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Author(s): Peter U. Beicken

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Kafka's Narrative Rhetoric

"THE CENTRAL PROBLEM of narrative method concerns the relation of the author to his work."¹ This statement by René Wellek and Austin Warren does not take into consideration the question of the author-reader relationship. It isolates the literary work of art and its "intrinsic" structures from the "extrinsic" sphere of its reception. Reception can be defined as the history of the understanding, appreciation, and application of a text within a cultural community. Viewed from the perspective of the author-reader relationship, the narrative method employed by the author as narrator assumes a "narratee." This "implied reader"² is a product of the artist's intention and is an integral part of the literary text as a whole. The concept of "implied reader" suggests a variety of roles, some of which are actualized by the concrete reader in the individual act of understanding. The author determines his choice of the "narratee" by limiting the multiplicity of roles in compliance with his artistic and aesthetic goals. The individual reader, however, will have to reconcile his predilection based upon his subjective interests, aesthetic sensibility, and literary training with the textual suggestions made by the author.

In a renewed discussion of Kafka the author and narrator, the focus of critical concern needs to be shifted from the "intrinsic" problem of narrative method to the perspective of the reader and his perception of the work. Indeed, a closer analysis from the standpoint of critical reception reveals that Kafka developed "*Einsinnigkeit*"³ or the congruence of

¹ René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, third ed. (Harcourt, Brace, 1969), p. 222.

² See Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1974), and his "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," *New Literary History*, III (#2 1972), 279–300.

³ See Friedrich Beissner, *Der Erzähler Franz Kafka* (Stuttgart, 1952), pp. 28ff. The concept of narrative congruence between author and medium in Kafka had been developed by Martin Walser in his dissertation, *Beschreibung einer Form* (Tübingen, 1952) and as a book (Munich, 1961), pp. 21ff. Although some breaks in

narrative consciousness and protagonist as a strategy of rhetorical intent. He wanted to involve the reader in an unintelligible and paradoxical world where the fate of his heroes remained inexplicable. Kafka's narrative rhetoric entails a radical critique of the traditional modes of storytelling and storylistening. As a departure from the automatized modes of reading it provokes a fundamental revision of narrative reception. The conventions of the past, although not a systematically unified body of structures, nevertheless ordered narration as the mediation of experience around one central human element: the narrator. The comfort derived from the narrator's voice made the actual reader feel at home in whatever implied role was suggested to him. The traditional narrator, this descendant of the epic poet, assumed superior knowledge and wisdom in the familiar figure of the omniscient narrator. Kafka, in a quite unknown and enigmatic remark, reflects upon the myth of the all-knowing epic poet: "A canny statement: The epic poet knows everything."⁴ This elusive observation seems to affirm the accepted superiority of the narrator. And yet, I view the statement as a subtle and ironical indictment of the traditional form of omniscient narration. The immediate context of the perplexing "*Gutes Wort*" is given in one of the manuscript pages of Kafka's novel *Der Verschollene* where the author recollects a conversation with the Austrian writer Otto Stoessl in whom he had detected incompleteness and discontinuity which was in striking contrast to the impression he had received from his work.⁵ Apparently Kafka values the coherence of the work more than its fallible and imperfect creator. Through the continuous artistic effort the work gains a solidity which gives it a status of its own. But it would be unwarranted to exclude the real author from his final product. Martin Walser, for example, with his stringent separation of the poetic from the historical personality, reduces the real author to a mere fictional phenomenon and center of speech to be reconstructed from textual evidence only.⁶ However, the historical personality who is the concrete determiner of mean-

perspective in Kafka's narratives have been pointed out, the position of "*Einsinnigkeit*" has not been challenged in its essence. It still pervades much of Kafka criticism. Jürgen Kobs's *Kafka* (Homburg, 1970), for example, the most substantial recent book on narrative matters, takes the concept of "*Einsinnigkeit*" for granted. For a more critical view, see my dissertation, *Perspektive und Sehweise* (Stanford, 1971). For further information, refer to my *Franz Kafka: Eine kritische Einführung in die Forschung* (Frankfurt, 1974), pp. 70ff.

⁴ "*Gutes Wort: Der Epiker weiss alles.*" This note stands at the end of the third of the "*Quarthefte*" into which Kafka wrote *Der Verschollene*. It is dated "15 Oktober," probably 1912. See Kobs, p. 537f.

⁵ "*Der Eindrücken (sic!) des Lückenhaften und Unterbrochenen im Menschen gegenüber dem Werk.*" These lines stand right before "*Gutes Wort: Der Epiker weiss alles*" in the "*Quarthefte*." See *Manuscript*.

⁶ See Walser, pp. 11ff.

ing is always part of his product. All language-activity takes place within the framework of a certain role behavior agreed upon by the language community. The author as narrator, too, follows rules. They are codified by the traditions of his genre. At the same time he can exercise his freedom to generate new literary forms. It is through his narrative role and artistic intention that the concrete author gains the status of a poetic being. With this concept in mind, I would like to compare Kafka's confessional statements about his narrative strategy with the structures of his literary works. The question will be raised to what extent Kafka employs narrative rhetoric in order to exert an influence upon the reader which makes him conform to the author's intentions. At the same time it will be revealing to see how Kafka provides the reader with an interior stance in his narratives which serves as a source for illumination and higher understanding. This, then, is the moment of reconciliation between Kafka's willful narrative rhetoric imposed on the "narratee" and the reader's freedom to enter the text with his own perspectives.

The terms complementing the two categories incompleteness and discontinuity which Kafka used in the analysis of Otto Stoessl were developed in his model of self-knowledge. Kafka places the concepts of completeness and continuity at the center of his aesthetics of writing. In emphasizing the epistemological aspect concerning human subjectivity however, the principle of self-knowledge is distinct from the psychological concept of self-analysis. In 1911, when lamenting the temporary inability to write in his diary, Kafka sees the attainment of self-knowledge endangered. He says:

One should permit a self-knowledge to be finalized in writing only when it can be executed with the greatest completeness, with all the incidental consequences, as well as with entire truthfulness.⁷

Kafka's ethical and epistemological rigor becomes apparent here. The search for truth, one of the staunchly adhered-to principles in his life, brings the writer to a stern affirmation of total truthfulness and completeness. Translated into epic terms, self-knowledge becomes the guiding principle in Kafka's portrayal of his "dreamlike inner life."⁸ Completeness and continuity create a predominantly linear narrative process. Such a continuous progression of time does not allow for any gaps

⁷ *The Diaries of Franz Kafka*, ed. Max Brod, Vol. I (Schocken, 1948), p. 41. In general I follow the standard translation. But in a few cases I have tried to be more faithful to the original. Here I use "self-knowledge" for the German "*Selbsterkenntnis*" rather than the translation's "self-perception."

⁸ *Diaries*, II, p. 77.

or breaks and calls for a center of perception and experience in the text other than the narrator's. Kafka made his main character into this central intelligence and the consistent focal point of perspective within the narrative. However, no superior knowledge guides the protagonist who, in his blindness, becomes a victim of the fatal progression of time. The inevitability of the hero's reduction to powerlessness culminates in his death and dramatizes the superiority of the victorious forces which render all attempts at self-determination futile. Rather than providing the reader with that privileged moment of insight into the reasons which bring about the protagonist's downfall, Kafka's obsessional quest for completeness and absolute truthfulness is frustrated by the maze of minute detail. This deconstruction of totality ultimately leads to the fragmentation of truth. The failure to establish a totalizing view restrains Kafka from restoring to the narrative any familiar sense of omniscience. He renders the world unintelligible and truth inaccessible.

It is difficult to locate the origin of Kafka's relentless craving for self-knowledge which was genuinely reinforced by his love of literature. His identification with writing became existentially all-consuming as the sole domain of self-expression. Perhaps the following account of his earliest rejection as a writer indicates the importance of literature and writing to him and anticipates the pattern of rejection Kafka experienced with his father. A diary entry of 1911 recalls a painful incident of Kafka's childhood in which he tried to gain the acknowledgment of his family in the attempt to write a novel about two hostile brothers, one of whom stays in his "European prison" while the other emigrates to America. Upon reading the first page, a sadistic uncle turns around to the other members of the family and condemns this literary effort as the "usual rubbish." Kafka confesses his feelings about this verdict some years later:

To be sure, I remained seated and bent as before over the now useless page of mine, but with one thrust I had in fact been banished from society, the judgment of my uncle repeated itself in me with almost true significance and even though I had a sense of belonging to the family I gained an insight into the cold space of our world which I had to warm with a fire that I first needed to seek out.⁹

This incident is a paradigm of rejection and ridicule. Literature and writing consequently serve as a refuge for the individual expelled by the alienating force of an ignorant human community. In Kafka's eyes,

⁹ *Diaries*, I, p. 44.

however, literature is not a form of escapism, but rather the only space where the isolated self is capable of establishing its human integrity. Writing as an act of self-definition seeks to emancipate the self from the loathed realm of power dominated by the authority figures. In Kafka's case the father, patriarch and tyrant, assumed the central role of repressive dominance over all social relationships. In the *Letter To His Father*, that extraordinary document of socialization in the late-bourgeois family, Kafka sharply criticizes all illegitimate authority. However, he impairs the lucidity of his critique by arguing not only self-critically but also from a standpoint which internalized the repressive impact of his authoritarian socialization. As early as 1910 Kafka developed his critical view of the familial and societal pressures by asserting the terrible and lasting harm which education had inflicted upon him. It is significant that Kafka, tortured by his search for clarity and self-knowledge, wrote six different versions of the very same critique.¹⁰ Literature as a refuge and writing as an emancipatory activity, however, could not gain a true basis in real life. Compared to praxis, that is the empirical domain of human action and self-determination, writing as the sole confirmation of one's existence had to remain a "nothing."¹¹

This dilemma of the threatened self also shaped Kafka's view of literary tradition. He was mainly concerned with the excruciating conditions of his favorite writers' lives. Ulrich Weisstein justifiably speaks of Kafka's psychologically determined relationship to the admired Flaubert.¹² The same can be said about Kafka's interest in the confessional writings of Kleist, Grillparzer, Kierkegaard, and others. The psychological disposition that underlies his interest becomes apparent when we focus upon Kafka's aesthetics of the literary function. In his need to look for mirrors of his own existential impasse in a repressive social situation, Kafka turns to books as vehicles for the transport of his soul into the envisioned refuge: "Many a book serves as a key to the unknown rooms of one's own castle."¹³ Kafka perceives the impact of

¹⁰ The opening sentence reads, "When I think about it, I must say that my education has done me great harm in some respects." *Diaries*, I, p. 14.

¹¹ See *Dearest Father: Stories and Other Writings* (Schocken, 1954). Most recently Heinz Hillmann has attempted to give a dialectical critique of Kafka's analysis of the socialization process in *Franz Kafka: Dichtungstheorie und Dichtungsgestalt*, second enlarged ed. (Bonn, 1973), pp. 232–255. See my own analysis in *Franz Kafka: Einführung*, pp. 202–207.

¹² Ulrich Weisstein, *Einführung in die vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1968), p. 106.

¹³ "Manches Buch wirkt wie ein Schlüssel zu fremden Sälen des eigenen Schlosses." Franz Kafka, *Briefe 1902–1924, Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Max Brod (Schocken, 1958), p. 20.

literature as an elevating force which leads to self-illumination. This path to self-knowledge is paved with an extreme awareness of pain. Kafka writes,

But we need these books which overpower us like a painful accident, like the death of a person dearer to us than our own life, like an expulsion into the darkest woods away from all mankind, books which affect us like suicide.¹⁴

This catalogue of pain, this lament of the alienated individual, conceives of literature as a continuum of suffering which destroys the complacency of an inauthentic life. Kafka's concept of reading as a cutthroat experience culminates in the nightmarish and terrifying metaphor which he used for the impact of literature: "A book should be an ax to break the frozen sea within us."¹⁵ This destruction is not meant as a self-mutilation. Rather it aims at a deconstruction of the inner façade of the alienated self. Another striking quotation underscores the revitalizing force of the intended blow:

If the book we are reading cannot bring us to life with a knock on the head, why are we reading the book?¹⁶

Never again did Kafka state his aesthetics of the literary function so forcefully as a principle of awakening and regeneration. The illuminative process he envisions operates as mediation of intuitive knowledge. The awakening occurs upon the unleashing of hidden and repressed energies. This breaking forth of an all-consuming stream beyond conscious control transforms the alienated subjectivity into a being of higher awareness. The confining role-identifications within the social hierarchy give way to a state of complete rapture and lucidity. The act of writing likewise leads the artist whenever he successfully follows his calling to a state of ecstasy and euphoria, a blissful moment of inner breakthrough which Kafka so overwhelmingly experienced in his nocturnal creation of *The Judgment* in 1912. Summoned to explore the unknown, that is the uncharted regions of his soul, the writer engages in

¹⁴ "Wir brauchen aber die Bücher, die auf uns wirken wie ein Unglück, das uns schmerzt, wie der Tod eines, den wir lieber hatten als uns, wie wenn wir in Wälder verstossen würden, von allen Menschen weg, wie ein Selbstmord, . . ." *Briefe*, p. 27f.

¹⁵ "Ein Buch muss die Axt sein für das gefrorene Meer in uns." *Briefe*, p. 28.

¹⁶ "Wenn das Buch, das wir lesen, uns nicht mit einem Faustschlag auf den Schädel weckt, wozu lesen wir dann das Buch?" *Briefe*, p. 27.

an intuitive process: "One has to write into the dark as into a tunnel."¹⁷ The act of writing, then, restores to the author his subconsciously sensed identity. "I am the novel," Kafka proclaims to Felice a year later.¹⁸ This experience of true identity destroys the facile rationalizations of psychological and descriptive analysis. Kafka asserts, "The inner world can only be lived, not described."¹⁹ Literature, then, as a revelation of inner rapture depicts in lucid images the opaqueness of the interior world and serves as a reflector of the writer's reality. This fictional dramatization of subjectivity provokes the reader's "imitatio." Kafka discloses the most explicit and stunning confession of the existential purpose in his narrative strategy by recording the feeling of happiness and euphoria after having completed the "Exegesis" of the "Legend" in *The Trial*:

All these fine and very convincing passages always deal with the fact that someone is dying, that it is hard for him to do so, that it seems unjust to him, or at least harsh, and the reader is moved by this, or at least should be. But for me, who believes that I shall be able to lie contentedly on my deathbed, such scenes are secretly a game; indeed, in the death enacted I rejoice in my own death, hence in a calculating manner exploit the attention which the reader concentrates on death, have a much clearer understanding of it than he, who, I suppose, will loudly complain on his deathbed, and for these reasons my lament is as perfect as can be, nor is it suddenly broken off, as is likely in real lament, but rather dies beautifully and purely away. It is the same thing as my perpetual complaining to my mother over pains that were not nearly so great as my complaints might lead one to believe. With my mother, of course, I did not need to make so great a display of art as with the reader.²⁰

Here Kafka exhibits the categories most central to his poetological intention and narrative rhetoric. The author's lament and the reader's coerced identification with the protagonist are instrumental to the persuasion of Kafka's "*Kunstaufwand*," display of art. Manipulation and emotional captivation are meant to arrest the reader and subject him to a game of deception with no redemptive catharsis. Kafka reverses the traditional function of literature. He also topples the codified models of

¹⁷ "Man muss ins Dunkel hineinschreiben wie in einen Tunnel." Max Brod, *Über Franz Kafka (Eine Biographie; Franz Kafkas Glauben und Lehre; Verzweigung und Erlösung im Werk Franz Kafkas)* (Frankfurt, 1966), p. 349.

¹⁸ "Der Roman bin ich." Franz Kafka, *Briefe an Felice*, eds. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born, with an Introduction by Erich Heller (Schocken, 1967), p. 226.

¹⁹ "Die innere Welt lässt sich nur leben, nicht beschreiben." Franz Kafka, *Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande und andere Prosa aus dem Nachlass, Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Max Brod (Schocken, 1953), p. 72.

²⁰ *Diaries*, II, p. 102. In the original, "*Berechnung*" stands for "in a calculating manner" and "*Kunstaufwand*" for "display of art." See Franz Kafka, *Tagebücher 1910–1923, Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Max Brod (Schocken, 1951), p. 448f.

narrative convention. The principle of reader illumination is misused to perpetrate blindness without possible insight. The reader's delusion and victimization become the artist's revenue of delight. In Kafka's narrative there is no room for the familiar figure of the narrator whose role was to mediate knowledge, to communicate with an intelligent audience, and to guide a willing reader. But Kafka does not merely intend to exploit the vulnerability of his audience, nor does he utilize the unreliability of the narrator as a trite source of intriguing entertainment. Rather, his radically subjective narrative strategy defines the inevitable human failure of his protagonists as a modern predicament.

Kafka's execution of the superior narrator does not warrant the commonly held view among Kafka scholars that the relationship of narrative consciousness and main character is fully congruous. An outline of the genesis of "*Einsinnigkeit*" will further clarify this point. Kafka arrives at his remarkable technique by way of the first-person narration which he transforms into a third-person narration. The substitution of K. for I in the original version of *The Castle* substantiates this contention.²¹ This transformation could be made without apparent difficulty because Kafka had created a specific kind of first-person narration; namely, one in which he successfully eliminates the dialectics of the experiencing-I versus the narrating-I. The latter, the narrating-I, inhabits a retrospective space of accumulated experience and knowledge in order to recollect things past. Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* bears this feature of the conventional retrospective stance in its title, although he intrigues the reader by a new application of the experiencing-I versus narrating-I dialectics. Kafka, however, reduces the narrating persona to an observing entity who perceives events at the very moment of their origination. This is, structurally speaking, the most important consequence derived from the principle of an absolutely linear progression of time. The almost undisturbed continuity of the time sequence—Kafka allows for only some reminiscences and flashbacks on the part of his protagonists—creates a fatal dimension underscored by the prospect of an unknowable, threatening future which asserts its menace in the death and final reduction of the hero. Time and again, Kafka depicts a fictional world stripped of the concreteness of historical time and society and constituted in the perception of the main character. Through this central

²¹ See Dorrit Cohn, "K. Enters the 'Castle': On the Change of Person in Kafka's Manuscript," *Euphorion*, LXII (#1 1968), 28–45.

perspective a coherent phenomenal field is established, but without any superior orientation or corrective evaluation. No intruding narrator enlightens the reader about the true meaning of the events and issues. These structural features of "*Einsinnigkeit*," together with a network of emotional appeals, compel the reader to identify inescapably with the protagonists. Drawn into a perplexing sequence of events, the reader is forced to submit to the characters' struggle against uncanny and overwhelming powers. Even when rendering the thoughts and feelings of his figures accessible, Kafka withholds their true motivations. Unlike the stream-of-consciousness technique or interior monologue, Kafka's strategy provides only token knowledge about his characters, and he dissipates all queries into their inner state of being by diverting the reader's interest. Any clear vision is blurred by endless hypothesizing, and the opaqueness of the Kafka hero whose lack of self-knowledge perpetrates his blindness confirms the inaccessibility of truth. The reader's advantage of a potentially penetrating gaze is undermined by his complicity in the act of "*imitatio*." Misguided by an abundance of minute detail which also fascinates and arrests the protagonists themselves, the reader fails to sustain a critical overview. His fallacy is that of empathy. The overriding atomization of truth and totality becomes imminent here. Kafka portrays a subjectivity conditioned by a constant threat. This threat corresponds to the repressive powers exerted upon the individual in modern society. In the confrontation with the world of authority and terror, any attempted act of self-affirmation is doomed to fail. The devastating impact of the fight against superior power, be it father or institutions, is exemplified in the following passage from *The Judgment*:

Georg shrank into a corner, as far away from his father as possible. A long time ago he had firmly made up his mind to watch closely every least movement so that he should not be surprised by any indirect attack, a pounce from behind or above. At this moment he recalled this long-forgotten resolve and forgot it again, like a man drawing a short thread through the eye of a needle.²²

In the rivalry between protagonist and antagonist, Georg's intended posture of caution and critical observation is simply swept away by the representative of authority and power. Unable to preserve his poise, Georg succumbs to the upsurge of events forced upon him. This is also

²² Franz Kafka, *The Penal Colony: Stories and Short Pieces*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (Schocken, 1948), p. 60.

the moment when the narrative voice hidden behind the persona of the hero distances itself from the character in order to gesture to the reader a warning albeit metaphorically. Georg's identity and consciousness disintegrate, and an uncontrollable drive to surrender takes over. At the end he willingly carries out the irrevocable sentence. Having abandoned his emancipatory impulse, Georg finds a new and, paradoxically enough, elating identity in becoming a victim whose self-sacrifice affirms the unchallenged claims of the established authority. With the hero's death, Kafka celebrates his victory over the reader whom he has compelled, through his enticing "*Kunstaufwand*," to forgo his detached poise and join vicariously in the protagonist's execution. By falling victim to the appeals of the story, the reader goes the path of total identification. This "*imitatio*," then, is a major fallacy provoked by the rhetoric of lament.

The model for the ritualistic enactment of total delusion by the enticing power of art is a mythical one. It is the song of the siren. But Kafka's ambiguity and narrative irony enable the reader to become another Odysseus. In a very late diary entry he reflects upon the comfort he derives from writing:

The strange, mysterious, perhaps dangerous, perhaps saving comfort there is in writing: it is the leap out of murderers' row; it is seeing that which is really taking place.²³

Kafka's term "*Tat-Beobachtung*" is the counterpart of the principle of identification, and it is a refuge for both writer and reader. Whereas the "*Totschlägerreihe*" invokes the image of dreadful victimization through the life process without possible salvation, "*Tat-Beobachtung*" creates a distance from within. Although Kafka employs the negativity and menace of the "*Totschlägerreihe*" in his forceful narrative strategy as a way of subjecting the reader, his "*Kunstaufwand*" allows for a certain degree of detachment which helps the reader to reflect upon the fate of his protagonists. "*Tat-Beobachtung*," then, signifies that the stance of the author is a form of self-observation. The narrative faculty both creates and critically evaluates the fictional reality. In turn, the character, as the persona of the author, constitutes the center of perception, but his perspective is without superior insight. The narrative consciousness, on the other hand, predominantly through its evaluative function, estab-

²³ *Diaries*, II, p. 212. "*Merkwürdiger, geheimnisvoller, vielleicht gefährlicher, vielleicht erlösender Trost des Schreibens: das Hinausspringen aus der Totschlägerreihe, Tat-Beobachtung.*" *Tagebücher*, p. 563.

lishes a realm of relative distance and lucidity by exposing the blindness of the protagonist. Nevertheless, this dialectic of blindness and insight does not allow for any separate entity to assume authentic knowledge.

"*Gutes Wort: Der Epiker weiss alles.*" Kafka does not pretend to know everything. He is determined to describe only the fate of his characters, namely failure and death. In "*A Hunger Artist*," for example, the narrative voice, which too often only speaks from the viewpoint of the alienated hunger artist, brushes aside all possible answers to the crucial question of why the public interest has suddenly waned by making the understatement,

There may have been profound causes for it, but who was going to bother about that.²⁴

Why on earth, a puzzled reader may ask, does Kafka the narrator not use this excellent opportunity to divulge the reasons for the hunger artist's fate? Why is there no attempt at an explanation by some reliable source which would give even an inkling of that crucial shift of the public interest? With no insight provided, the reader is bound to be trapped in conjectures about the hunger artist's art which is not communicative but rather self-referential. Only an indirect comment is given at the end by the fact that a panther, to which the public flocks, is his successor. In order to reach conclusions, the reader has to break through the paradoxical circle of the protagonist's delusive self-understanding. Kafka shuns giving straight answers when he finds himself left with disquieting questions. One of the most powerful moments in his scenario is the death of his characters. Here his "*Kunstaufwand*" is at its peak.

Kafka insists on "*imitatio*." He subjects the reader to the haunting experience of an enigmatic and opaque world in which suffering from the plight of human destiny prevails. By implication Kafka provides the reader with conclusive evidence that this condition is not merely metaphysically contrived. In depriving his audience of the comforting and illuminating narrator of the past whose traditional role also included a certain degree of playful unreliability, Kafka does not only manipulate emotion and identification, however. Employing the principles of alienation, contradiction, paradox, irony, and through the reflective stance of an author telling his tale from the closest possible dis-

²⁴ *The Penal Colony*, p. 250.

tance, Kafka depicts the realm of human experience in such a way as to enable the reader to overcome his unmeditated willingness to identify. Being elevated to the level of "Tat-Beobachtung," the reader is confronted with a text which reproduces the oppressiveness and opaqueness of his social condition. By escaping from murderers' row, he becomes witness to the failure of the protagonists. Even the heroes are allowed exceptional moments of lucidity and self-knowledge. Gregor Samsa's knowing smile in *The Metamorphosis* is startling and probably the most extraordinary smile in world literature. It is the reflective reader who breaks the spell of identification cast upon him. This is the moment of illumination when the reader enters the discourse of the text with the promise of return to his own self. Writing then is, after all, a cognitive process in the realm of imaginary events, a kind of dialogue of the lonely author with himself in the presence of the reader.