the examining judge for allowing K. to run around so free. He calls it a mistake about which he had complained to the judge. 'Between the interrogations at least, K. should have been held captive in his room.' The student would make confinement the policy towards the arrested. He would not seek K's free commitment, but his captivity, the repression of his ego, the reduction of his vital capacities, a harsh and severe education towards inwardness and ultimately a preparation for the grave. *The Trial* presents the older system as desired by the student, countermanded and superseded by the judges' new policy of physical freedom for the accused, which changes the whole concept of *The Trial* from an

Oedipal to an existential intent. For the student, the new policy, as represented by the judge, is incomprehensible.

The Trial has these two contrasting layers of intention which probably account for the particular obscurity and ambiguity of this novel. This co-existence of two opposed levels of meaning intensifies the protagonist's necessity to choose between different interpretations of his situation Interpretation must precede choice as choice must precede action. Interpretation is the careful weighing of the various meanings implied in a situation.

This necessity to choose culminates in the necessity to interpret with which the prison chaplain confronts K. *The Trial* culminates in a parable to which the listener K., is called upon to supply the key and make the application to his own case. The legend of the doorkeeper who stands before the law abstracts the challenge which *The Trial* itself represents.

The priest tells K. the legend of the doorkeeper as an illustration of K.'s delusion in regard to the court. This delusion is explicitly stated in the text of the parable. At the end of his life, the man from the country asks why no one else has come to ask for the entrance. although everyone strives to enter the law. The doorkeeper answers that this entrance was destined for this man alone. The man's delusion consisted in the belief that the entrance into the law is something universal.

This delusion is implicit in the parable from the beginning. It is so strong that it easily escapes the reader because it is built in the man's perspective, which the reader, like K., tends to share. The delusion is implied in the man's initial reaction to finding the doorkeeper blocking his way. The text says that the man 'hasn't expected such difficulties', for he assumes 'that the law is supposed to be accessible at any time'. The man, in other words, has come with the expectation that entrance into the law is an automatic right available to everyone and at all times. He does ask for permission to enter, but assumes that the permission will be a formality.

The doorkeeper says that he can't allow the man to enter 'now'. This word 'now' is crucial because it is intimately tied to the man's expectations that the law would be open at any time. The doorkeeper's 'not now' proves this expectation is the man's primary illusion. The implication in his answer is this; at the moment of his asking for permission the man is not allowed to enter. Left open is the possibility that he might be able to enter if and when he does not ask for permission. This implication becomes explicit almost immediately. The doorkeeper suddenly steps aside and laughingly invites the man to go in despite his prohibition. Now, 'the door' according to the text 'stands open as always'. That is, no physical force whatsoever prevents the man from going in. The doorkeeper underlines the man's freedom by his jocular invitation and in the same breath he warns the man of the frightening appearance of the doorkeepers inside.

Now there is nothing in the man's way except fear. It is not the doorkeeper, but the man's fear that keeps him from entering. His desire for the law is great but his fear is greater. Intimidated by the doorkeeper's words and looks he prefers to wait for permission and this permission never comes.

The timing is a decisive key to the understanding of the parable. Entrance into the law is possible only at a definite, unique moment which the man allows to pass by unused. The unique moment is linked to the unique individual for whom alone this entrance is destined. Uniqueness of moment & uniqueness of person are united in the free decision that is necessary to enter the law.

The function of the doorkeeper as a figure of denial is necessary for the existential meaning of the parable. The obstacle is essential to the quest. Significantly, the text doesn't begin with the man but the doorkeeper standing in front of the entrance. Only by overcoming difficult resistances can the entrance become the man's entrance. This explains the priest's later remark that one doesn't have to accept everything the doorkeeper says as true, but only as necessary. Whether the law (which stands for truth here) really has such horrible doorkeepers is difficult to ascertain.

The doorkeeper's challenge to the man to try the entrance in the face of frightening odds burdens the man with the necessity of making a decision that will determine his further existence and herein lies the existential meaning of the parable. The man has three choices; first, he can put his desire for the law above his life and take the risk of confronting the inner doorkeepers; second, he can place his life above the law and wait; and third, he is free to leave the quest altogether and go home. Among the three possible existences, he chooses himself as one who rejects his freedom and waits for the permission of another—thus choosing the life of a dependant and a supplicant.

The man from the country is K.'s mirror image. K. too has decided to seek his law, i.e. his trial by choosing the court over the yacht. But, like the man from the country he then refuses to accept the paradox of self-determined entrance. He wants the court, his doorkeeper, to relieve him of his own self-discovery and hand him his acquittal or else take the blame for murdering him.

K. takes an Oedipal view of the doorkeeper as he does of the trial. The doorkeeper appears to him as an oppressive deceiver, withholding and denying the man's right to enter. Similarly K. views his trial as an unjust attack by illegitimate power figure. He misunderstands the fact that the trial is his own choice in which acquittal cannot come from another. K. experiences his trial as a fight inflicted upon him by a vicious antagonist and looks for aid. Though he does not go as far as Block or the man from the country in enslaving himself to helpers, he cannot see his way without them either. The parable, like the degrading spectacle staged by K.'s lawyer and merchant Block, illustrates the priest's warning to him, "You are looking too hard for the help of others. Don't you realise that it's not the true help?" But K. cannot connect the priest's warning with the legend and thus fails to see that it isn't the doorkeeper's malice but the man's fearful dependence that cheats him of his entrance into the law.

K. sees the court as a gang of corrupt lechers who, if a woman is shown to them 'would overrun the bench and the defendant to get there in time'. This view appalls the priest and yet it is he who singles out the help of women as a particularly illusory form of aid. Here again the two meanings of *The Trial* are juxtaposed against each other, an Oedipal assault upon the defendant male adulthood and ego and, on the other, an existential challenge to choose and define oneself. K. himself has to find his own interpretation as the man has to find his own entrance into the law. He has to choose his interpretation before he can decide on his action.

As K. is the reader of the legend, the court is the reader of K. Thus, in the early part of the book the inspector informs him that his arrest amounts only to his being made aware of the condition of being arrested and to show the court how he will take it. The first member of the court who comes to arrest K. bears Kafka's own first name Franz. Thus the court and the accused are two aspects of one K. – one is the observer who enjoins upon the other to interpret and to choose and to act.

Subsequently K. is slaughtered 'like a dog' rather than allowed to die like a man. Perhaps K. is condemned this degrading, inhuman death by his own evasion of the self-determined end which he has shirked against.

To conclude I would like to say that just as the legend and *The Trial* demands K. to interpret in his own way, this text belies any definite interpretations. Any text/discourse does so but this is superb in its ambiguities.

Conclusion

The Absurdity of Reason

The Trial is the most familiar and the most controversial of Kafka's novels. It is perhaps the most well known of his literary oeuvre and its opening incident, the unexplained arrest of Josef K., is fixed in many people's minds as the quintessence of the 'Kafkaesque'.

Accusations against *The Trial* are many. It has been described as a form without content or a riddle without an answer, designed to provoke and then frustrate the reader's desire for an intelligible meaning. But this is not true. *The Trial* offers no scope for a simplistic interpretation. Just as the legend and the entire Trial demand K. to make his own choices and his own interpretations, Kafka lays a challenge to the reader to derive his own meaning. Perhaps challenge is not the right word, for the multi-layered possibility of interpretation that Kafka offers also indicates his acute awareness of the creative process. The nature of creation of a literary discourse is such that it embodies the creator's struggle to give shape to a meaning. Kakfa seems to be cognizant of this struggle as also of the fact that an interpretation, too, is a struggle to derive significance out of the multiple possibilities of the various semantic elements.

The juxtaposition of elaborate gesture and inaccessible meaning, of minute detail and unknowable whole is the most striking feature of his way of writing. *The Trial* can be looked on as narrative of Josef K.'s wanderings in offices and corridors versus the incomprehensible guilt itself. What makes Kafka's writing entirely different from the known modes of literary compositions is that his text always points to a truth beyond itself but never commits itself to the truth to which it points.

Kafka's stories present themselves as interpretations. They point to a text beyond them, but are deprived of the doctrine they interpret. They, thus, become a secret code whose secret is irrecoverable. Their message seems to be still in the making and therefore they yield no theme or no idea that can be related to the real world. They are inherently open-ended and fragmentary and seem to be multiple pointers to an unknown meaning.

The absurd nature of *The Trial,* as a whole, makes the reader treat the text as symbolic and one feels a need to translate it into another mode. The various clues scattered in the text suggest several possibilities for such translation. Yet, none of these encompass everything in the semantic universe of the novel. The text's enigmatic quality requires translation but it defies any accepted doctrine. Whether one attempts a religious or psychoanalytical or Marxist or Feminist analysis, each is contradicted by some elements in the text. Besides, none seem to be able to treat the text as a whole. Thus, no thematic exploration seems consistent and satisfactory. A crucial gap, thus, exists at the level of the theme itself. The fictive world is divorced from any final meaning in the real world.

But one cannot treat Kafka as a purely self-reflexive writer, for that would mean ignoring the obvious metaphysical thrust of his work. Kafka's work is guided by an undeniable metaphysical impulse. The theme *The Trial* evokes or perhaps evades, may be as much psychological or political in nature as much as metaphysical. But its resistance to a reduction to just one of them is a measure of its holistic, metaphysical drive. Kafka seems to be after the total meaning of existence, the total truth of ontology rather than the partial truths of psychology or ethics or politics. The fact that Kafka's stories resist thematic extrapolation is inseparable from the fact that they are metaphysical and concerned with the world as a totality.

Some argue, that towards the end, Kafka's novels do contain a scene which seems to fill up the gap. In the case of *The Trial,* it would be the cathedral scene. The parable Before the Law does seem like a revelation and the revealed way to salvation. Does this imply that this restores the novel to the status of a decodable code or does this scene exist merely to underline the absence of any final message. The final scene, consisting of the execution of

K., that follows the parable contradicts all meanings one can derive from the parable. The conclusions drawn from the parable cancel each other out. The confusion arising from an attempt to determine the deluded person, whether the man from the country or the door keeper or whether the door keeper has deluded the man from the country, all seem to be expressions of the commentator's despair. The text itself or rather the law it propounds seems to be beyond human judgement. The priest's final remark is "It is not necessary to accept everything as true, one must only accept it as necessary." This rejects all human understanding as well as any understandable message.

It is necessity, not lying, that the priest opposes to truth. A nihilistic conclusion like Josef K.'s is as false as any other, for it equally applies human judgement to the law, to the ultimate meaning of things. The law is neither truth nor falsehood, it is the necessity of given facts. Misunderstanding this postulate, K. finds he is too tired to follow such thoughts. No wonder, for he is asked no more and no less than to give up reason.

According to Derrida, the man from the country in Kafka's parable is, the story that tries to approach the law, enter into relations with it, enter it and become intrinsic to it. He also draws an analogy between the inaccessible law and the inaccessible final meaning of a story, which he refers to as its unreadability. Thus. Before the Law becomes an allegory of unreadibility: it is a story of the way all stories must. according to the deconstructive creed, evade all definite meaning and question their own philosophical claims through their rhetoric.

To find a true deconstruction of Before the Law one must revert to Kafka's own text. Kafka. as the priest of the parable serves as a true deconstructor of his text. The priest's words, "The scriptures are unalterable and the comments often enough merely express the commentator's despair", could indeed serve as a splendid motto for deconstruction itself. Texts are unalterable. and our interpretations often enough merely express our despair vis-a-vis this fact.

A Kafka text neither asserts a philosophy nor necessitates an identification of the rhetorical operations that would question it. The questioning instead is openly thematized, incorporated into the plot itself, thus making all definitive assertion of philosophy impossible. Deconstruction, in Kafka. is not the result of an examination of the hidden implications of its rhetoric but is built into the text itself. It comprises in a plot that excludes theme and not in language that subverts thought.

Thus, Kafka becomes a problem for deconstruction. He both embodies its strategies and disrupts its conclusions. On one hand, his text is an example of a discourse that rejects all final interpretation. But, on the other hand, since he does the job of deconstruction himself his presence and voice cannot be said to be irrelevant. Disruption of meaning in Kafka results from his own explicit skepticism and not merely from the free play of language.

Kafka's modernity lies in his epistemological position and its formal consequences rather than in what is popularly associated with the Kafkaesque: the thematics of alienation and anxiety, the decor of labyrinthine corridors and offices, the prophecies of totalitarianism. Of course, the influence of the Kafkaesque in the latter, popular sense is tremendous. Kafka's imagery has become the standard imagery of innumerable novels dealing with urban bureaucracy or fascist politics. However, this adoption of his settings is only a superficial facet of the influence he still exercises today. His real influence is much deeper and is related to the epistemological aspects.

There is a whole league of writers concerned in some way with the question of theme in a work of narrative and the transmissibility of this theme through the work. None of them easily accept the automatic reduction of fiction to themes. One of these is Albert Camus with his theory of the absurd.

There are some obvious affinities between Kafka's *The Trial* and Camus's *The Outsider*. This makes a comparison between the two writers quite natural. The protagonist of *The Outsider* is named Meursault. This was a name sometimes used by Camus himself as a pseudonym and is reminiscent of Kafka's use of his own initial. Meursault is thirty years old like Josef K. and again both are insignificant clerks. Both lend rather unfeeling lives, their lack of feeling highlighted by superficial love affairs. Both are arrested and finally executed (or are about to be). Toward the end both must face a prison chaplain, an encounter that in both novels is described in great detail and has a central significance. Josef K.'s consciousness, no less than Meursault's, seems transparent to things (the warder's outfit, the offices and corridors) and opaque to meanings. What is *The Trial* about ? What is Josef K.'s guilt? It is opaque even to the meanings of his own gestures. Both Meursault and Josef K. seem to have no access to their own inner beings. *The Trial* is largely restricted to Josef K.'s and *The Outsider* to Meursault's perspective. Both novels relinquish omniscience, or even partial rectification of their dominant perspective through other perspectives, but also the advantages of introspection.

Kafka uses the third person narration while Camus employs the narrative mode of the first person. Thus, there is a major difference between the two texts, as in the former, the narrator and perspective are not of the same origin; while in the latter it is so. Therefore, *The Trial* embodies a double ignorance: both of a character who can see only what he can see, and an external narrator who cannot, or will not, see through the character.

The oddity of a first person narrator who is outside his thoughts and feelings did not deter Camus; it was precisely what he was after. This subject was the outsider who was outside all normal feeling and could therefore go through the motions, the physical gestures of socially accepted conduct without ever experiencing the emotions behind them. He could follow the warden to the mortuary, for instance, though feeling no real need to see his mother for the last time.

"Shame" and "execration" are the words with which Kafka's *The Trial* and Camus's *The Outsider* respectively end. Meursault, the Outsider, happily hopes for those howls of execration to greet him on his day of execution. Josef K., like a dog, feels that the shame of it will outlive him. Camus seems to put the ultimate victory of Meursault against the ultimate humiliation of K.

Kafka's anguish derives from the ever present threat of an inaccessible judging authority. Camus's absence of anguish has to do with the absence, to him, of such authority and the resulting sense of mastery over his life.

Transcendence to Kafka is a source of anguish while immanence to Camus is a source of exaltation. Conversely, Kafka's end can be seen as a capability to face the hopeless truth of guilt and defeat while Camus's can be read as a leap into the illusion of revolt, lucidity and joy.

Camus's skepticism is much less radical than that of Kafka's. In this sense, Camus's treatment of Meursault's is consciously different from that Kafka effects of K. Kafka's radical imagination conceives man's fate as having no connection with his interior life. The priest's words to Josef K. – "it is not necessary to accept everything as true, one must only accept it as necessary"– wrest human life away from all graspable motivation. In *The Outsider*, Camus does not divulge Meursault's thoughts and feelings. This absurd way of seeing includes what seems like a Kafkaesque wholesale preclusion of interior reality, but is in fact a rejection of only that part of interior reality, which conforms to the mendacious dictates of collective reason. When Meursault keeps silence, he does so not because his inner life is inaccessible but because he is a stranger to what the collective way of seeing expects one's inner truth to be. As a stranger to the collective ways of seeing, he can hope to see the truth.

No wonder he can happily hope for the howls of execration to greet on his day of judgement. And no wonder, Josef K., impotent, inconsolable victim of incomprehensible powers, feels that, like a dog, the shame of it will outlive him.

Camus, in *The Outsider*, opted for psychological realism in a different manner than that of Kafka's. He borrowed Josef K.'s ignorance of his inner life, but limited it to the particular psychomoral make up of his protagonist, Meursault. It was now an individual rebel's alienation from collective standards of feeling, not everyman's incomprehension of himself. Camus's negation of an interior life is a total rejection of the moral values of a particular culture, whereas Kafka's silence concerning human motivation is a total epistemological agnosticism.

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus says, "There are works in which the event seems natural to the reader. But there are others (rarer to be sure) in which the character considers natural what happens to him." Man, according to *The Myth*, is placed in the insolubly tragic situation of confronting an irrational world while longing wildly for rational clarity. This is Camus's "absurd". The absurd is the irreconciliability of two certainties –" my appetite for the absolute and for unity and the impossibility of reducing this world to a rational and reasonable principle."

Camus said of Kafka's work, "It is the fate and perhaps the greatness of Kafka's work that it offers everything and confirms nothing." Kafka's perpetual oscillations between the natural and the extraordinary and his openness to many interpretations is the absurd element in his work. The absurd effect is linked to an excess of logic. According to Camus, herein lies the mystery of the absurd. The absurd is the tension, the divorce, between our nostalgia for rational understanding and the irrational world that is bound to disappoint it. Kafka's *The Trial* puts this aptly. It is through the logical and the everyday that Kafka brings out the entire absurdly of life which springs from the relation of an individual to her world.

Whether the quest in Kafka's work is for religious or moral certainty or for an inaccessible sex object or for unreachable integration in society is beyond confirmation. Its greatness lies in that it keeps pointing to a doctrine but never confirms it. This uniqueness has made it the symptomatic work of its age. Kafka's works are an extreme expression of modernity in its disinterestedness, 'its renunciation of both mimesis and self-expression, its insistence on the autonomy of art and its independence from empirical experience.

What is paradoxical in Kafka's work is that its very irreducibility to a truth becomes an indication of its obsession with truth. Kafka's self-reflexiveness cannot be regarded as separate from the metaphysical thrust of his work. Kafka's fiction constantly displays its metaphorical face, its lack of self-sufficiency, its reaching to a truth beyond itself. At the same time, it constantly evades that truth, pointing back to itself again.

Perhaps what is most paradoxical about Kafka is that the writer who invented bureaucracy and concentration camps, seems also to be the most resolute champion of a modernistic version of art for art's sake. Kafka's works, especially, *The Trial*, defeat all attempts to translate them into truth and thus always send the readers back to themselves. This refusal to yield an unambiguous message seems to be a celebration of pure fictionality and hence, of art for art's sake.

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