



Reading the Letter in the Pocket: Dissemination and Insemination in Kafka's "The Judgment"

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Abstract

Departing from the intimate relationship between writing and reading in Kafka's oeuvre, this article aims to illustrate the transference effect of literature staged by Kafka's "The Judgment" (1912). As a text telling the story of a conflict between father and son, "The Judgment" evokes an Oedipal struggle. The article suggests that despite these Oedipal connotations, the text resists representation, foregrounding its performative force. Tracing this performative force in the itinerary of the letter that the son writes to his friend in Russia, the article engages with Lacan's conceptualization of "letter" and "literality." With the help of other Kafka readers, particularly Adorno, Benjamin, Blanchot, Deleuze and Guattari, and Derrida, the article concludes that "The Judgment" can be read as a text of transgression –both of the Oedipal law and the laws of literature– in which the effect of transference leads to an experience of *jouissance*.

Keywords

Jouissance, Lacan, Oedipus complex, transference, transgression, unreadable

To cite as

Demir-Atay, H., 2016, 'Reading the Letter in the Pocket: Dissemination and Insemination in Kafka's "The Judgment"', *PsyArt* 20, pp. 165–184.

When I read your letter the first time, that sentence frightened me so that I smudged it over with my pencil to make it unreadable.

Kafka, Letters to Friends 251

I. Introduction

Although Franz Kafka did not write any critical text that reflects his perception of the act of reading, his letters and diaries provide us with many references to the writers he read: Dickens, Goethe, Hamsun, and Stendhal, among others. His comments on texts and writers are consistently accompanied by his reflections on the experience of reading. Not only does he describe his emotions when reading books, but he also writes his projections on his reader's possible reception of his texts. Considering that some of his fiction is also based on readings of literary works extending from mythical stories to *Don Quixote*, one can see that, in Kafka's oeuvre, reading and writing are often intertwined. These two acts inform each other and blur the lines between the two, bringing forth the transformative effect of literature. This article attempts to show this effect by reading the "letter" in Kafka's "The Judgment" (1912) as a signifier which deconstructs the parental relationship between the author and the literary work.

II. The *Venire* of the Letter

"The Judgment," similar to *The Metamorphosis* and *The Trial*, deals with the recurrent themes of guilt and punishment. The struggle between father and son –young merchant Georg Bendemann– points to a struggle for power through some references to Georg's possible undertaking of his father's role in life, particularly in business. After Georg's mother dies, he commits himself "with greater determination to the business as well as to everything else" (78). Georg's success is proven by the improvement in business. His engagement with Fräulein Frieda Brandenfeld, "a girl from a well-to-do family," adds to the tension, alluding to Georg's replacement of his father as a sexually potent figure (79). Georg's father associates this engagement not only with Frieda's sexually seductive acts, such as "lift[ing] up her skirts," but also with Georg's mother's death: "[Y]ou have disgraced your mother's memory, betrayed your friend, and stuck your father into bed so that he can't move" (85). Disgracing the mother's memory for a sexual motivation as well as sticking the father to bed evokes a struggle occurring in the Oedipal triangle, considering that the story is wrought with similar connotations.

Yet reading the story as the representation of Oedipus complex or of the sense of guilt that may be a remnant of Oedipal stage can hardly be justified by a logical line of thought. Neither the manifest nor the latent content provides the reader with a totally consistent net of symbols and figures. Georg's friend in Russia, for example, cannot easily be integrated to the interpretations that view the story as the representation of Oedipus complex. Georg's father adds him to the Oedipal triangle, accusing Georg of betraying his friend as well (85). As a distant friend of Georg, he appears to play a significant role in the strife between father and son for "resigning himself to becoming a permanent

bachelor” as a result of his isolated life in Russia (77). Even though Georg's friend in Russia emerges as a figure that highlights the competition between Georg and his father when Georg's father calls him “a son after [his] own heart” (85), any reading of the story has to confront the absurdities revolving around him.

At first, Georg's friend in Russia seems to be a figment of his imagination as a distant fellow who pays rare visits to his homeland. However, when Georg's father claims to have known him well, his “reality” strikes not only the reader, but also Georg himself. He begins to see his friend everywhere, “in the vastness of Russia,” “at the door of an empty, plundered warehouse,” or “among the wreckage of his showcases” (85). His ambivalent position as a distant yet intimate friend can be observed starting with the opening scene of the story in which Georg has just finished a letter to him. The letter Georg puts in an envelope “in a slow and dreamy fashion” (77) aims to keep up Georg's correspondence with his friend, but Georg does not feel comfortable about sending “any real news such as could frankly be told to the most distant acquaintance” (78). Despite his unsettling feelings about sending “real news” to him, Georg writes of his engagement with Frieda, puts the letter in his pocket, and goes to his father's room in order to inform him that he is mailing the letter. After telling his father that he will send the news of his engagement to St. Petersburg, Georg “draw[s] the letter a little way from his pocket and let[s] it drop back again” (81). While this indecisive movement of the letter is added to the ambiguous function of the friend in Russia, the tension between father and son increases. Finally, Georg's father sentences him to death by drowning (87). Georg follows his father's order, and lets himself drop from a bridge, calling in a low voice, “Dear parents, I have always loved you, all the same” (88).

While the story is complicated by the shift from punishment to suicide, from the struggle for power to the expression of love, the letter that remains in the pocket continues to be a question. Even if the possibility of reading the story as the representation of Oedipus complex is not completely blotted out by these absurdities, they enable the scene of writing to come forth as the main force in the story. Its “writerly” nature, in Barthes's term, is propelled by the impossibility of pursuing thematically and symbolically coherent figures. The letter Georg writes to his friend appears to be a pure signifier as is the case with the letter in Edgar Allan Poe's “The Purloined Letter.” As a signifier without signification the letter's itinerary illustrates the unreadability of “The Judgment.” While the letter, which Georg draws a little from his pocket and drops it back again, swings on the bridge like the purloined letter hanging from the mantelpiece, Georg's friend in Russia may be read as the intended addressee placed in the Oedipal triangle. If the letter arrives at its destination, if not at Russia, it is basically because it shifts in the signifying chain as a pure signifier. Consequently, the letter's addressee is wherever it is read rather than

the one that is intended. This suggestion may be explained through the distinction Barthes makes between performance and representation.

Barthes defines the performative form as the one “in which enunciation has no other content [...] than the act by which it is uttered...” (“The Death” 146). The performative form and therefore the action of the text are facilitated by a temporality that destructs the judgmental relations in reading. Temporality eludes the notion of literature that locates the book and the author “automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after*” (145). The author exists simultaneously with the book instead of coming before it. This simultaneity destructs the “judgmental” relationship between the text and the reader. As Barthes describes, “[t]he Author is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child” (145). The parental relationship between the author and the text entails the idea of the reader whose reception of the text is based on a demand. In other words, when the author is deemed to be the origin of the text, then he/she is assumed to demand the reader's reception of the text in a certain direction.

The author can create an intended effect as long as he/she comes before the text, whereas the temporality that leads to the action of the text prevents any demand by creating multiplicity in reading. If such a text is “ourselves writing” (S/Z 5), then any singular system, including the predictability of the text meets a resistance. Similar to the writer who does not demand a particular reading from the reader, the reader does not demand the literary work from the writer. Georg's letter in “The Judgment” turns to be an “ourselves writing” when it appears as disappearance as a result of its movement in Georg's pocket. The letter not only diverts from its address, but also performs the action of “The Judgment.” Therefore, Kafka's letter, in addition to Georg's, arrives at its destination beyond the writer's and the reader's intentions and demands.

However, one should be wary of defining Kafka's intentions. Kafka provides commentaries and explanations on his texts as well as their sources and motivations. Nevertheless, reading these explanatory remarks as the manifestation of Kafka's intentions might be problematic since Kafka's writings are hardly separable from his readings. In other words, Kafka's diaries and letters contribute to the performance of Kafka's oeuvre which stages the powerful effect of the scene of writing and reading with their incompleteness as well as the fact that many of them have been published after Kafka's death. Kafka does not “demand” from the reader by creating an “intended effect,” in Benjamin's terms, because the reader is already in Kafka's work as the reason and the effect of writing (“The Task” 76). The September 23, 1912 entry of Kafka's diary, for example, exposes how the experience of writing and reading are merged for Kafka. The entry is written at the time when Kafka wrote “The Judgment” “at one sitting” –during the night of 22nd-23rd, from ten p.m. to six a.m– in a “fearful strain and joy” (212). He recites how one needs “a complete opening out of the body and the soul” in order to write (213). Kafka merges

the experience of writing with that of reading just after pronouncing the essential of writing: “Many emotions carried along in the writing, joy, for example, that I shall have something beautiful for Max’s *Arkadia*, thoughts about Freud, of course; in one passage, of *Arnold Beer*; in another, of Wasserman; in one, of Werfel’s giantess; of course, also of my ‘The Urban World’” (213). Kafka's passion of reading becomes clear in this passage when he expresses his emotions during writing through his experience of reading.

“The Judgment” as a story that “came out of [Kafka] like a real birth, covered with filth and slime” attains a special importance to understand this reciprocal relationship between writing and reading (February 11, 1912, 214). Kafka's association of birth with “filth” and “slime” alludes to his maternal possession of his work. Instead of nourishing his “child” like a “father,” Kafka gives birth to his “child” like a “mother” in the convoluted feelings of pain and pleasure. This parental relationship does not change the nature of temporality described by Barthes, as the combination of pain and pleasure entails death in itself together with birth. Kafka's becoming mother implies the death/loss of phallus and therefore the abolishment of the creator's precedence over the created.

In order to better understand Kafka's maternal relationship with his texts, Charles Bernheimer's reading of one of Kafka's diary entries might be a good departure point. Bernheimer reflects on Kafka's entry of December 13, 1914, in which he writes that his best writings find their basis in his capacity “to meet death with contentment.” As the entry reads, the passages that deal with a dying person shake the reader, while Kafka exploits the effect that death creates on the reader as his lament is “as perfect as can be, nor does it suddenly break off, as is likely to be the case with a real lament, but dies beautifully and purely away” (87). Bernheimer draws attention to the mastery that Kafka attributes to his own death in this entry in contrast to his usual experience of himself as unsound. This mastery, he adds, is also associated by Kafka with a perfect, complete, and beautiful writing process (87-88). Bernheimer defines Kafka's separation of himself from the reader as “cruel” for its purpose of playing a fictional game: “Whereas the reader is convinced by the mimetic power of the literary work of the implacable finality of death, the writer rejoices in his ability to construct that finality as a textual effect” (88). In other words, while the reader needs to deal with the pains of his/her identification with the character who is facing death, the writer enjoys the fictionality of his work, first by confronting his own death powerfully (88). Bernheimer thus points out the correspondence between the view of the contented death and “The Judgment,” which emerges “like a real birth” (89). According to Bernheimer, the text is born and dies in a maternal relation to its creator in the first period of Kafka's creative activity. Nonetheless, he adds, in this same period Kafka seems to differentiate between death and dying when he defines himself as “made of literature,” and writing not as death, but “the eternal torments of dying” (89).

Without attributing a particular importance to Kafka's establishment of a maternal rather than a paternal relation with his early work, Bernheimer views Kafka's contentment with facing death as the manifestation of his mastery over writing. Even though Kafka's aestheticization of death as beautiful and pure is harmonious with the notion of writing that Kafka describes as a painful experience, his “cruel” treatment of the reader is made suspicious by the action of writing. When writing proves to be an “action” or a “performance,” the writer gives birth to the reader together with the text. Kafka, who is “made of literature,” cannot stay as the master of his texts. In “the eternal torments of dying” all components of literature –writer, reader, and text– are transformed through a loss of their identities. The mimetic effect of the text on the reader, which Bernheimer describes as the reader's identification with the character, is lost when the reader is born with “the death pangs,” in de Man's terms (“Conclusions” 85). The death of the reader describes his/her loss of identity as the origin of him/herself. If the reader suffers when reading, it is not because he/she identifies with a dying character, but because a dying character performs the reader's own situation. In “The Judgment,” then, Georg's performance as a “gymnast” may also be read as the staging of the reader's “sufferance.” Georg, together with the letter in his pocket, reaches at his destination, but the reader is not the mere address. Instead he/she is suspended on the bridge, sharing the fate of Georg and the letter. This suspension marks the reader's transformation in the act of reading.

That is to suggest that the Oedipal connotations in the story do not necessarily refer to the characters' or Kafka's Oedipus complex. The reader does not stand in a distanced position to interpret the signs and hence master the meaning of the story. If the story expresses some “inner truth” (Kafka, *Letters to Felice* 86-87) or indicates an important step to Kafka's self-discovery (Kaus 12), the reader is in no way excluded from this adventure. Instead of identifying with the characters or the writer himself, the reader is involved in the story as part of its performance. Consequently, the absurdities around the Oedipal power relations as well as the letter that appears as disappearance suggest that literature resists the relations based on power, bringing forth the effect of an event through the traces rather than the whole entities.

Considering that Adorno construes Kafka's texts' intimacy with the reader as an “aggressive proximity,” one may still see here a “cruel” treatment of the reader. However, the transformative effect of reading replaces the reading based on identification in this intimacy. According to Adorno, Kafka's texts reduce their distance with the reader to the extent that the reader feels the text's aggressive approach to him/her. The reader, having a habit of identifying himself with the fictional characters in the literary texts, is not accustomed to this kind of physical proximity (246). Attributing this aggressive proximity to the literality of Kafka's work, Adorno argues that “[o]nly fidelity to the letter, not oriented understanding, can be of help” (247). Kafka, avoiding metaphors, takes even dreams “à la lettre” (248). Kafka's treatment of dreams literally

corresponds to the reader's treatment of Kafka: “[the reader] should dwell on the incommensurable, opaque details, the blind spots” (248). Dwelling in the dark regions of Kafka's texts, the reader does not search for an ontological or a psychological projection, but enjoys the traces of the text. The reader's enjoyment here is combined with pain, since physical proximity with the text and even involvement in it is an unsettling experience. *Jouissance* of reading, which is at stake here, is the effect of the dissemination of the signifier –the phallus–, and the insemination of traces. When the reader's intimacy, which turns to be an erotic experience, brings about castration, or more generally the loss of logo-centric assumptions, then reading becomes an encounter rather than an activity that results in identification. Encounter differs from identification with its unpredictability and the potential of transforming identities.

The line that Adorno draws between psychology and psychoanalysis may be interpreted as another formulation of this difference. According to him, psychoanalysis derives the ego from the id and thus avoids describing personality as a substantial unity. Kafka's skepticism towards the ego, however, exceeds even Freud's conceptualization of psyche in that “he explodes [psychoanalysis] by taking it more exactly at its word than it does itself” (251). The literality or the “letter” of psychoanalysis in Kafka's work suggests that the reader confronts the Real. It is this confrontation that renders the letter in “The Judgment” a letter of action. It is not a letter to be deciphered by the reader; it is rather a letter that acts by touching the reader. Its “aggressiveness” makes the reader's distance from the text impossible. Both the letter that Georg sends his friend in Russia and “The Judgment” –as a letter– make their effect on the reader by their existence, i.e. by the fact that they were written down.

The opening scene of writing in “The Judgment” intimates the literality of the letter of psychoanalysis. Georg, who puts the letter in an envelope, is sitting in his room in one of the “small, ramshackle houses stretching beside the river” (77). His contemplation of the landscape out of the frame of a window parallels Kafka's writing of an “inner truth.” Having finished his story, Kafka seems to contemplate the outer world in order to see how universal this inner truth can be. In a letter to Felice, Kafka writes, “[The Judgment] is somewhat wild and meaningless and if it didn't express some inner truth (which can never be universally established, but has to be accepted or denied every time by each reader or listener in turn), it would be nothing” (86-87). Although Kafka calls this inner truth “wild and meaningless,” he finds a meaning in the bond between the father and the son in his diary entry of February 11, 1913: “In the course of the story, the father, with the strengthened position that the other, lesser things they share in common give him –love, devotion to the mother, loyalty to her memory, the clientele that he (the father) had been the first to acquire for the business– uses the common bond of the friend to set himself up as Georg's antagonist” (215). Kafka's crystal explanation of the antagonism

between the father and the son and the friend's function in their relationship continues with a “literal” decipherment:

Georg has the same number of letters as Franz. In Bendemann, ‘mann’ is a strengthening of ‘Bende’ to provide for all the as yet unforeseen possibilities in the story. But Bende has exactly the same number of letters as Kafka, and the vowel e occurs in the same places as does the vowel a in Kafka. Frieda has as many letters as F. and the same initial, Brandenfild has the same initial as B., and in the word ‘Feld’ a certain connexion in meaning, as well...” (215)

The resemblance between Georg and Franz, as cited by Kafka himself, might incite autobiographical comments, especially those which center on Oedipus complex. Kafka's life-long bachelorship and “Letter to His Father,” which tells an antagonism between father and son and is signed by “Franz,” foster such autobiographical readings. However, the parallel that Kafka finds between the “letters” in the passage above may be read as another performance of writing and reading scenes. On the one hand, the passage shows how Georg and Kafka are writing letters by expressing nothing more than the similarities between the letters of the alphabet, while on the other hand, Kafka performs the act of reading “literally.”

Thus, the literality of psychoanalysis suggests that the resemblance between Georg and Franz refers more to their “letters” than to their Oedipal struggles. In other words, the references to Oedipus complex in the story are not irrelevant in the context of literature itself due to the presumed temporality of writing and reading. If the text is assumed to be the child of the father, the theme of castration works well for Kafka to deconstruct this assumption. Psychoanalysis functions here as another letter which does not signify only itself. The psychoanalytic decipherment of the signs is rendered impossible when reading occurs as an event that is based on a “reflexive structure.” Derrida, borrowing the term from de Man, draws attention to the multiplicity of voices in this structure, which enables us to see how one encounters others in this literality: “a reflexive structure that not only does not produce coincidence with or presence to itself, but which instead projects forward the advent of the self, of ‘speaking’ or ‘writing’ of itself as other, that is to say, what I call a trace” (“Inventions of the Other” 29). The advent of the self as other denotes not only the dissemination of the whole text into traces, but also the self-forgetting of writers and readers. It is “the *venire* of the letter” in multiple voices, as staged by the status of Georg’s letter before the father. It is the letter “to come” that “granulates, crackles, caresses, grates, cuts, [and finally] comes”: that is *jouissance* (Barthes, *The Pleasure* 67).

III. Locomotives of *Jouissance*

Jouissance of reading is experienced in the traces of the text, since the law that guides the presumed temporality of writing and reading is transgressed here. When the letter “comes” in “The Judgment,” this erotic moment marks it as a fetish object. While the letter's movement in Georg's pocket indicates its “partiality,” its destination shows that both the letter and “The Judgment” are signifiers without signification. Hence, the reader finds satisfaction not in the decipherment of signs to reach a coherent interpretation, but in the “cuts” of the story. The letter's coming in “multiple voices” suggests the reciprocal desire between the reader and the fetish object.

The fetish, which is not only desired, but also desires, satisfies the reader by pushing the limits of pleasure principle. As Lacan theorizes, *jouissance* relates to law –phallus and the name of the father– since its production is not independent from the function of the superego. When the superego forces the subject to transform his/her desire for pleasure to socially acceptable realms, a trace called *lamella* or drive is still left. It is this drive that finds satisfaction in traces by transgressing the law. For that reason, *jouissance* is experienced beyond the pleasure principle, which is guided by the impossibility of satisfaction, while drive finds satisfaction in this trace revolving around petit objet a (*On Feminine Sexuality* 5-6). The subject's satisfaction by this movement around petit objet a is the result and the effect of an encounter with traumatic residues or more generally the remnants of the repressed material. Therefore, while desire is replaced by drive as a result of the magnetic pull between the fetish and the reader, *jouissance* emerges as an experience that combines pleasure with pain.

Although Ronell once wrote that Kafka scholars were beginning to get interested in Lacanian psychoanalysis “with the speed of Gregor getting out of bed” (214), many of Kafka's reflections show how he considers reading an experience similar to *jouissance*. Above all, it is the “effects” that interest both Kafka and Lacan. Lacan's belief that the effect of the written word does not necessarily depend on understanding it may well explain the effect of not understanding Kafka (*My Teaching* 62). In the intertwined net of writing and reading, Kafka offers his reader a “world of apparitions,” which he wants to find in literature as a reader (Heller 380). While Heller describes “world of apparitions” as a world that “mak[es] no sense in the way literature is mostly expected of” (380), Kafka gives a better definition: “I prefer to sit in the armchair at the window and read, or not even read” (*Letters to Friends* 198). The undecidability of reading and unreading reveals not only the resistant other in the act of reading, but also the cooperation of pain and pleasure in the creation of *jouissance*.

This cooperation can be found in Kafka's description of some books as “a key to unfamiliar rooms in one's own castle” (*Letters to Friends* 10). Considering that these are the books which attract Kafka more than others, one can assume that Kafka views reading as an uneasy journey to “other” worlds.

From the comfort of one's castle to the unpredictable worlds, Kafka looks for passion and patience in reading. As he writes in a letter to Oskar Pollak, a book should leave a shattering effect on the reader:

I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound and stab us [...] The kind of books that make us happy are the kind we could write ourselves if we had to. But we need books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us. (Letters to Friends 16)

By equating reading with suffering here, Kafka refers to a reading effect that can be experienced in a unique encounter. If a book should affect the reader like the death of a loved one, the encounter may indeed be described as unique. However, this unique encounter entails an idea of difference for being a “missed” one, in a Lacanian term. In other words, reading as “mourning” punctuates one's world to make it impersonal. If in a missed encounter “the reality can no longer produce itself except by repeating itself endlessly,” the effect of reading, similar to that of losing a loved person, is unrepresentable (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental* 58). As Barthes describes while developing his theory of photography and writing an account of his mother's death, this effect, which he calls “*punctum*,” cannot transform reality without any disturbance. In contrast to “*studium*,” which is the average effect of a photograph, *punctum* is what Lacan calls *tuché*, i.e. “the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression” (4).

Kafka's description of a good book amounts to his desire to experience such an encounter. This expectation includes an idea of difference since self-forgetting, or “suicide,” in Kafka's expression, is an effect of this experience. If we cannot write the books that create these effects “ourselves,” then we need “other” selves in order to experience “the Real.” In the forests to which the reader is banished, the uncanny effect of reading surrounds him/her. As Derrida suggests in *The Work of Mourning*, “Ghosts: the concept of the other in the same, the punctum in the studium, the completely other, dead, living in me” (42). Identification with the other here does not serve recognition and confirmation of one's ego. On the contrary, it creates ghosts that haunt and punctuate stable identities. Writing about the difficulty of reading Dickens, Kafka refers to the required passionate desire and the magnetic pull between the text and the reader through an imagery of locomotive:

[Y]ou experience a story within yourself from its beginning, from the distant point up to the approaching locomotives of steel, coal, and steam, and you don't abandon it even now, but want to be pursued by it and have time for it, therefore are pursued by it and of your own volition run before it wherever it may thrust and wherever you may lure it. (Diaries 51)

Kafka suggests here that in addition to the reader who will pursue the text, the text, which is an engine, should also pursue the reader. The reader experiences this machine in him/herself, voluntarily turning to be a “siren” that lures the text. Remembering that Kafka writes this passage about the difficulty of reading Dickens, one can suggest that becoming machine here implies power, patience, and passion. Both the subject and the object of reading become “active” in Kafka's imagery, which also presents the act of reading as a passion that requires a power of submission. The ironic co-existence of power and submission refers to an authorial loss both on the part of the text and the reader.

The reader's and the text's power, then, serves to run each other. While the reciprocal passionate desire proves to be drive in this journey, Clayton Koelb's formulation about the intimacy of writing and reading in Kafka's work may help us understand its reason: “Writing is the creation of a template that directs an act of inscription, and reading is the suffering of that inscription upon the reader's psyche” (74). This description evokes Lacan's formula that the unconscious is structured like a language. Remembering Ellie Ragland-Sullivan's contextualization of Lacan's “magnetic pull” in literature, which defines the text as an allegory of psyche's structure (“The Magnetism”), one can conclude that Koelb views the reader's pull to the text as part of his/her drive. If the text takes the initiative while the reader yields to it (74), one may maintain that the reader's submission is the result of the similarity between the structure of the text and his/her psyche, which is magnetically driven to the former. The text's “initiative” is a locomotive that makes the text's structure copy itself in the reader.

Koelb does not use the word “structure” in his reading. Neither does he refer to Lacan or Ragland-Sullivan. However, he argues that the self may well mean the text “for a man who could tell his fiancée that he consisted of nothing but literature” (138). For that reason, even if Kafka understands reading as “the passive reception of an aggressive and powerful text” (74), Koelb adds Kafka's “machine” to this dynamic as a mediator that provides a contact between the text and the reader (75). Because reading and writing turn to be inseparable with this mediator, one may propound that the writer's self, which is literature itself, continues to be haunted by other selves. Reading as “suffering of inscription” moves the structural resemblance between the text and the self beyond a realm of recognition. Even if the self looks for “itself” in the text, the impossibility of satisfying this desire results in encounters with “other selves.” These encounters are realized in the multiplicity of the text, which manifests itself in traces rather than in a structure that can be copied.

Hence, suffering of inscription cannot be understood as the reader's recognition of his/her own self in the textual structure. The letter “to come” inscribes in one's psyche that “[t]here are things we have never seen, heard, or even felt, whose existence [. . .] cannot be proved” (*Letters to Friends* 48). The possibility of seeing, hearing, or feeling these “things” emerges when reading is experienced as *jouissance* and begins to transform people. Since this

possibility is contingent on the violation of the symbolic law, the pleasure of transgression is inherent in the sufferance of reading. It is in fact this transgression that makes Kafka's works “unreadable.” Because the Other of the symbolic law lacks the knowledge of its death, in addition to being dead, as Žižek writes, “The super-ego imperative ‘Enjoy!’, the inversion of the dead Law into the obscene figure of the superego, implies a disquieting experience: suddenly we become aware that what a minute ago appeared to us a dead letter is really alive, breathing, pulsating” (48). Žižek's reformulation of Lacan's conceptualization of the real helps us underscore that when the symbolic law is transgressed, the superego is reborn as a figure that orders the subject to “enjoy.” Likewise, in literature the symbolic law is transgressed by unreadable texts, resulting in an enjoyment found in the “things” that are “proven” through this feeling. In Kafka's world, locomotives “approach” to make the name of the father unreadable.

IV. Covering the Readable

The name of the father points to the symbolic order where desire is constituted, basically because one's desire is the desire of the Other. Someone's entrance into the field of his own desire can be made possible only through castration, which represents the loss of a sexual organ that conveys a symbolic function. Castration derives from the fact that desire cannot be something one possesses (Lacan, *My Teaching* 40-42). Castration, which thus represents the hole in which one's desire is constituted, proves to be the condition of one's existence (*The Four* 265). Therefore, it is both “the central lack” that psychoanalysis is interested in and the place where the subject encounters the Real. Castration opens the possibility of the reincarnation of the name of the father as an obscene figure, which, losing its symbolic function of judging and punishing the son, orders him “to enjoy.” The subject who cannot stop desiring begins to satisfy his desire by circling around *petit objet a*, but the name of the father is not erased completely. It only becomes unreadable, which necessarily includes readability.

Then the problem of “The Judgment” can be read as a problem of the superego or the “dead letter” which reincarnates. The name of the father is legible in the whole text, but is also “covered” as if someone “smudge[d] it over with pencil to make it unreadable” (*Letters to Friends* 251). The father is covered up with a blanket in a room, which is “unbearably dark” for Georg and “dark enough” for the father himself. When Georg “tuck[s] the blankets more closely around him,” the father cries, “You wanted to cover me up, I know, my young sprig, but I'm far from being covered up yet” (84). The father's reaction to being covered up by the son –although he himself asks if he is well covered up– may be interpreted as the father's reading of his son's act metaphorically. The son, according to the father's reading, wants to kill and bury him. Stanley Corngold extends the father's metaphoric interpretation to the burial of

meaning, contending that the father condemns Georg to blindness. Georg becomes blind to his simple intention to cover his father up with a blanket as a result of the father's accusation that Georg wants to bury him. This is a reversal followed by a lure that pulls the reader to “the game of reading persons to death” (30). Corngold makes the connection here with the figure of “a man drawing a short thread through the eye of a needle,” which the narrator uses to portray Georg’s careful observation of his father in case of an indirect attack. Georg recalls and forgets this resolve as if he is “drawing a short thread through the eye of a needle.” Likewise, Corngold argues, “the reading demanded of the reader will be beset, too, by moments of remembering how to understand it and as promptly forgetting it, for it is so elusive” (30).

If the father's metaphoric reading, which contrasts Kafka's literality, makes Georg blind to his simple intention of covering, then Kafka's reader who reads as if he/she “draw[s] a short thread through the eye of a needle” becomes blind like Georg as well. Yet, Georg's blindness in the sense Corngold describes turns to be a keen vision if the blanket is uncovered. The comfort the reader finds in his ability of reading results in enlightenment. In “The Judgment” the psychoanalytic reading “demanded of the reader” gives that comfort to him/her, unveiling the curtain of ignorance. The problem, however, is that as long as the moments of remembering are followed by the moments of forgetting, this tension, resistance, or undecidability renders the comfortable unveiling impossible. Like the covered father who “spr[ings] erect in bed” (84), the blind spots of the text erect as the “superego” of the reader to tell him/her reading is not a comfortable practice. Yet, the erect superego also implies the transgression that brings about *jouissance* of reading. The name of the father, which is readable in the text, covers this readability by losing its “moral” function. The comfort of psychoanalytic interpretation is diminished by the fact that the superego should not “spring erect in bed.” What remains is this enjoyment, this orgasmic fall, whose noise is covered by a “motor-bus coming” (88), if not by a locomotive approaching.

Georg's “low voice,” which expresses his endless love for his parents, “caresses” the reader and shows him/her that “writing aloud” occurs in a text “where we can hear the grain of the throat” (Barthes, *The Pleasure* 66). “The articulation of the body” covers the readability of “some inner truth,” clarifying why unreadability does not completely oppose readability. If “The Judgment” expresses some inner truth, as Kafka writes, the forepleasure of unveiling it contributes to the emergence of *jouissance*. The erect body of the father on the bed as well as the fall of Georg's body stages the superego's ordering the son to transgress the law, but transgression is rendered possible by the presence of the law.

The impossibility of repeating the sense of guilt expressed by Franz in “A Letter to Father” implies the intensity of the father's “effect” on the son. As “unfortunate psychoanalytic interpretations” suggest, “Franz”'s intense feelings result in the reiteration of the representation of father and son

relationship in “Kafka”’s work (Deleuze and Guattari, “An Exaggerated” 9). If this reiteration signifies something, it is the possibility of psychoanalytic Oedipal readings, which “would like to be a master of the signifier” (“What is a Minor” 27). As discussed in the first part of the article, this mastery is difficult to attain since the obvious psychoanalytic signs, which span Kafka’s various writings, are accompanied by the absurdities that complicate the net of symbols. While the indecisiveness here leads us to read the performance of the text, which the article described as the *venire* of the letter, the performance needs the *mise en scene* of referential elements. Retaining the readability of the text, the *mise en scene* constructs the realm of “as if.”

“Art is an *as if*,” Blanchot writes in “Kafka and Literature” (19). When everything occurs in the presence of the illusory “truth,” “Kafka and Literature” also turns to be “Kafka or Literature.” Kafka, who is “all literature,” occurs “as if” the *mise en scene* of the Oedipal Kafka presents us the “inner truth.” While the signs that draw the reader to psychoanalytic interpretations function as a *mise en scene* that prepares the reader for the unreadable traces of the text, the name of “Kafka” –with all its readability– does not constitute an exception to this *mise en scene*. Kafka’s indecisive image, as appears in Wagenbach’s and Brod’s accounts, tells us that the “inner truth” that is expressed in “The Judgment” is an illusory truth in the presence of which the event of reading occurs.

Kafka’s indecisive image, which is drawn by biographical references, features him as unreadable. The force of literature “defaces” Kafka to the extent that the writer *of* the text is replaced by the writer in the text. The “monosyllabic and reticent listener” of his contemporaries, as Wagenbach describes, does not participate in their discussions although he knows their works. He does not even publish his writings unless he is invited by the publishers to do so. He contacts a limited number of friends and lacks the great changes in his life (1-2). Wagenbach relates Kafka’s relative alienation in a flamboyant environment like Prague to the education system of *Gymnasium*, which is based on a distant communication between teachers and students. This kind of a system is geared to the students “who bring with them from home the art of storytelling” (22). The strict discipline of Kafka’s school aims at reticent listeners instead of the listeners of storytelling tradition, which is motivated by the principle of contamination. Although Wagenbach does not cite contamination included in the art of storytelling, he implies that the aura of the storyteller and its reflection on the listener as a mystic experience is considered by the school as a threat to the idea of communication based on respect. In the art of storytelling, as Benjamin informs us, “[t]he more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply is what he listens to impressed upon his memory” (120). The listener, then, is included in the stories to the extent that he/she begins to be able to tell stories. Therefore, in contrast to the distant communication expected in *Gymnasium*, in the art of storytelling, communication is based on a transferential narrative exchange. Brooks’

summary of this model may explain why Kafka's "inner truth," which finds expression in "The Judgment," appears to be a component of the *mise en scene* that prepares the event of reading: "The transferential model suggests that there is an irresolvable shuttling between these two positions [storyteller and listener]: that the truth of narrative is situational, the work of truth reciprocal" (101). By highlighting that stories and their truth inform and shape the construction of each other, Brooks helps us understand how the autobiographical aspects of Kafka's writing is an indispensable part of his work.

Hence, the motifs which are open to a psychoanalytic reading function as a *mise en scene* of this resistance. In this *mise en scene*, the name of the father extends to the whole text as the law that should be transgressed for *jouissance*. The exaggeration of Oedipus, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, creates a photo of the father which may be projected on the map of the world. Finding a political and historical meaning in the name of the father that shadows Kafka's work, they base this exaggeration on his social origins and conditions as a Jew from Prague. Deleuze and Guattari admit the possibility of Oedipal reading but open a new possibility of "deterritorializing Oedipus into the world." According to them, "to do this, Oedipus had to be enlarged to the point of absurdity, comedy. To do this, the 'Letter to the Father' had to be written" (10). Quoting Kafka, they maintain, "Dramas and tragedies are written about [the revolt of the son against the father], yet in reality it is material for comedy" (10-11). Although Deleuze and Guattari underscore the comic exaggeration of Oedipus in Kafka's work, one can also conceive of comedy here as used by Dante in *Divina Commedia*. Comedy, for Dante, means a "rustic song," deriving from *comos* (village) and *oda* (song) (Musa 42). In that sense of the word, the exaggerated Oedipus implies not only the power relations that permeate into the familial, social, and political life, but also its ordinariness. Then, father and son relationship represents a humble instead of a lofty theme peculiar to the tragedies. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari's quotation from Kafka comes from his conversation with Gustav Janouch, in which Kafka refers to Synge's drama whose setting is a village. This does not mean that for Kafka the word "comedy" does not denote any comic and funny elements, but it may also mean that the theme of Oedipus complex indicates a common human condition.

A controversy appears at this point between the universalization of Oedipus and Kafka's portrayal of his relationship with his father as "unique." It is in fact this controversy that ends "The Judgment" with Georg's fall rather than the father's punishment. Georg's fall, which attains a comic twist with his description as a "distinguished gymnast," suggests that despite its "ordinariness," the act is singular in that he has to drop himself from the bridge swinging for a while between the entrance and the exit of the law. Georg appears to be a "*homo sacer*," who Agamben describes as "a human victim who may be killed but not sacrificed" (53). "Sentenced" by the sovereign

power, Georg's position may be read as that of homo sacer, who confronts a violence, which is “classifiable neither as sacrifice nor as homicide, neither as the execution of a condemnation to death nor as sacrilege” (52). While Georg appears to be unsacrificial when the father does not execute his condemnation of his son to death, -similar to *das Ungeziefer* in *The Metamorphosis*- Oedipus ceases to be a theme of the “goat song”, the tragedy, which originally displayed “a form of ritual sacrifice accompanied by a choral song in honor of Dionysus” (Cuddon). Thus, in spite of the universalization of Oedipus, it can never be ritualized because Gregor, Georg, Josef K. or Franz cannot be sacrificed. The fall or the death of bodies functions as a revelation of truth, an inner truth, a being. The repeatability of the theme makes it a comedy while the unrepeatability of the feeling makes it unsacrificial.

“The Judgment” as an early story seems to have started a revealing process not only in the work of Kafka but also in itself. The name of the father projects on the story as a gloomy photo: “It surprised Georg how dark his father’s room was even on this sunny morning” (81). Georg covers up his father who reacts to be covered up by saying that he will use his last strength. What is covered here is the body of the father. What reveals itself is again the body of the father. The bodies in Kafka’s work may be covered by the blankets or by the animals through metamorphoses, but their inner truth remains hidden expected to be revealed uncannily. When Georg shouts at his father -“You comedian!” (86)- he seems to refer to the portrait or the photo of the father. “Nothing can be so deceiving as a photograph. Truth, after all, is an affair of the heart. One can get it only through art” says Kafka (Janouch 152).

V. Conclusion

The fall of Georg's body in “The Judgment” expresses “some” inner truth, which is sentenced by the ordinary life. The reader can hear that low voice as a sign of a revelation, which makes him/her return to “the burrow”, “the village” of Georg. This burrow takes the reader to a scene of writing of the undelivered letter in contrast to the consumed newspapers in Kafka’s works. The ramshackle houses which can hardly be distinguishable from each other, similar to Titorelli’s proliferating heath landscapes (*The Trial* 163), prepares the reader for sensing an inner truth since the landscape is enframed by the window of Georg’s room. Georg’s perspective in the narrative gives rise to a reflection on art as he appears as a writer in the story. The foggy photographs create the possibility of revelation of truth, which cannot be universally established. Therefore, the destination of the letter in “The Judgment” cannot be something, somewhere or someone but a desire of being “[drawn] a little way from [the] pocket” and “drop[ped] back again” (81). Thus the universal laws of literature open a door for the reader, but his/her unique experience, which cannot be ritualized, prevents him/her from entering the law. The simultaneity of the universality and singularity marks the nature of the reader's

experience with an unreadable text. Because a literary text has a legal personality, as Derrida suggests in his reading of Kafka's parable, "Before the Law," the reader's relation with the sovereign power of the text may be read analogous to Georg's suspension before the orders of his father.

Derrida refers to Freud's conception of "repression" as a response to the origin of the moral law in order to underscore its relationship with the unconscious tendency of purification. When Freud reads repression as a means of one's "elevation" of him/herself from the zones of sexuality, Derrida observes, repression is conceived as the origin of morality (194). Thus, Freud traces the history of law by constructing a "great narrative" or writing "an interminable auto-analysis" and realizes that the law interrupts the story as the law detached from its origin (194). Moving from Freud's nose that smells out the law of the law in the search for the origin of the law, Derrida arrives at the doorkeeper's nose that stops the man from the country. The nose that "comes to symbolize the genital zones" makes the man from the country decide to wait before the law (195). The experience of reading a story entails a similar deferral, according to Derrida, as a text is both possible and impossible or readable and unreadable: "Reading a text might indeed reveal that it is untouchable, literally intangible, *precisely because it is readable*, and for the same reason unreadable to the extent to which the presence within it of a clear and graspable sense remains as hidden as its origin" (197). The possibility and impossibility of reading meet before the text that bars the door to "genealogical history," at the same time arousing a "desire for the origin and genealogical drive" (197). The ambivalence here finds its corollary in the "origin of morality" described by Freud. If the repressed desire for parricide lies in the origin of morality, it is basically due to the sons' failure in murdering their fathers. In other words, the source of morality is the son's inability to kill their fathers as being dead makes the fathers more powerful. Oedipus complex, then, as a fact based on power relations, does not provide us with an "event." If the father is not killed by the son, there is nothing happening. Yet, this "presumed event" makes an effect in history by leaving one face to face with a narrative that he / she should believe or not. It is, in that sense, "the origin of literature at the same time as the origin of law -like the dead father, a story told, a spreading rumor, without author or end, but an ineluctable and unforgettable story" (199). Similar to the son struggling with the Oedipus complex, the reader exposes an ambivalent attitude toward the text. Standing before the text he/she demonstrates both submission to it and avoidance of entering into it.

This ambivalent attitude implies *différance* rather than prohibition. The nature of the law of literature becomes clearer when Derrida interprets the fact that in "Before the Law" the doorkeeper, who represents authority, stands also before the law. Although he stands in opposition to the man from the country, both are blind to the law. While the man from the country waits to "see," the doorkeeper is distanced from the law by the presence of other doorkeepers who are more powerful than him. Therefore, "this first-last doorkeeper never sees

the law: he cannot even bear the sight of the doorkeepers who are before him, prior to and above him” (202). The doorkeeper, then, is not the sole authority who prohibits the entrance through the door, but his “discourse” defers it (203).

The interminable deferral that is put on stage in “Before the Law” represents the deferral of “the reference, the rapport, the relation” (205). This deferral underscores again the law of the law whose subject can never be located in a certain place. The subject of the law of the law is not simply “there,” but it “exists.” For that reason, Derrida maintains, the situation here cannot be described as “trial,” “judgment,” “verdict,” or “sentence,” but it is rather a deferral of the judgment. The subject of the law is a “prejudged subject” who arrives at the law in advance to be judged (206). This fact about the law renders the doorkeeper a “guardian” who guards nothing. The law of the law refers to nothing that is present as existing always as a deferral. The absence of a cognitive “relation” about the law of the law illustrates its resemblance to literature. Both have a common name, but lack a definition or a rapport.

Derrida interprets the lack that emerges as a result of the deferral till death as “non-penetration by premature ejaculation or by non-ejaculation” (209). The analogy of sexual impotence amounts to the singularity of the law, as the entrance or penetration remains premature not because of the absence of a place but because the door opening to this place is unique. The door is geared for the man from the country who “arrives there but cannot arrive at entering” (210). The singularity of the entrance describes the reader's position before the text: “The text guards itself, maintains itself -like the law, speaking only of itself, that is to say, of its non-identity with itself” (211). The text, in other words, leaves the reader before the law by making the law of non-identity. The law of non-identity refers to the text's unreadability or its silence about its content. Furthermore, the silence of the text voices its literary effect, exceeding its particular place in the history of literature.

Georg's silent fall in the final scene of “The Judgment” stages this literary effect. While his body's fall leads the reader to the impossible exit, the door shut by the “nose” of the doorkeeper directs him/her to the traces of the text. Georg's father, Kafka's signature, history of literature, rules, conventions, and laws are covered by a blanket so that they will all erect to order the reader to enjoy.

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