

among the living, and *The Castle*, too, with the complete indeterminacy of the mode of being (*Seinslage*) of the castle, are themselves examples of the logical equivalence of all modes in this kind of literature.

In conclusion I might add to this point that thus, on the whole, this surreal, non-classical conception of being by no means deals merely with the "deformation of the natural form of phenomena," as Paul Klee formulated it in 1924 [. . .] in order to explain effects in his own painting—which, however, extend very much beyond this explanation.* The world of aesthetic being, too, distinguishes itself through the play of modes; every neglect of reality favors the multiplicity of possibilities, and every deformation of the form or of the object, which the aesthetic sign lets emerge from the husk of trivial purposes, making it recognizable and communicable, already almost implies a change of mode. Kafka does not deform.

From Max Bense, *Die Theorie Kafkas*. Cologne and Berlin: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1952. Pp. 51-54. Reprinted by permission of the publisher. Copyright © 1952 by Verlag Kiepenheuer, Witsch & Co. GmbH. [Trans. S.C.]

* Paul Klee, *Über die moderne Kunst*, 1949.

Hellmuth Kaiser

Kafka's Fantasy of Punishment

The works of Franz Kafka, like dreams in their mixture of fantasy and realism, like works of art of the highest order by virtue of the vitality of their language and the cogent clarity of their descriptions, allow the analytic point of view to gain richer insights into the subconscious currents engendering great art than are permitted by perhaps any other literary work.

Comparable to fairy tales and myths for the self-contained character of their symbolic content, they have for the psychologist the advantage over these forms, of embodying the internal vicissitudes of a single personality and therefore of revealing the connections within an entire personality development. [. . .]

In keeping with the nature of an analytic investigation, those psychological facts which come to light will have no bearing on the character of Kafka which expresses itself in conscious actions, thoughts, and words; instead, elements partly or entirely absent from the writer's consciousness will play a major role.

The reader unfamiliar with such investigations must therefore be warned against supposing that by means of them the "real Kafka" will come to light, or that the gestalt of the artist lying closer to consciousness and perceived from a nonanalytic perspective is only a deceptive mask. . . . To do our utmost to rule out misunderstandings, we want to acknowledge explicitly the fact that our assertions refer to an object not figuring in the usual kind of biographical investigation, and we shall assign to the personality, the levels of whose sub-

conscious we seek to examine, the cover-name K., which Kafka usually gives the heroes of his novels. . . .

The Metamorphosis opens as one morning the hero, a young traveling salesman, just about to go on a business trip required by his job, discovers on awakening that he has been transformed into an ugly, disgusting insect (something like a bedbug, but one of course larger than life-size).

No reason is given for this metamorphosis from which its symbolic significance could be derived. We shall therefore study its effects . . . in order to draw some conclusion as to its meaning.

The metamorphosis is preceded by a span of five years, during which time a steady development always proceeding in the same direction takes place in the hero, Gregor Samsa, and in the parental household in which he lives. This development is introduced by the collapse of the father's business . . . , an event which causes Gregor to devote himself to his job with redoubled zeal, so that he soon . . . becomes the breadwinner for his parents and sister. The mother had always been incapacitated by a physical ailment, and the father, obviously emotionally hard hit by his economic failure, sinks into a condition of physical and mental lethargy, in which he neglects his appearance, sleeps a great deal, dozes listlessly, and for the most part just remains still. With the help of a servant girl the sister takes care of the household and for the rest devotes herself to playing the violin. The son, Gregor, whose ambition grows with his success, finally goes so far in his care of his family that he resolves to send his sister to the conservatory, even though this would restrict him professionally. He intends to announce this plan to his sister on Christmas Eve—which at the beginning of the story is just approaching—"without bothering about any objections."

Now the metamorphosis takes place. Gregor is unable to work and finally dies a few months later of voluntary starvation, after realizing that in this condition he is a horror and a worry and burden to his family.

This event has the following effect on the family: the

sister takes a job in an office,* the mother sews underwear for a clothing firm, the father becomes a bank messenger. The story ends with the father, mother, and daughter making an excursion together, in the course of which the family's financial situation is discussed and revealed to be relatively good. The closing sentences are about the parents' budding wishes, which bid fair to become true, that their "good-looking, shapely" daughter will be well provided for through marriage with a "good husband."

But what is most striking is the change which occurs to the father throughout the course of the story. Almost an entire page is devoted to its description. From being an old man the father becomes a bank official "holding himself very erect," dressed in a "tight-fitting blue uniform."

Summarized, then, this is the course of events: the son becomes strong as a result of the business failure of his father, through his competence cripples his father's self-esteem and acquisitive sense, and finally takes over the father's position in the family while the latter sinks into the degraded state of a dependent, helpless, needy creature. Following the catastrophic metamorphosis . . . the same development takes place in reverse; the father again takes up his position as head of the family, and the son sinks into the state of useless ballast. . . .

Thus the story depicts the struggle between son and father as it rises out of the oedipal conflict. And two phases of this struggle are placed hard by one another: the first, in which the son has the advantage, and the second, in which the father defeats the son. Between both phases stands the metamorphosis as the line of demarcation or, better, as the event which reverses the direction of development.

Of course the metamorphosis of the son—viewed psychologically—does not signify an external event but an internal change in the direction of drive. It is a kind of self-punishment for his earlier competitive striving

* Actually a store. [S.C.]

aimed against the father, a withdrawal from the exacting genital position.

The word "punishment" does not seem appropriate, since after all the son has done nothing more than that which a keen sense of family responsibility would have prescribed to anyone in his position.

But we have to take into account the fact that hostile feelings toward the father, precisely because they warrant punishment, were not allowed to be expressed openly in the story. But if we look very closely, we shall still be able to discover their concealed traces. Namely, even when the actions of the son before as well as after the metamorphosis are depicted so as to be beyond reproach,* the behavior of the father is still inspired by a distinct thirst for revenge: this emotion comes to light in the moment when the father has the opportunity and nominal cause to deal aggressively with his son and is not only "furious" but "glad." The masking tendency has had the effect here of clothing the depiction of the son's feelings of hate for the father in the depiction of the father's corresponding emotions toward the son. Considering the nature of our psychological interpretation, this reading is not only a bare possibility but an absolute necessity. For every striking manifestation in poetry must

* Strictly speaking, there is an exception even to this. Gregor intends to send his sister to the conservatory without bothering about "any objections." That is, so to speak, his final and boldest wish before the metamorphosis. Over against this, at the end of the story, is the parents' wish to marry off their daughter. And so if Gregor wanted to send his sister to the conservatory, it was not only out of brotherly concern for her musical development, but—as we may conclude precisely from the parents' opposed wish—by tying her to an artistic career to prevent her from marrying. Again, the brother's jealousy of the sister expressed here may have arisen in turn by a displacement of the oedipal jealousy intended for the mother. This idea might find some support in the fact that according to the story Gregor's decision to send his sister to the conservatory is his last thought before the metamorphosis, so that we may gather that it triggers off the metamorphosis. It follows from this that something must be expressed in this decision which is calculated to release strong feelings of guilt and thus the strong need for punishment.

have its psychological basis in the poet's psyche [*Seele*]; nothing essential can be considered to be the contingent characteristic of a "nature" or "environment" which just happens to be so constituted and is then said to be faithfully depicted.

The punishment which K. dictates to himself through his metamorphosis has a dreadful, sinister character. We shall have to isolate its various features.

The animal into which Gregor is transformed is an insect, a loathsome disgusting creature. From the dishes set down in front of him he picks out for himself the ones that are spoiled, rotten, and unfit for human consumption. The rest he doesn't care for. We see here . . . that the animal state denotes a lower, more infantile level of development of the instinctual life. It is no accident that the animal in this case is an insect, i.e. a creature standing . . . [at an extremely low level] on the evolutionary scale. As far as the development of disgust is concerned, there exists at first an anal pleasure, which is entirely free of disgust. With the repression of anal pleasure, a disgust for the feces arises. As long as the repression is not yet consolidated, the disgust is violent, and the object-domain toward which it is directed is indistinct, since every similarity between a pleasurable object and feces is recognized and seized upon as such, and the pleasurable object in question is drawn into the domain of the disgusting. As the repression of anal pleasure is increasingly consolidated, the line dividing what is disgusting from what is not disgusting becomes narrower and more sharply defined, because anal pleasure no longer goes *in search of* the affinity with or similarity to feces. The result of these facts . . . is that the insect of *The Metamorphosis* feels a decided pleasure in things that are unclean and disgusting, hence, in feces, and can therefore enjoy the spoiled food without disgust.

In the light of these considerations, we can speak of the metamorphosis as a regression into the anal phase.

It is worth noting that the triumph of the son over the father is accompanied by the father's growing dirty in precisely the same way that the triumph of the father

is accompanied by the son's growing unclean. The son cannot put himself in the father's position without the father's putting himself in the son's position. Unclean-ness, anality, is here conceived as a demon which, driven out of one person, must enter into another. The drives which are no longer allowed to take effect in one's actions are projected onto the partner, the "opponent."

Another dimension of the "punishment by metamorphosis" results from the father's behavior toward the son. As we have already stated, the balance of power between father and son is reversed by means of the son's metamorphosis. The father's hitherto suppressed hostility and craving for revenge—the mirror image of the oedipal hate which, as we have concluded, the son bears toward the father—manifest themselves in two aggressive acts, in which the father bodily maltreats the son.

Gregor is first maltreated when after his metamorphosis he attempts in his monstrous form to calm the office manager of his firm, who is enraged by Gregor's absence; and to this end he emerges from his room. The father, infected by the horror which grips the mother as well as the office manager, attempts to scare the "insect" back with angry hissing. Gregor, who in his new condition has only an imperfect control over his body, gets stuck in the door to his room, of which only one wing is open; one of his sides gets scraped raw, and ugly patches remain on the white door:

. . . when from behind his father gave him a hard shove, which was truly his salvation, and bleeding profusely, he flew far into his room.

The second scene in which he is maltreated is more detailed: the sister intends to clear the furniture out of Gregor's room in order to make it easier for him to crawl around. She also wins her mother over to this plan, although at first the mother, with her instinct for the right thing, has misgivings about it, because such an act would necessarily make the son believe that the family was now convinced of the irreversibility of his

present condition. Gregor, who earlier had wanted the furniture removed, finds the clearing out of the things which have become dear to him, now that it is about to become reality, a painful experience, and in the attempt to save at least something, he breaks out of his seclusion. [The action of pp. 35-37 is summarized.] . . . In the living room Gregor is surprised by his father. The father, taking a mistaken view of Gregor's responsibility for the mother's fainting, chases the son around the table and finally bombards him with apples. . . .

There are *two* scenes of maltreatment. In the first scene two injuries occur; in the second, two apples strike. The repeated occurrence of the number two strengthens the interpretation, in any case obvious, that the mistreatments are "acts of castration" [in the broadest psycho-analytical meaning of the term].

In the second scene, too, we find easily interpreted allusions to the sexual basis of the entire proceedings. The behavior of the mother and sister portrays with uncanny accuracy the typical behavior of a well-meaning family toward a member who is neurotically ill. "The furniture is cleared out," i.e. family life becomes oriented to the neurosis. The sick member is granted a special existence, concessions are made to him, partly for his own good, partly to get along with him better, and areas of conflict are removed. The danger inherent in this is hinted at in the story: the individual who has taken flight in regression is robbed by this behavior of his last connections with reality. K. feels this instinctively and, in order to salvage at least something from his former life, takes up a protective position in front of his relation to woman, to sexuality—indeed his position protects it by covering it up. One can adduce from other works of Kafka that fur is for him almost always the symbol of the female genitalia (as this symbol is repeatedly found in folklore), and that for K., only erotically active, aggressive women come into question as love objects. These comments will be sufficient to clarify the meaning of the "picture," which . . . Gregor had cut out of a glossy magazine.

The fact that we are really dealing here with an oedipal conflict, i.e. with jealousy toward the father on account of the mother, is evident from the end of the second occasion of Gregor's maltreatment. . . .

With his last glance he saw the door of his room burst open as his mother rushed out ahead of his screaming sister, in her chemise, for his sister had partly undressed her while she was unconscious in order to let her breathe more freely; saw his mother run up to his father and on the way her unfastened petticoats slide to the floor one by one; and saw as, stumbling over the skirts, she forced herself onto his father, and embracing him, in complete union with him—but now Gregor's sight went dim—her hands at the back of his father's neck, begged for Gregor's life. (39)

Here we find in immediate connection with the father's violent "castrating" intimidation an allusion to the son's witnessing the primal scene, revealed by the typical "paralysis of sight" which corresponds to the effect of repression.

It may seem strange that in the story the metamorphosis, i.e. the regression, takes place first, and only in the further course of this process do the castration shock and the witnessing of the primal scene appear. But if we consider these experiences more precisely . . . we shall find, at least so far as the castration shock is concerned, that they are in no way the original childhood experiences which take place years before regression, but further developments of these impressions, complex structures, which have arisen through the interactions of various strivings within the subconscious. But even where a further development is not recognizable—as in the witnessing of the primal scene—this does not mean that the corresponding primary experience has to be intended, but only a re-emergence of this experience in memory or fantasy. For the symbol-language of literature does not distinguish real experience from the resurgence of the repressed into consciousness.

Until now we have observed two moments of the

punishment by metamorphosis: anal regression and the reactivation of the oedipal situation (castration, witnessing of the primal scene). We now come to a third moment, the most important one for the particular goals of our study.

If during the time of his punishment Gregor is maltreated by his father, suffering the repetition of the castration experience, there is something more in this than the gratification of the need for punishment. The fruit which the father employs while maltreating him—the apple—is indeed the typical, proverbial reward of the child, as it recurs, for example, in "moralizing tales," not to speak of its significance in the biblical fall of man. What the father grants the son with the bombardment is not only punishment, but pleasure, too, and masochistic pleasure at that. We suspect now that what is "startling and unbelievable" about the pain Gregor feels after the apples are thrown is in fact the circumstance that this pain contains pleasure. It is also this pleasure that causes Gregor to feel "as if nailed to the spot" and to "stretch" out his body or, as we can now say, to "stretch himself voluptuously" in a "complete confusion" of all his senses. The confusion originates, of course, in the fact that pleasure and pain are mingled in the most intimate fashion.

In every case the injuries are inflicted on the son from behind. In the first scene it is a "hard shove from behind" which makes him bleed; the apples in the second scene hit him in the back, and one of them even remains lodged there. This points to the fact that the masochism is connected here to the anal sphere, an association which fits in well with the fact that the metamorphosis into a filthy insect represents a regression to anal fixations. One could well imagine that the effects of a chastisement suffered at the hands of the father (blows on the buttocks) have here become associated, on the one hand, with the castration threatened by the father and, on the other hand, with the pleasurable feelings associated with defecation. Out of the encounter of this complex with the excitations arising from the observation of the primal

scene, it is possible that as a result the desire has formed for a forcible *impregnation* by the father in the form of a *coitus per anum*, a process described by the scene of the bombardment with apples, if we conceive of it as a rebus or pun. With the aid of parallels from other works of Kafka . . . we can go one step further and assume that the lodging of the apple in the back of the "insect" also signifies a wish fulfillment—namely, by this coitus to gain the father's penis as a substitute for his own lost member.

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Peter Dow Webster

Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis" as Death and Resurrection Fantasy

Kafka's "Metamorphosis" has fascinated many readers who respond to it on an unconscious level of apprehension rather than on a level of conscious understanding. The tale is as weird as many a nightmare they have had, and as strangely, even humorously disturbing. Here are the eternal ones of the dream or the archetypal constructs of the unconscious subjected to the secondary elaboration and conscious control of the artistic mind. Although most readers feel the import of these characters vaguely, many prefer not to know their total meaning too clearly because of the anxiety involved in facing even artistically created reality; and the revelations of art, like those from the unconscious itself, do challenge and sometimes destroy the frontier defenses of the ego.

Kafka himself took care not to examine too closely his dreams. . . . Because of his refusal or maybe his ego's fear of a total invasion of the unconscious, he continued to pay throughout his life for a deep-seated destructive urge against the mother image and an equally strong desire to possess or to be possessed by this archetypal image. What Kafka presumed, or at least claimed, to be detestation, originating in fear, of the father was merely or primarily a masochistic attachment to the denying mother, whom he strove to displace in his creative work as artist. What he thought was a cause was an effect. In his ego he felt like an unclean pest, and it is to the dung beetle that his ego is reduced in "Metamorphosis."

. . . "Metamorphosis" is misleading as a title; it should be pluralized since the whole family constellation, father,