

PSYCHOANALYTICAL READING OF FRANZ KAFKA'S *THE TRIAL*

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Abstract:

Franz Kafka was born in Prague, which was confused city, much like, Kafka himself, it was city with numerous languages and ethnic groups fighting for position as it was clear in the late 19th century that Jewish residents were quite low in social rank. Kafka was never known as a writer in his youth. It is only after his death that he recognized as famous writer. He was a social satirist, a fine craftsman and his works present the grotesque picture of society. The inhumanity and absurdity of the modern age are mirrored in his writings. He was extremely concerned with man's struggle for survival in the modern world, which is surrounded by corrupt, unseen forces. Bureaucracy is ultimate refuge for common man's survival, which is shown very ironically in his many works, among them, Let us observe psychoanalytical issue and their impact on human beings, which is shown in his one of the works, "The Trial".

Key Words: *Psychology, ethnic groups, absurdity, modern world.*

Introduction

The psychological or psychoanalytical approach to Kafka largely ignores the content of his works and uses the "findings" of the diagnosis as the master key to puzzling out Kafka's world. We know Kafka was familiar with the teachings of Sigmund Freud (he says so explicitly in his diary, after he finished writing "The Judgment" in 1912) and that he tried to express his problems through symbols in the Freudian sense. One may therefore read Kafka with Freud's teachings in mind. As soon as this becomes more than one among many aids to understanding, however, one is likely to read not Kafka, but a text on applied psychoanalysis or Freudian symbol. Freud himself often pointed out that the analysis of artistic values is not within the scope of the analytical methods he taught.

Interpretations are always a touchy matter and, in Kafka's case, perhaps more so than in others. The reason for this is that his works are (1) essentially outcries against the inexplicable laws that govern our lives; (2) portrayals of the human drama running its course on several loosely interwoven levels, thus imparting a universal quality to his work; and (3) very much imbued with his high degree of sensitivity, which responded differently to similar situations at different times. Particularly this last aspect suggests in cohesion and paradox to the mind which insists on prodding Kafka's stories to their oftentimes irrational core. Kafka's pictures stand, as Max Brod never tired of pointing out, not merely for themselves but also for something beyond themselves.

Charles Neider's psychoanalytical reading and comprehensive discussions of its meaning is important contribution to understand Kafka. He observes that, there are two types of symbols in *The Trial*; they are mythical symbols and symbolic actions. For example, Joseph K is a Bank employee. Bank is a mythical symbol, a repository for money. Money symbolizes 'ordure'. Therefore, the Bank has an anal character. The two warders insist on K to wear his black coat. Black coat is a symbol of death. Neider enlists many words from the novel as mythical symbols such as "The pleats, pockets, buttons, and belt of the first warder are all sexual symbols." Similarly Neider suggest that there are some social symbols which reveal K's 'infantilism'. For example Frau Gurbach, the land lady, is a symbol of mother image. Similarly all the paraphernalia in Fraulein Burstner room such as the stockings, blouse, pillow, silk shawl, night

table, chest are suggestive of female symbols.

Neider perceives that "K's laughter arises from his unconscious awareness of his ridiculousness and of the symbolism of his occupation." The Cathedral, where K is supposed to take Italian visitor, is a symbol of mother. The Italian who never appears in the Cathedral is an agent of the Court and belongs to the unconscious. Whereas K's going to the Cathedral is symbolic of death, and an unconscious desire to return to the womb. The appearance of the priest in the Cathedral suggests a father image; a symbol of castration for K. Neider makes very subtle remarks on this incident: "Read psychoanalytically, this means that religion is a function of the unconscious." Charles Neider points out to some elements of depth psychology in *The Trial*. For instance, the Bank is a symbol of the conscious mind; and the lodge in which K lives symbolizes the preconscious and the Court stands for the unconscious. The lodge or the preconscious is a symbol of the 'irrational' and the 'amoral'. The police officers who represent the unconscious announce K's 'psychic arrest'. Since they are the minor officials of the unconscious they do not know the complex motive of the Court. Their job is just to arrest the guilty. In the same way Joseph K is summoned to the Court by telephone. Telephone in Freudian psychology has a "phallic value". Thus Neider delves deeper into the text to find out symbols and images which have sexual implications.

Neider believes that Joseph K is suffering from 'castration complex'; and provides lots of textual details in order to explain K's problem. According to Neider there are many incidents in the novel potent enough to arouse K's masculinity but he keeps on rejecting them. This constant rejection symbolizes the hero's fear of castration. Hence K's inability to deal with women characters especially Fraulein Bustner on a mature sexual level. One can see that Neider has adopted a very different approach to Kafka. He strongly believes that it is the psychoanalytical approach which can unravel the ambiguity in Kafka. He severely rebukes all the exegetes of Kafka particularly Max Brod and Edwin Muir who projected Kafka as a 'mystic': a man who is concerned with the spiritual predicament of man. "The chief advocates of the mystical school-by far the greatest cabala of them all- are Max Brod and Edwin Muir." These mystagogues, Neider thinks, have overlooked the neurotic problem of the author. His fundamental argument is that Kafka is not concerned with the spiritual dilemma of man rather with his personal deficiencies, his sense of alienation - a victim of tuberculosis, a member of Jewish minority community and his neurotic relationship with his father. If Max Brod and other critics interpreted Kafka as a profound religious thinker concerned with some fundamental problems in man God relationship Charles Neider deconstructed Kafka's oeuvre as expression of the author's personal problem.

Thus one can see that like Neider other critics have made serious attempt to decipher the mystery of *The Trial*. For instance, critics like Calvin S. Hall and Richard E. Lind have thoroughly explored the relationship between Kafka's life, dreams, and his writing. Their assumption is that "The writing of fiction is, of course, a form of expressive behavior". They have adopted a quantitative and analytical method to comprehend the meaning of the works of Kafka and have exploited the author's biographical details including his dreams, his attitude towards his father and his ambivalence towards women to find out the personality of the author. They believe that Joseph K is an extension of the author's alienated personality. Joseph K in *The Trial* interacts with males and female and with those who have power and those who are totally powerless. The critics meticulously record the numbers of K's interaction with men and women and believe that he is aggressive in his interactions with people. In his aggressive interaction he is more often the aggressor than the victim. Therefore, guilt and shame are not synonymous: When we examine *The Trial*, however, we see that Joseph K despite his arrest does not feel guilty. Rather he bends every effort to learn what the crime is that he is charged with so that he can defend himself. At the end of the book, when an official plunges a knife into Joseph K's heart, he feels ashamed to be dying like a dog. He is humiliated but not guilty. In whatever way we look upon the novel the dilemma of K seems to be insoluble. This is the hallmark of Kafka's writings. His most successful novels and short stories always leave the reader uncertain about the ultimate meaning of the text. Hatfield rightly avers: "There is no single, infallibly

correct meaning in which we may reduce them.” They deal with something which is inexplicable and rationally unintelligible.

Franz Kafka is in fact one of the most commented writers of the twentieth century. He has presented such an image of individual - an outsider with alienated consciousness caught in a helpless condition struggling against a mysterious court - that has caught the imagination of every great critic. Kafka presents everything with remarkable precision and clarity. There is hardly any ambiguity in his style. But the image of man which he has presented in *The Trial* is provocative, disturbing, and surprising. In Kafka the image of the individual is a metaphor for the exploration of different types of human predicament. Every critic has tried to comprehend the mystery of *The Trial* in his own way.

Theodore Ziolkowski, another important critic, has tried to relate the novel with the theme of guilt. He believes that “*The Trial* is a book about guilt and freedom: the inevitability of man's guilt in the world and man's freedom to accept the responsibility for his own guilt.” He believes that the novel projects the world in which there is no such thing as a state of innocence. Therefore, freedom is guaranteed only to the one who recognises his guilt. The problem with Joseph K is that he doesn't recognise his guilt. Though he becomes guilty the very moment when he realises that he has been falsely accused and wrongly incriminated by a hostile Court. The moment K refuses to realise his responsibility he loses his freedom. The idea is that man's freedom lies in accepting his guilt. But the protagonist instead of accepting his guilt attempts to project his own guilt on the world around him. Consequently “what we have in *The Trial*, is not a reflection of reality, but rather a distortion of reality...” He focuses on the changing consciousness of the hero. When K is arrested a sense of guilt develops him as is revealed in his apology to the landlady for the trouble he had caused her in the morning.

He also apologizes to Fraulein Burstner for the slight confusion the morning incident had left in her room. Similarly one another incident that reveals the development of guilt in K is the flogging scene. Henceforth his whole effort is oriented towards disclaiming his guilt. “It is this decision that is horrendous.” Joseph K has two alternatives either to accept the responsibility of his action or to evade his responsibility on the expanse of freedom. K chooses the second alternative hence he is not free in perpetuity. In order to disclaim his guilt K desperately seeks the help of different mediators especially of women hoping sorely that they might come to his rescue. Thus he creates a group of helpers such as Fraulein Burstner, Huld the advocate, and his maid Leni, Titorelli the painter, in a desperate attempt to put his responsibility on the shoulders of others. Ziolkowski further observes that the animal images in *The Trial* are symbolic of human degradation. For instance, Block, the commercial traveller is a symbol of a man who has degraded himself and is totally dependent on his advocate. “Block is not merely a symbol of human degradation, but a typological anticipation of K's own fate.” One can say that some of the critics have implicitly or explicitly adopted a psychoanalytical approach in order to comprehend the problem of Joseph K. He seems to be an individual suffering from some psychological problem.

Thus *The Trial* is a psychoanalytic narrative which deals with the hero's subjective trail. Hence “In *The Trial* Joseph K can never escape the court. He encounters its representatives in his room, on the street, at work, in the cathedral everywhere”. Therefore, Greenberg believes it is the protagonist's mind where the Court is located. The Court and all the intimate references in the novels point to the inner world of the hero. It is in the mind where the trail takes place. “*The Trial* swims in the turgid atmosphere of mind.” It means that the novel deals with psychological alienation of the hero. K never realizes that the Court lies in his own conscience and it appears to him as something external hence he acts against himself. The irony is that “What K thinks is being done to him, he is doing to himself. Another important critic of Kafka Ritchie Robertson has made some important observation on *The Trial*. He is of the view that the novel belong to a genre which may be called “the metaphysical (or religious) crime novel” which has its root in the Gothic and psychological novel of the eighteenth century.

In this way Kafka in this classic novel is able to penetrate to the bottom of the problem before it

became an obsession for the post-war European writers, historians and philosophers.

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